

Lancashire County Council

Internal Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 5th March, 2021 at 10.00 am in Teams Virtual Meeting - Teams

Present:

County Councillor David O'Toole (Chair)

County Councillors

M Salter	E Lewis
T Ashton	P Rigby
C Crompton	P Steen
J Fillis	D Whipp
D Foxcroft	G Wilkins
S Holgate	

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None were disclosed.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2021

Resolved: The minutes from the meeting held on 22 January 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record.

4. Staff Welfare and Wellbeing

The Chair welcomed to the meeting County Councillor Shaun Turner, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing; Deborah Barrow, Head of Service Human Resources; Andrea Smith, Public Health Specialist; and Karen Smith, Team Leader Employee Support Team.

At the January meeting of the Internal Scrutiny Committee a request was made for an item to be considered on the welfare and wellbeing of staff, in light of the ongoing pandemic.

A presentation was provided to members of the committee to highlight the various aspects of work that had been ongoing during the pandemic to help and support staff of the county council with their welfare and wellbeing.

During the presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- Sickness absence during the pandemic from March 2020 to January 2021 was lower than the previous year. This was likely due to the new ways of living and working. Lancashire County Council's absence levels had followed the national pattern.
- Lancashire County Council staff had been supported and recognised during the pandemic. Access to information and guidance on Covid and employment had been made available. Help with remote working and home schooling was provided and there was support for staff so they could work from home. Staff were also encouraged to take leave.
- As recognition of the hard work and dedication of staff during the pandemic, CMT had given an additional two days leave to each member of staff.
- The Employee Support Team, which sat within Public Health, had dedicated its time during the pandemic looking at corporate wellbeing. Staff engagement was vital. There had been a staff survey in 2020 to gain insight into the wellbeing and feelings of staff and managers within the county council. There had also been engagement with councillors.
- The Employee Support Team assisted people with the implications and restrictions of lockdown.
- Isolation and loneliness were major issues, so keeping staff connected was vitally important.
- Social contact was very important. There was a 'Safer Working Group' which was looking at how to safely start bringing people back into the workplace.
- The key to providing support was knowing who needed support. The committee was informed that there were several referral mechanisms in place. There was a lot of accessible information available both externally and internally. There were wellbeing volunteers who were connected with teams on the ground. Managers were being educated on how to signpost people to the right support. There was also information available on C-First for councillors.
- A blog style way of communicating with staff had been set up. This enabled staff to engage and reflect on their circumstances.
- There was a self-care evaluation sheet available to all staff.
- The county council's vision for wellbeing volunteers was to create a supportive culture of wellbeing where staff could flourish. Wellbeing volunteers were emailed weekly to get feedback.
- The Wellbeing Volunteer Programme was a network of staff that could support each other's wellbeing and raise awareness of what support and information was available. There were 160 wellbeing volunteers across Lancashire County Council.
- There was focus on developing support on wellbeing for the whole of Lancashire County Council. The priority for this focus was frontline staff. The focus was on resilience, mental health and self-care and where support could be accessed.
- Lots of ways had been looked at to keep staff motivated, engaged and connected.

- It was important to place staff wellbeing at the heart of the induction process for new staff and managers and back this up with training.
- Supporting the recovery from the pandemic and the impact this would have on staff and service users was vital.
- Lancashire County Council continued to be supportive, innovative, collaborative and respectful.

In response to questions from members, the following information was clarified:

- The question of levels of sickness and what type of sickness had caused incidents was raised. The top two reasons for sickness, mental health and muscular / skeletal issues, had not changed during the pandemic. There had been a spike in mental health absences in April / May 2020. More support had been provided in this area.
- The committee enquired about the county council's approaches to long term Covid. There had been concerns from trade unions about the sickness absence policy. Conversations had been held with trade unions. Regarding long term Covid absences, services had been advised not to count this towards trigger levels of absence incidents. Talks had also been held with Public Health colleagues about how better to support staff with long term Covid get clinical help.
- Members enquired if county council staff working at a high-risk level were being monitored. The vaccine rollout was underway for staff in high risk services. There was robust risk assessment in high risk areas. A rigorous testing process was also taking place, where staff were tested every three to five days.
- There was concern staff and councillors were over working themselves during the pandemic. It was important for them to look after themselves and each other.
- It was noted that conversations were taking place with the Staff Experience Board around new ways of working. It was thought that trade unions could offer a useful voice in these conversations. The committee was informed that trade unions had a useful voice and had been involved in conversations and updated on new ways of working.

Resolved: The Internal Scrutiny Committee noted the update presented and recognised the challenging and ever-changing environment staff were operating in and the new best practice being developed, as a consequence. Officers were thanked for delivering an interesting and informative presentation.

5. Overview and Scrutiny Work Planning 2020/21

The Internal Scrutiny Committee was informed that due to Purdah and the local elections on Thursday 6 May 2021, the meeting of the committee on Friday 16 April 2021 would be cancelled.

Resolved: The meeting of the Internal Scrutiny Committee on Friday 16 April be cancelled.

6. Urgent Business

There was no Urgent Business.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next virtual meeting of the Internal Scrutiny Committee would take place on Friday 9 July 2021 at 10.00am.

L Sales
Director of Corporate Services

County Hall
Preston