

Lancashire County Council

External Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 17th November, 2020 at 10.00 am in Skype Virtual Meeting - Skype

Present:

County Councillor Edward Nash PSC (Chair)

County Councillors

D Stansfield	C Crompton
A Ali	H Khan
I Brown	L Oades
J Burrows	J Shedwick
S Clarke	P Steen

County Councillor Hasina Khan replaced County Councillor Gillian Oliver for this meeting only.

County Councillor Andrea Kay attended the meeting under Standing Order D13 (1).

D Stephen, Member of Youth Parliament for the North and Garstang's Youth Mayor attended the meeting regarding item5 – Decarbonisation pathway for Lancashire.

1. Apologies

None were received.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None were disclosed.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 July 2020

Resolved: That the minutes from the meeting held on 31 July 2020, be confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Chair's update

The Chair, County Councillor Ed Nash, pointed out that Covid had a major influence on everything the External Scrutiny Committee did as it was reliant on external bodies to form its agenda.

Flood Risk Management was an ongoing subject. It was noted that the Flood Risk Management Team had appointed another Flood Risk Manager who the committee would look forward to meeting at a future meeting. Members had been sent copies of the letters sent to Government following the Cabinet Member's comments on the recommendations of the Strengthening Flood Risk Management and Preparedness Task and Finish Group. Members had also been sent some of the responses received from Government.

The committee was informed that the pandemic had affected Universal Credit significantly. The committee was waiting for a response from the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing on the committee's recommendations on Universal Credit.

Resolved: That the Chair's update be noted.

5. Decarbonisation pathway for Lancashire

The Chair welcomed to the meeting from Electricity North West, Cara Blockley, Central Services Manager, Steve Cox, Engineering and Technical Director and Helen Norris, Stakeholder Engagement and Responsibility Framework Manager. From Cadent Gas the Chair welcomed Helen Boyle, Regional Development Manager.

The committee was provided with a presentation on the decarbonisation pathway for Lancashire. Lancashire was currently set to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. The pathway provided a view on how its energy system could be decarbonised through a balanced use of renewable electricity and low carbon gas. The presentation aimed to show which technologies would emerge as commercially viable first and were therefore likely to be adopted by customers.

The following points were highlighted:

- By 2050 Lancashire would rely on electricity imports from the National Grid and would be a net-importer of hydrogen. The majority of energy consumed in 2050 would be from electricity and hydrogen. Due to Lancashire's onshore and offshore wind potential, more than half of the electricity demand could be met with local distribution level generation. Abundant wind resources could also be used to generate significant amounts of green hydrogen by 2050.
- On the installation of charging points for electric vehicles and the difficulties for people who lived in terraced houses or apartment blocks it was noted that from national trials people charged their vehicles in different places not just at home. Electricity North West had provided charging points (13 amp plugs) at its offices for staff to charge their vehicles at no additional cost to help incentivise the take up of electric vehicles. Whilst it would cost approx. 4 pence per mile to charge each vehicle, it was highlighted that it would cost more to meter such provision. Vehicles could be charged at around ten miles per hour on a 13 Amp plug. Electricity North West was encouraging employers in Lancashire to

provide slow low trickle charging facilities for employees in their car parks. All major supermarkets were installing fast charging facilities. Large fuel stations were also providing ultra-fast chargers which would fully charge an average vehicle in around 15 minutes. It was explained that people were anxious about electric vehicle charging and running out of power however it was highlighted that most people used their vehicles for short distances and the way to solve this problem would be to install as many chargers at places of work, supermarkets, fuel stations and surface/multi-storey car parks as possible. Home charging was not an essential part of owning an electric vehicle.

- Further detail was sought on the storage of hydrogen in salt caverns. It was explained that there were lots of trials happening around the country regarding this to answer a number of questions on hydrogen and the safety of storage. One such trial was being undertaken at Keele University¹ where they were now looking to implement 100% hydrogen supply for commercial and residential settings. Cadent Gas and other companies were looking at networked hydrogen and the supply chain. It was highlighted that Cadent Gas was not advocating hydrogen as the only solution, but a mixture of sources of energy generation.
- On the development of tidal and river based generation it was pointed out that the roll out of such technology might depend on the price point versus the next generation of wind turbines or solar cells. Whilst there had been mixed success around the world for tidal and river based generation in particular large single point developments, the issue was the price per unit produced over the long term and this was the challenge for nuclear power and large scale civil engineering projects such as tidal. Organisations would be committing energy customers to a higher price in order to recover capital costs. However the technology would not be excluded from contributing to energy generation for the area.
- It was highlighted that the price point for electric vehicles was dropping. For instance the whole lifetime operating costs for mini excavators was less than a diesel or petrol powered digger as well as having no noise and no carbon dioxide emissions. The problem was that very few people knew of these vehicles and the amount of information and leadership to businesses in the North West region on decarbonisation and low carbon technology was felt to be insufficient. This was one area Electricity North West wished to work with the committee and local authorities across the region on. Around 60-65% of all energy used in the region was by businesses and commerce and they were the primary target for switching their fleets to electric vehicles and moving their heat demand on to hydrogen. Public education campaigns and outreach programmes for businesses were crucial to help enable people to understand the opportunities available to them.
- It was reported that a number of organisations in the Ellesmere Port area had come together and established the HyNet North West Consortium² in

¹ HyDeploy green energy trial at Keele University: <https://hydeploy.co.uk/>

² HyNet North West Consortium website: <https://hynet.co.uk/>

order to develop a supply chain for hydrogen. Lancashire's solution for hydrogen would likely come from HyNet.

- It was suggested that Lancashire County Council should provide leadership on decarbonisation and to consider ways to incentivise take up of low carbon technology. Decarbonising its own operations and publishing what works was all part of what would be considered as a central leadership role for the county council.
- Electricity North West was hoping to move its fleet to electric vehicles with the exception of 4WD and heavy goods vehicles within the next 7 years. The latter would increasingly convert to hydrogen, but they were not commercially available to buy yet.

It was felt that the process of decarbonisation as presented by Electricity North West and Cadent Gas, was progressive, comprehensive and stimulating, giving a true path towards a carbon free future for Lancashire. It was also felt there were a number of opportunities to progress this project both for the public and private sectors, particularly as Lancashire had significant resources and might even be able to supply the rest of the UK.

The chair reminded the committee from his rapporteur activities that there was no coordination of effort at a time when strong leadership was required. Some District Councils were quoted as looking to Lancashire County Council to prompt, advise and take a lead on decarbonisation. It was therefore;

Resolved: That relevant officers be requested to attend a future scheduled meeting of the External Scrutiny Committee to present on the Greater Lancashire Plan and progress made towards a green summit for Lancashire as previously agreed with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Environment and Planning to bring together all councils, public sector, the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership and the private sector into a cohesive, planned effort.

6. Universal Credit: Citizens Advice in Lancashire - the impact of Covid 19

The Chair welcomed to the meeting from Citizens Advice Rossendale and Hyndburn, Rachel Whippy, Chief Officer and Jenny Duthie, Universal Credit Help and Claim Best Practice Lead.

The committee was presented with an update on the impact of Covid 19 on the people of Lancashire and the issues they faced.

The following points were clarified:

- On whether there had been an increase in domestic abuse issues during the pandemic, it was reported that there had been 179 reported issues in 2019 and this had increased to 239 in 2020. Anecdotally Citizens Advice advisors were reporting an increase in the number of referrals for relationship issues and this was echoed nationally.

- Concerns were raised about loan shark activity. Members were informed that there was a government funded organisation for stopping loan sharks. Members were provided with a link to the 'Stop Loan Sharks' website: www.stoploansharks.co.uk . Stop Loan Sharks worked closely with Trading Standards. Credit Unions were also proactive in helping people get out of the grip of loan sharks. Solutions were available for people with debts under £20k were they could obtain a Debt Relief Order. It was stated that people should contact Citizens Advice for help in dealing with their debts and setting up debt management plans.
- On how the county council might help support residents, it was felt the community hubs established during the pandemic were a good example of local authorities, health and the voluntary sector working together in partnership and it was hoped this would continue. In terms of service delivery for Citizens Advice it was noted that whilst capacity was reserved for the most vulnerable in society and those with complex issues, their approach was to help enable people to support themselves by providing a wealth of information and resources through its website and training on how to use it.
- It was noted that the Citizens Advice did not work with trade unions but this could be an option.
- It was suggested that Lancashire County council could advertise for volunteers for the Citizens Advice.
- The Chair reminded the committee that a formal written response to its recommendations made in February 2020 was awaited from the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing. It was felt that the committee should wait for the Cabinet Member's response before making recommendations.

Resolved: That;

1. The report be noted.
2. The External Scrutiny Committee awaits receipt of the formal written responses by the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing before formulating any further recommendations.

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.

It was suggested that the committee continue to review the three themes of:

- Universal Credit.
- Strengthening Flood Risk Management and Preparedness.
- Decarbonisation.

Resolved: That the External Scrutiny Committee continue to review Universal Credit, strengthening flood risk management and preparedness and decarbonisation at forthcoming meetings.

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 12 January 2021 at 10.00am by means of a virtual meeting.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston