

Lancashire County Council

Internal Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 22nd January, 2021 at 10.00 am in Skype Virtual Meeting - Skype

Present:

County Councillor David O'Toole (Chair)

County Councillors

M Salter	E Lewis
T Ashton	P Rigby
C Crompton	P Steen
D Foxcroft	D Whipp
S Holgate	G Wilkins

1. Apologies

None were received.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

County Councillor Erica Lewis declared a non-pecuniary interest for Item 4 – Update on Lancashire's response to Covid-19, as she was the Leader of Lancaster City Council and its Covid response.

County Councillor David Whipp declared a non-pecuniary interest for Item 4 – Update on Lancashire's response to Covid-19, as he was Deputy Leader of Pendle Borough Council and leader of its Covid response.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 November 2020

Resolved: The minutes from the meeting held on 13 November 2020 were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Update on Lancashire's Response to Covid-19

The Chair welcomed to the meeting County Councillor Keith Iddon, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport; County Councillor Shaun Turner, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing; County Councillor Graham Gooch, Cabinet Member for Adult Services; County Councillor Phillippa Williamson, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools; Angie Ridgwell, Chief Executive & Director of Resources; Stephen Young, Executive Director of Growth, Environment, Transport & Community Services; and Josh Mynott, Democratic and Member Services Manager.

At the September 2020 meeting of the Internal Scrutiny Committee the committee received a presentation on Lancashire's response to Covid-19. It was agreed at the time that a further update would be presented at the January 2021 meeting.

Each Cabinet Member delivered an update to the Internal Scrutiny Committee on what had been happening in their own portfolio area during the pandemic and thanked all Lancashire County Council staff for their hard work and dedication during the pandemic.

Regarding the Highways Team, all services were now being delivered, some working methods had changed and changes had been made to keep services going. Recently Lateral Flow Testing had been introduced at the depots and workshops to identify staff with Covid symptoms. The Fleet Workshop had worked hard to keep all the vehicles out and the Grit Teams had been working around the clock since Christmas to keep the roads clear. Due to the heavy rain extra gully cleaning vehicles had been brought in.

Comments and questions raised were as follows:

- There was concern about secondary routes not being gritted. It was pointed out that it had been a difficult year with the weather but secondary routes were important. The Highways Team served the public as best it could and when the team was able to it would clear and grit secondary routes.
- A question around excessive exclusion zones outside some Covid test centres was raised. The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport informed the committee he would look at this and report back to members.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing explained that cases of Covid infections in young people was at its highest point since the start of the pandemic. The main areas of exposure were in health care, shops and workplaces. The police were being firmer with fines for people not obeying the rules. The NHS were being supported by local authorities in the distribution of vaccines and mass vaccination had begun. Vaccinations in all care homes in Lancashire would hopefully be completed by Sunday 24 January 2021 and all over 50's would hopefully be vaccinated by the middle of March 2021. 24,000 people a week were currently being tested in Lancashire. Lancashire County Council had applied for military support to help with the testing.

Comments and questions raised were as follows:

- Members stated how pleased they were with the performance in delivering the vaccine in Lancashire. This was down to good collaborative working across the local authorities and different organisations including NHS partners and voluntary partners.
- There was concern about vaccine supplies for Lancashire and there was uncertainty around when the next set of vaccine supplies would arrive.

This would have an impact on Primary Care Services as they were a vital part in delivering vaccinations.

- The issue of vaccinations for vulnerable and homeless people was raised. The committee was informed that the Public Health Team was compiling a list of these people and work was in progress regarding vaccinations.
- There was a lot of work being done around hospital discharges. Discussions were taking place between the county council's Adult Social Care Team and hospitals. Patients being discharged from hospitals to care homes were now being tested.
- A question was raised in regards to sheltered accommodation and housing associations and how they were operating in relation to Covid and whether residents were being vaccinated as a number of them were over 65. The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing would come back to the committee on this.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Services pointed out a number of creative measures were being put in place in care settings in Lancashire to maintain family contact. A task and finish group had been set up to report to the Lancashire Resilience Forum on visiting guidance for care homes. Designated visiting rooms which would be sanitised were also considered. There would be a schedule of time limited appointments and clinically approved PPE for visitors and supervisors and there would be risk assessments undertaken for care homes. Funding had been received from Government for the installation of visiting rooms and PPE. All county council care homes had their installations completed before Christmas 2020.

Comments and questions raised were as follows:

- It was stated that it was refreshing to see Lancashire County Council and the Health Service breaking down barriers and restrictions in terms of working together during the pandemic.
- Members enquired if the people running Extra Care Units were given different advice than the advice given to county council care homes and independently run care homes. People in Extra Care Units were in domiciliary care provided by outside care organisations, they would have to follow the advice of people living independently.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools stated that a detailed update had been presented to the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee. It was noted that Covid had brought challenges in terms of safeguarding. There was an upcoming Ofsted review in terms of the approach to dealing with the pandemic.

Regarding education, it had been very challenging but the teams were working well. As much support as was possible was being given to Lancashire schools and the teachers, staff and governing bodies were working hard to keep the schools open for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

The Chief Executive, Angie Ridgwell, updated the committee with a presentation on Lancashire's response to Covid-19.

The county council had now reopened most of its services, some services such as day services, libraries, museums and registrars had been pulled back significantly in line with national lockdown requirements.

Members were informed that since Christmas 2020, county council staff sickness levels had started to rise again, this was in line with the national picture as infection rates increased. The committee were informed that currently 7.75% of staff were on sick leave or unable to work.

Lancashire County Council had played a significant role in the testing strategy. It had worked closely with the district council's to provide targeted SMART testing. Due to the success of the testing model it was being taken up nationally.

In terms of vaccinations Lancashire County Council had been supporting its health colleagues. Vaccines were managed by the NHS and the county council was able to make suggestions and seek influences.

There had been a number of Covid Bite Size Briefings for county councillors and all Lancashire Leaders and Lancashire MPs were briefed regularly through the Lancashire Resilience Forum.

An update was presented to members in regards to the county council's financial position. Whilst there was concern on the authority's Medium Term Financial Position, it was noted that the county council had good reserves and was in a strong position compared to other local authorities.

Lancashire County Council continued to work hard and respond positively. A lot of progress was being made and recognised nationally.

Comments and questions raised were as follows:

- Praise and thanks was given to all Lancashire County Council staff for the work they were doing during the pandemic.
- There was concern over the increase in staff absence numbers. There had been more impact on frontline services. The authority was recording absences for those staff that were self-isolating and not working, those that were self-isolating and working, those were absent due to Covid, and employees who could not work due to looking after dependents.
- It was commented that it was felt that the position had improved regarding democratic involvement, decision making had to be as open and transparent as possible.
- One area where there were still challenges was around Development Control meetings and it was reported that district and parish councillors were not allowed to speak at them. It was noted that wherever possible direct speaking should be allowed. With the roll out of Microsoft Teams

district councillors, parish councillors and members of the public would be able to speak at Development Control meetings.

- It was pointed out that at the moment there was a lot of economic evaluation taking place. A Ministerial Task Force had been set up to explore the impact of the pandemic on the Lancashire economy. The impact on the economy in Lancashire was unprecedented and it had seen a huge downturn. The county council had submitted a recovery plan to Central Government. It was suggested that a Bite Size Briefing on Lancashire's economy would be useful.
- Members enquired why they were not allowed access to attend the meetings of the Lancashire Outbreak Engagement Board if they were not a member of it. The intent of the board was to encourage engagement of the public to follow the Covid rules. It was clarified that any member should be able to attend but only members of the board could speak.
- There was concern over the upcoming elections in terms of safety and the plausibility of them taking place. There had to be a safe environment to vote and the safety of staff was vital. The restraints on campaigning would make it difficult for politicians.
- Regarding Lateral Flow Testing, it was pointed out that the accuracy issue still remained. The testing model rolled out enabled larger businesses to take tests on a regular basis. Working with smaller businesses was more problematic.
- Small businesses were struggling in the pandemic and the authority was doing its best to support them. It was stated that district councils had been given money to support businesses.
- Regarding Lancashire County Council's financial outlook, it was felt that authority was in a strong and sustainable position. The question of how the authority compared with other county councils financially was raised. The Chief Executive would ask for information on how the authority compared with other county councils and this information would be shared with members when available.

Resolved: The Internal Scrutiny Committee noted the update on Lancashire's response to Covid-19.

5. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21

This report presented provided information on the single combined work programme for all of the Lancashire County Council scrutiny committees.

Requests for future items to be considered for the work included the following:

- How Lancashire County Council was planning for recovery in terms of the economy and social aspects.
- The welfare and wellbeing of Lancashire County Council staff and how they were being supported.
- An update on how Lancashire was meeting its low carbon targets.
- How Lancashire County Council was dealing with drainage issues.

Resolved: The Internal Scrutiny Committee noted the single combined work plan presented.

6. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next virtual meeting of the Internal Scrutiny Committee would take place on Friday 5 March 2021 at 10.00am.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston