

Lancashire County Council

External Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 12th January, 2021 at 10.00 am in Skype Virtual Meeting

Present:

County Councillor Edward Nash PSC (Chair)

County Councillors

D Stansfield	S C Morris
I Brown	L Oades
C Crompton	G Oliver
T Martin	J Shedwick

County Councillor Stuart Morris replaced County Councillor Joan Burrows permanently on the committee.

County Councillors Erica Lewis and Julia Berry attended the meeting in accordance with Standing Order D13(1).

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from County Councillors Stephen Clarke and Peter Steen.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

County Councillor Erica Lewis declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5 – Strengthening Flood Risk Management and Preparedness Progress Report, as she was a founder member of South Lancaster Flood Action Group.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 November 2020

Resolved: That the minutes from the meeting held on 17 November 2020, be confirmed as an accurate record.

5. Strengthening flood risk management and preparedness - progress report

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Rachel Crompton, Principal Flood Risk Officer; Marcus Leigh, Highways Service Manager (Infrastructure); and John Davies, Head of Service Highways.

The External Scrutiny Committee was presented with a progress report on the implementation of agreed actions following the recommendations of the Strengthening Flood Risk Management and Preparedness Task and Finish Group.

A number of comments and issues were raised by members and the following points were noted:

- Members were reassured that progress had been made over the last six months regarding the recommendations from the External Scrutiny Committee. Interviews would be taking place for a new post within the Flood Risk Management team dealing with data analysis and communication.
- Progress had also been made with key partners including Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council, on updating the Flood Risk Management Strategy for the wider Lancashire geographical area. The latest version was due to be released for consultation.
- The Flood Risk Management Team was overwhelmed at times with the number of requests for advice from local planning authorities. The team was currently reviewing available resources.
- On the matter of SuDs Schemes it was reported that the Flood Risk Management Team could only respond to what was offered by the developer. The county council had worked with United Utilities on producing a standard approach to evaluating SuDs proposals from developers regarding design, construction and maintenance.
- It was pointed out to the committee that United Utilities were not in a position to object to planning applications as they were not statutory consultees. The county council regularly engaged with United Utilities to see if they had any concerns or comments they would like the local authority to make on their behalf.
- It was noted that United Utilities had attended a meeting of the External Scrutiny Committee in April 2018 and this had been a successful meeting. It was suggested that representatives from United Utilities should attend a meeting of the committee once a year.
- It was noted that there had been a welcome increase in communication between Flood Action Groups and Lancashire County Council in terms of weather alerts. It was felt that Flood Action Groups should have the opportunity to engage with other partners especially the Making Space for Water Groups.
- It was felt that the management of water was fragmented and that a different approach was needed.

Resolved: That regular updates on progress be presented to the External Scrutiny Committee, subject to any restrictions made by Covid19 and local elections

4. Chair's update

The Chair, County Councillor Ed Nash, reminded members of the three themes which the External Scrutiny Committee would concentrate on:

- Carbon Reduction
- Universal Credit and Welfare
- Flood Risk Management

Regarding Universal Credit, the committee was informed that its recommendations which were formulated in February 2020 were presented to Cabinet in March 2020 and a formal written response was awaited.

An update on Universal Credit and the pandemic in Lancashire from the Welfare Rights Service perspective was presented under this item.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting County Councillor Shaun Turner, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing; Jo Barker, Welfare Rights Service Manager; Andrea Smith, Public Health Specialist (Wider Determinants) Lancashire County Council; Rachel Whippy, Chief Officer Citizens Advice; and Jenny Duthie, Universal Credit Help to Claim Best Practice Lead, Citizens Advice. It was reported that there had been a significant impact by the pandemic across Lancashire in terms of the number of claims for Universal Credit that had been received. In particular there had been a marked increase in caseloads for vulnerable residents in Lancashire. The pandemic had a considerable impact on households in poverty and people with health related issues.

The Welfare Rights Team had recently revamped its website in line with its service offer. There was useful information on the website around challenging decisions for people of a pension age and for carers as well as benefits e-learning courses and information on Covid. A new email box had been established to take enquiries digitally from members of the public. The team was also making use of social media channels to share information. A staff duty line had also been created for county council staff so that they could have simple enquiries dealt with. The team was also looking at updating its information on the county council's intranet (internal) website.

A number of comments and issues were raised by members and the following were points noted:

- The committee expressed their admiration for the Welfare Rights Team and how valuable their work was. The committee offered its full support to the team.
- Concerns were raised over Universal Credit and sick pay. There had been some confusion during the pandemic about whether people could receive statutory sick pay or employment and support allowance or Universal Credit. It was pointed out that people on sick pay could claim Universal Credit. If people had to self-isolate or were vulnerable and unable to work, they could claim sick pay from day one. On the Covid pages of the Welfare Rights' website there were links to financial information. The website had also a link to an online benefit calculator. People could also contact the Welfare Rights Team or contact Citizens Advice for information.
- It was noted that Shared Lives Carers were treated as self-employed and that this was costing the county council more money.
- Members were informed that the extra costs to the local authority due to the impact of the pandemic varied across the county. The Welfare Rights Team needed more information on this from the services affected.

- The knowledge and experience of the Welfare Rights Team would be enhanced by working closely with the business intelligence team and other relevant county council services.
- It was stated that capacity had been a considerable issue during the pandemic and this had inhibited the progress of responding to the recommendations formulated by the External Scrutiny Committee in February 2020. It was suggested that County Councillor Gillian Oliver be reappointed as rapporteur by the committee to meet with officers from the Public Health Team to review relevant Council policy and in particular to discuss and answer the previous recommendations made by the External Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 25 February 2020.

Resolved: That;

1. County Councillor Gillian Oliver be reappointed as rapporteur on the matter of Universal Credit in Lancashire, tasked to meet with Officers from the Lancashire County Council Public Health Team to both review relevant Council policy and in particular to discuss and answer the previous recommendations made by the External Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 25 February 2020.
2. That County Councillor Oliver, together with the Public Health Team reports back to the External Scrutiny Committee as soon as is practicable.

6. 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.

Members were informed that if the elections went ahead in May then the External Scrutiny Committee might be unable to hold its meeting in April due to purdah. It was suggested that two additional meetings in February and March could be arranged if needed.

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

- 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.

7. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the External Scrutiny Committee would take place on Tuesday 13 April 2021 at 10.00am by means of a virtual meeting.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston