

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Committees

Meeting to be held on Tuesday, 7 July 2020

Electoral Division affected: (All Divisions);
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Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21

(Appendices 'A' to 'C' refer)

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

A single combined work programme for all of the Lancashire County Council scrutiny committees is currently being formulated. A draft copy of the work programme is set out at Appendix 'A'.

The topics included were identified at a work planning workshop for members of the Internal Scrutiny Committee held on 29 May 2020.

Recommendation

Members of both Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Committees are asked to:

- i. Suggest any additional topics for potential inclusion on the work programme.
- ii. Delegate to the Scrutiny Officers the development and delivery of this programme, identifying appropriate methods of scrutiny, in consultation with the Chairs.
- iii. Temporarily suspend the current Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committees work programmes (2019/20) and for these to be kept under review.

Background and Advice

As a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, a decision was taken in March to suspend all council committee meetings including scrutiny until further notice. Following the introduction of new regulations and guidance on remote council meetings in April, it was confirmed that the scrutiny function would resume and that a remote work planning session for scrutiny as a whole be arranged for members of the Internal Scrutiny Committee (as the parent scrutiny committee) to receive an update on the journey so far and plans for recovery.

The Covid 19 pandemic has required members and officers to work differently and the wider context has also meant that priorities have changed or shifted in emphasis. However, scrutiny committees have an important role in reviewing how Lancashire County Council prepared for, and responded to, the Covid 19 pandemic and how the county council aims to recover and assist people and businesses across Lancashire. Therefore a single combined work programme for the foreseeable future and for all scrutiny committees is currently being formulated. A draft copy of the programme is set out at Appendix 'A'.

The work programme is a work in progress document. The topics included were identified at a work planning workshop for members of the Internal Scrutiny Committee held on 29 May 2020 and from discussions with all scrutiny chairs and deputy chairs.

A copy of the work programmes for 2019/20 is set out at Appendices 'B' and 'C'.

Methods of Scrutiny

There are several ways to investigate a topic, which include a variety of different approaches which include:

- Items to committee
- Select committee style scrutiny
- Enquiry Days
- Joint / partnership scrutiny
- Task and finish groups
- Rapporteur

However, it is important to bear in mind that regardless of the chosen method that is used for scrutiny, with a reduction in officer support to provide information, there will be a need for scrutiny members to be more proactive in gathering and using evidence.

Gathering Evidence

The Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny Committees in Local and Combined Authorities states that "Effective planning does not necessarily involve a large number of pre-meetings, the development of complex scopes or the drafting of questioning plans. It is more often about setting overall objectives and then considering what type of questions (and the way in which they are asked) can best elicit the information the committee is seeking".

This way of questioning can assist members with gathering evidence and can be used in a select committee style of scrutiny.

Other options for gathering evidence include:

- Holding focus groups or workshops or survey users of a service or people affected by a particular issue.

- Chairing discussions amongst experts – a “roundtable” exercise, bringing together local experts, this can be an action-focused way of gathering evidence;
- In-depth review of written evidence and information – this may come from a variety of different sources, which should have been identified through the scoping exercise.

Further to this, another option afforded to scrutiny is to provide a 'watching brief' on a particular subject area.

The Voice of the Public

Listening to and giving voice to the public is central to scrutiny's effectiveness.

Members of the public can bring a different perspective to any topic by speaking about their personal experiences in a way that is self-aware and reflective.

Committee members may wish to consider how the voice of the public could be included in identified topic areas to draw insights from community experiences as part of the scrutiny function going forward.

Considerations for Scrutiny Topics

Having a positive vision of what scrutiny might achieve may help to understand how it could work differently. Agreeing topics for inclusion in the work programme is about focusing and directing limited resources to maximise scrutiny's effectiveness:

- National issues will inevitably be subject to enquiries / scrutiny at a national level. ***Consider what you can influence locally.***
- Health, social care and education teams have limited resources to support O&S and non-critical work. ***How can scrutiny support those services without unnecessary extra burdens?***
- Decisions have been made in partnership through the LRF. ***How can you best look at partnership working?***
- Decisions and activities were taken to deal with an unprecedented situation. ***What general lessons can be learned from unique circumstances?***
- Recovery will not be “back to normal”. ***Can scrutiny shape the future of the county council / Lancashire?***

In addition to this, and as a tool to narrow the focus further, the following questions could be applied:

- How can scrutiny add value?
- What will have the biggest impact?
- What is the overall aim?

Consultations

NA

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

This report has no significant risk implications.

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
List of Background Papers**

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None		
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Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

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