

Lancashire County Council

External Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 31st July, 2020 at 10.00 am in Skype Virtual Meeting - Skype

Present:

County Councillor Edward Nash PSC (Chair)

County Councillors

D Stansfield	B Dawson
I Brown	T Martin
J Burrows	G Oliver
S Clarke	J Shedwick
C Crompton	P Steen

County Councillor Bernard Dawson replaced County Councillor Azhar Ali for this meeting.

The Chair welcomed County Councillors Ian Brown and Peter Steen as new members of the committee, replacing County Councillors Anne Cheetham and David Foxcroft permanently.

Also in attendance were County Councillors Erica Lewis and Matthew Salter.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from County Councillor Liz Oades.

2. Constitution: Chair and Deputy Chair; Membership; Terms of Reference

Resolved: That the appointment of Chair and Deputy Chair; the membership of the committee and the terms of reference, as presented, be noted.

3. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

County Councillor Stephen Clarke declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 6 as he was the Lead Member for Flooding.

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 February 2020

Resolved: That the minutes from the meeting held on 25 February 2020, be confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

5. Chair's update

The Chair pointed out to members that the External Scrutiny Committee should consider what it could achieve prior to the next election in 2021. It was reported that the committee prior to the pandemic had been focussing on three distinct themes being:

- Flood risk management.
- Universal Credit and the effects of it on the people of Lancashire.
- Low carbon energy.

Going forward, the Chair suggested that the committee should continue to review these matters as potentially single item agendas to encourage a debate and formulating recommendations on these important issues.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

6. Strengthening flood risk management and preparedness - Cabinet member responses to the recommendations of the scrutiny task and finish group

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Albert Atkinson, Cabinet Member for Technical Services, Rural Affairs and Waste Management; Rachel Crompton, Flood Risk Manager; John Davies, Head of Service Highways; and Marcus Leigh, Highways Service Manager – Infrastructure; to the meeting to present the written responses to the committee's recommendations on strengthening flood risk management and preparedness.

County Councillor Albert Atkinson, Cabinet Member for Technical Services, Rural Affairs and Waste Management, thanked the committee and the members of Strengthening Flood Risk Management and Preparedness Task and Finish Group for their comprehensive report. The recommendations of the task group had been looked at in great detail and the Cabinet Member accepted all of the recommendations. Timescales for proposed actions were also set out in the response.

A number of comments and issues were raised by members in relation to the written responses and the following was noted:

- Assurance was sought by the committee that the ongoing review of staffing levels within the Flood Risk Management Team, would not result in a reduction in the number of staff supporting the function. It was reported that following a recent restructure of the Highways Management Service a review of where the Flood Risk Management Team needed strengthening was currently underway. In addition a new manager post had been created within the team. Councillors suggested this information be communicated to Flood Action Groups to quash local rumour.

- The acceptance of the cabinet member to create a culvert policy was welcomed by the committee. The importance of locating historic culverts was highlighted. In addition it was felt that a map identifying locations of riparian responsibilities across the county would be advantageous.
- On surface water attenuation for new highways sponsored by the county council, it was reported that plans for current projects had already been completed and work was underway. It was pointed out that if the county council discovered aspects that could alleviate flooding then the appropriate action would be taken.
- On concerns regarding riparian owners' responsibilities it was explained that the subject matter was felt to be of a technical /specialist nature that provided a barrier to some owners in understanding their responsibilities. It was reported that the county council was exploring new ways of explaining riparian responsibilities to residents and local landowners.
- It was acknowledged that all risk management authorities were working within the constraints of a fragmented system. One member of the task and finish group had hoped that its work would have identified measures to reduce risk, improve resilience, speed recovery and build a single voice to influence change at a national level and felt that the outcome of the work was letters rather than leadership. In addition the member felt that they were unable to report back to their residents on what had changed as a result of the work undertaken. Furthermore it was felt that the county council did not recognise the value of flood action groups and the expertise they had and felt that the response to medium term recommendation M8 to enable participation from flood action groups at Making Space for Water meetings was dismissive.
- It was suggested that a flood risk management summit could be sponsored by the committee at some time in the future.
- Members of the committee requested to receive copies of the letters to be issued to the relevant Secretary of States.

It was noted that a number of timescales for actions to be completed by were set for December 2020. It was suggested that an update on those actions be presented to the committee at its meeting scheduled on 12 January 2021 and or all risk management authorities and flood action groups to be kept informed of the work of the committee. Subject to elections being held in 2021 and pre-election period a further update on progress be provided in March/April 2021.

Resolved: That;

1. The responses by the Cabinet Member for Technical Services, Rural Affairs and Waste Management be received.
2. Copies of the letters to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government be circulated to the External Scrutiny Committee.
3. An update on the measures to be completed by December 2020 be presented to the External Scrutiny Committee at its meeting scheduled on 12 January 2021.

4. The Cabinet Member for Technical Services, Rural Affairs and Waste Management, and, the Flood Risk Management Team be thanked for all the work they had done.

7. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21

The External Scrutiny Committee was presented with a single combined work programme for all of the Lancashire County Council scrutiny committees.

On Universal Credit, it was reported that the External Scrutiny Committee was awaiting on a written response from County Councillor Shaun Turner, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, to the committee's recommendations on Universal Credit and its effect on the people of Lancashire. It was noted that claims for Universal Credit had risen since the pandemic. It was felt this matter should be revisited at the committee's next meeting along with the written response from the Cabinet Member.

Resolved: That;

1. The External Scrutiny Committee continue to review low carbon energy, flooding and Universal Credit at forthcoming meetings.
2. The External Scrutiny Committee delegate to the scrutiny officers the further development and delivery of this programme, identifying appropriate methods of scrutiny, in consultation with the Chairs and with the input from any member.

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the External Scrutiny Committee would take place on Tuesday 13 October 2020 at 10.00am.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston