

Lancashire County Council

Scrutiny Management Board

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 13th November, 2024 at 10.30 am
in Committee Room 'B' - The Diamond Jubilee Room, County Hall, Preston**

Present:

County Councillor David Westley (Chair)

County Councillors

S Hind
S Cunliffe
J Fillis
J Mein

G Mirfin
S Rigby
J Shedwick
M Tomlinson

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from CC Rob Bailey.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None were disclosed.

3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 23 July 2024

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 23 July 2024 be approved as an accurate record.

4. 2024/25 Quarter 1 Financial Monitoring Report

The Chair welcomed County Councillor Alan Vincent, Cabinet Member for Resources, HR and Property (Deputy Leader), Noel O'Neill, Interim Director of Finance and Commerce, Kate Lee, Head of Service Financial Management (Operational), Mark Howe, Director of Quality Improvement and Principal Social Worker to the meeting.

The Board was presented with a copy of the 2024/25 Quarter 1 Financial Monitoring Report as presented to Cabinet at its meeting held on 5 September 2024. The report provided an update on the 2024/25 revenue and capital financial position, as at the end of June 2024.

It was reported that the 2024/25 Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring Report was due to be presented to Cabinet at its meeting scheduled for 5 December 2024. Members raised a concern that the receipt of this report was not timely, and as such impacted on the effectiveness of a review by the Scrutiny Management Board. The Cabinet Member for Resources, HR and Property (Deputy Leader) agreed to ask the Political Governance Working Group to carry out a review on whether budget scrutiny was an appropriate function for the main scrutiny committees to undertake.

Members were invited to ask questions and a summary is outlined below:

On the challenges with funding to provide services, it was reported that there remained pressures across all key service areas such as adult services, SEND and school transport services. However, services continued to take steps to ensure that service requirements were met.

A number of questions were raised in relation to monitoring savings and processes in place. Officers sought to assure the Board that all identified and approved savings were closely monitored through Directorate Finance and Performance Boards. This included identifying mitigations required where there were delays in savings. This could include aspects such as in year one off savings via extra grants, and staffing vacancies. Members were advised that ongoing challenges with regards to achieving savings continued to be monitored closely. On whether the minutes of the performance boards could be shared with members, the Interim Director of Finance and Commerce agreed to consult the council's Monitoring Officer to confirm the position.

On the £2m procurement savings identified, it was highlighted that the savings were primarily related to commissioning and were regularly reviewed both internally and externally. Members were informed that contract management would be reviewed, which had been identified through an external audit undertaken.

With regard to a question on targets and working from home savings, including rationalisation of buildings, it was reported that a review was underway on building running costs and the production of a new property strategy to assess rationalising buildings and bringing services together to support and reduce a growing backlog of maintenance.

It was noted that in future, financial and performance reporting would be linked and scheduled for consideration by Cabinet at the same meetings throughout the year. There was a commitment to ensure both reports would be presented to the Scrutiny Management Board.

On a query raised concerning agency costs and staffing in Adult Services, it was reported that there has been an increase in staff leaving the authority. In addition, the recent staff survey has indicated some areas for improvement. There continues to be a need to look at reducing agency costs which was under discussion with the People Service. It was acknowledged that Adult Services continued to be under significant pressure due to rising demand, workload challenges and ability to respond, alongside the complexity of working with a number of partner agencies and the appropriate funding of services. However, it was reported that teams within the



service continued to seek ways to work smarter and more cost effectively as well as staff engagement to raise awareness and seek feedback on cost pressures.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Management Board welcomed the proposal to align the timing of the Corporate Performance and Financial Monitoring reports presented to Cabinet and this Board.

5. Medium Term Financial Strategy Update 2025/26 - 2026/27

Members were presented with a copy of the Medium Term Financial Strategy Update 2025/26 - 2026/27 for review.

It was noted that the 'On street Pay and Display' saving of -£0.397m (GET007) had been built back into the budget. Members recalled that Cabinet at its meeting held on 18 January 2024 agreed that, following representations from district councils and the Scrutiny Management Board, consultation would take place with the district council Leaders, and that their views would be fully considered by Cabinet before any proposals were developed further or implemented. Assurances were sought and it was confirmed that discussions were taking place with a small number of districts who expressed a possible interest in this matter.

Resolved: That the Medium Term Financial Strategy Update 2025/26 – 2026/27 be noted.

6. Budgeted Savings Tracker

The Board was presented with a report on the tracking and delivery of savings agreed by Full Council in the current and previous financial years.

Members were invited to ask questions and a summary is outlined below:

On forecasting demand in Adult Services, there was an understanding that a variety of models could be utilised to support future planning and subsequent cost, however previous experience had shown that models and assumptions were susceptible to levels of unpredictability which posed considerable challenge for the council. For example, the council was not aware of who, how many or what the associated costs of self-funders in residential care and their packages of care who dropped to statutory levels would be. Members were informed that complexity of need also presented significant costs, and this could not be predicted.

With regard to utilising data to drive responses to challenges and whether it was sufficient, it was reported that improvements in using data to inform decisions had been made and it was acknowledged that further improvements could be made.

It was acknowledged that prevention was key to supporting services moving forward and providing service users with more resource at a community level to address problems early.

On investing to save initiatives it was reported that there were three ongoing areas of activity. The first was on obtaining additional capacity within the reviewing team to



pickup reviews at an early stage. The second initiative was responding to complex casework in relation to Section 117 of the Mental Health Act and Continuing Healthcare cases. It was reported that a number of cases were being passed on to the council when it was felt the responsibility rested with the local NHS. Such cases were being taken on by the council but were having a significant impact on the council's finances. The final area was to apply a short term investment through providing overtime to existing council staff instead of agency staff to assist with demand pressures.

With regard to budget planning, it was reported that officers were identifying where demand was needed through this process. However, it was highlighted that much of the work undertaken to identify savings across Adult Services was around how work could be done differently through identifying areas of good practice elsewhere and data. However, it was acknowledged that it might take longer to achieve the savings in this area than originally planned.

In considering whether any further scrutiny of savings was required, the Board felt this was not necessary at this stage. The tracker report was presented to all meetings of the Board and progress with delivery would be monitored accordingly.

Resolved: That the savings tracker and progress with delivery be noted.

7. Mental Health in the Construction Industry - Rapporteur Report

County Councillor John Fillis introduced the report on the activity, findings and suggested recommendations on the implementation of a scored component concerning mental health, on all construction tenders following his investigation on behalf of the Scrutiny Management Board.

The Scrutiny Management Board was asked to support the following suggested recommendations:

That the Cabinet Member for Resources, HR and Property (Deputy Leader) gives consideration to:

1. Amending existing questions within the Common Assessment Standard, used as evaluation criteria in tenders:
 - a. To reflect a requirement for contractors to signpost employees to substance abuse support services as part of their internal policies.
 - b. To reflect the requirement for contractors to make a commitment to initiatives equivalent to 'Building mental health in construction' and the 'Building Mental Health Charter'.
2. At an appropriate time, reviewing responses provided to identify and compile good practice and refine the list of questions in the Evaluation Criteria to work with the industry towards a national standard.
3. Carrying out a further review at an appropriate time, on how best to implement questions and processes on addiction including signposting to support services.



4. Establishing a process to ensure employment assistance programmes are reviewed through contract management activity to ensure accountability and assurance that requirements are being met in the submission.
5. Ensuring that sub-contractors are either signposted to support or can access the contractor's employee assistance programme.

In considering the recommendations, it was suggested that the Board records its thanks to County Councillor Fillis and the officers involved with the investigation and that this should be recorded in the minutes.

Resolved: That:

- (i) County Councillor John Fillis, Marie Demaine, Paul Fairclough, Gary Halsall, and Lee Harrington be thanked for their work in producing the report and formulating the recommendations.
- (ii) The findings and next steps outlined in the report be noted.
- (iii) The suggested recommendations proposed by County Councillor John Fillis be supported and submitted to the Cabinet Member for Resources, HR and Property (Deputy Leader) for formal written response.

8. Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee - Joint Health Scrutiny

The Board was provided with a report from the Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee to agree 'in principle' the establishment of a potential joint health scrutiny committee with Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council to review proposals arising from the NHS Shaping Care Together Programme.

It was reported that this arose from the 18 September 2024 meeting of the committee where the NHS Shaping Care Together Programme was discussed. The report established that the programme aimed to improve the provision of health and care in Southport, Formby, and West Lancashire and highlighted that the next phase was to review the urgent and emergency care provision. Any proposals for service development or change were required to be presented to the relevant health scrutiny committees (Lancashire County Council and Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council) with a view to identifying whether proposals signify a 'substantial variation' to current services.

The Board was advised the committee resolved that 'in considering the information presented, the Shaping Care Together Programme be agreed a substantial variation 'in principle', with a view to more detail on proposed options presented at a future meeting'. It was confirmed that a further report would be presented to the 13 December 2024 meeting of the committee, with a view to confirming that the proposals meet the substantial variation of services criteria, which would require a joint committee to be convened in January 2025, should Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council also agree a substantial variation of services.



To facilitate the convening of a potential joint committee in January 2025, the Board was asked to consider and agree 'in principle' to the establishment of a joint health scrutiny committee with Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council, pending outcomes from both committees in December.

Resolved: That in considering the report, the establishment of a joint health scrutiny committee with Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council be agreed 'in principle'.

9. Work Programmes 2024/25 and Actions and Assurances Update

The Board reviewed the work programmes as presented in the agenda pack. It was noted that the two topics scheduled for 4 December 2024 Environment, Economic Growth and Transport Scrutiny Committee meeting were to be merged as one single item.

Resolved: That in considering the report, the:

- (i) Work programmes be agreed.
- (ii) Activity update on the Political Governance Working Group be noted.
- (iii) Actions and assurances outlined at Appendix 'F' be noted.

10. Request from Full Council - Banking Hubs

Members were informed that at the Full Council meeting held on 17 October 2024, consideration was given to a Notice of Motion submitted by County Councillor Matthew Maxwell-Scott on Banking Hubs. As part of this motion, it was resolved that:

'The Scrutiny Management Board be asked to set up a working group to consider how best to liaise with banking organisations with a view to devising a model plan to accelerate delivery of banking hubs in the worst affected areas in Lancashire'.

In considering the request, the Board felt that the proposed working group should report on its activities to the Scrutiny Management Board.

Resolved: That the request for a working group on Banking Hubs to be established be agreed and assigned to the Scrutiny Management Board to report on its activity.

11. Report on the activity of the Councillor Support Steering Group

The Board was presented with an overview of matters considered by the Councillor Support Steering Group at its meeting held on 12 July 2024 and 6 September 2024.

Resolved: That the report of the Councillor Support Steering Group be received.



12. Urgent Business

12(a) Request from Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee - SEND Strategy 2025-2028 Deep Dive Session and Working Group

Members were presented with a report to consider a request from the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee to establish a deep dive session and working group on the emerging SEND Strategy for 2025-2028.

It was reported that the reason for the report being presented as an item of urgent business related to the need to expedite the matter and facilitate in-depth scrutiny in contributing to the development of the strategy during the further consultation and workshops stage in January 2025. As the next meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board was not due to take place until February 2025, it was agreed to be included as an item of urgent business for this meeting.

At its meeting held on 6 November 2024, the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Development of a SEND Strategy 2025-2028.

The report set out emerging themes, priorities and next steps and invited the committee to consider how best it could engage with the development of the strategy.

The committee resolved to ask the Scrutiny Management Board to establish a Deep Dive session to discuss the emerging themes as outlined in the report and provide input into the development of the SEND strategy 2025-2028. The committee also resolved to ask the Board to consider establishing a Working Group for the purpose of providing long term input into SEND Strategy.

It was suggested that the request be agreed with proviso that the Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board reviews the terms of reference for the working group.

Resolved: That:

- (i) A Deep Dive session to discuss the emerging themes and give input into the development of the SEND Strategy 2025-2028 be agreed.
- (ii) The establishment of a working group for the purposes of providing long term input into the SEND Strategy be agreed subject to the terms of reference being reviewed by the Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board will held on Tuesday 4 February 2025 at 2pm in Committee Room B – The Diamond Jubilee Room, County Hall, Preston.



H MacAndrew
Director of Law and Governance

County Hall
Preston

