

SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board held on Friday, 22 May 2020 at 1.30 pm. This was a virtual meeting.

The Chair welcomed everybody to the first ever County Council remote meeting, a new way of working for all members and officers in response to the Covid 19 emergency.

Members and officer then showed their respects, by way of a one minute silence, to remember those residents of Cumbria who were no longer with us.

PRESENT:

Mr WJ Wearing (Chairman)

Mr J Airey	Dr S Haraldsen
Mr SB Collins	Mr M Hawkins
Mr P Dew	Mr J Lister
Ms C Driver	Mr W McEwan
Mrs S Evans	Mrs V Tarbitt
Mr KR Hamilton	Mr M Wilson (Vice-Chair)

Also in Attendance:-

Ms J Atkinson	- Assistant Director - Strategic Commissioning
Ms H Blake	- Senior Manager - Customer, Policy and Scrutiny
Mr D Barton	- Assistant Director - Education and Skills
Mrs L Davis	- Democratic Services Officer
Ms K Fairclough	- Chief Executive
Mr S Hall	- Assistant Director - Economy & Environment
Dr D Roberts	- Executive Director - Corporate, Customer and Community Services
Ms A Jones	- Executive Director - Economy and Infrastructure
Mr J Readman	- Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director - People

PART 1 – ITEMS CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

54 ROLL CALL FOR MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Members and officers confirmed their attendance at the meeting. An apology for absence was received from Councillor Chris Hogg.

55 MEMBERSHIP

There were no changes in membership of the Board.

56 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest for this meeting.

57 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED, that the press and public be not excluded from the meeting during consideration of any item on the agenda.

58 MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the meetings held on 3 March 2020 be agreed and signed by the Chair.

59 CALL-IN ITEMS

The Chair advised that there were no call-in items for the Board to consider.

60 COVID 19 BRIEFING - THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO DATE

The Deputy Chief Executive and the Assistant Director – Economy and Environment provided members with an overview of the Council's activity to date in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Deputy Chief Executive outlined his gratitude to members and staff on the huge amount of work that had been undertaken in response to the pandemic and the new ways of working which had resulted in a positive impact for Cumbria and its residents. It was noted that fantastic partnership working had taken place with other organisations such as the NHS and District Councils.

Members noted that the Council had led, as a category 1 responder, the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) with a range of partners to respond to the epidemic. The Council was also leading on a number of sub groups such as Care Homes, PPE, Waste, Logistics, Multi-Agency Information Cell, Strategic Media Advisory Cell and Education. The Council had needed to adopt significant changes to the ways of working in a very short period of time and substantial changes and upgrades had been made to the Council's technology and communications systems. This had allowed, where appropriate, home working for staff and members, and enabled compliance to the national strategy to "Stay at Home".

The Assistant Director – Economy and Environment informed members that in early March, an Education Tactical Co-ordination Group (ETCG) had been established to

oversee the temporary closure of schools and the establishment of school “hubs” to provide education and childcare to the children of key workers and vulnerable children. Members noted that disadvantaged and vulnerable children had been the Council’s priority throughout. Regular updates had been provided to families, schools and childcare settings throughout and a key area of focus had been to have safeguarding measures in place.

Members were informed of the strong partnership working that was taking place with health services across the county and with NHS England. Significant work had taken place to ensure that hospitals in Cumbria had maintained sufficient capacity to care for Covid-19 patients. Adult Social Care has been providing a 7 day per week services and continued to review changes to care packages to ensure people were safe and in receipt of care and support appropriate to their needs. The Council had supported increases in the availability of testing throughout the county.

With regard to care homes and home care, Members noted that the council continued to work in partnership with agencies across the NHS and public sector, to support work in care homes. This work included the monitoring of infection rates of both residents and staff, supporting infection control, providing PPE, testing, additional staff support and supporting the management of hospital discharges.

It was noted that household waste recycling centres had now been reopened on 12 May following government guidance. The waste sub group had closely monitored incidents of fly tipping and implemented measures to address this in the period of HWRC closures.

Members were aware that six welfare co-ordination hubs had been established in just 5 days across the county and had been vital in helping thousands of vulnerable people. The hubs had received an average of 200 contacts a day helping with medication, shopping and concerns from family members worried about elderly loved ones.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) had been a massive issue nationally, and members were informed that the council had led on the management and distribution of PPE. The council had also led on significant procurement of PPE to ensure the necessary volumes were available to council staff and independent sectors in the social care and education sectors.

To conclude the officer outlined the position with regards to highways and construction. The council had temporarily suspended the majority of highway maintenance and construction activity. As national guidance had been developed and safe methods of work devised, the Council had gradually begun to bring these services back.

The discussion, question and answer session that ensued mainly focussed on education and care homes. Members were informed of the work taking place to support the reopening of schools and other settings, liaising with relevant colleagues and national organisations, to support and co-ordinate a risk assessed approach, balancing immediate health concerns, safeguarding and the longer terms effects of prolonged seclusion. In answer to a question on virus figures in localities, members

were informed that figures would be available from Public Health, England and work was being undertaken in local school clusters to provide this information.

In answer to a member's question, the officer informed members that work was taking place to provide laptops to vulnerable children and although, it was thought the laptops were 4g enabled to avoid additional broadband costs to families, the Assistant Director – Education and Skills agreed to email this information to all members following the meeting.

A member raised a question around the school meal voucher scheme and the Assistant Director – Education and Skills agreed to provide information to members on the uptake of this. Members were invited to notify him of specific local issues.

The Assistant Director – Strategic Commissioning updated members on the work undertaken in this period working with nursing homes, care homes and providers. Following questions, members were pleased to note that the Council had not had to re-enact Care Act easements during the Covid period and a Local Care Home Plan was currently being developed although the majority of requirements were already in place for the county as care homes had been a very early priority for the council. The allocation of government funding was discussed at length and members noted that further guidance was awaited for allocation of part of the funding. It was agreed that further information be provided to members when the guidance was received. Members suggested consideration be given to the introduction of hot/cold areas in nursing/care homes and officers confirmed that this was being investigated. It was acknowledged that long term support for the care home market would be necessary. Support measures in place for staff were outlined to members. Officers were requested to continue to advertise support measures that were available to staff.

Members congratulated officers on the community work that was taking place around the county in conjunction with District Councils and the volunteer sector. The continuation of community work in the recovery stage was discussed. The Executive Director – Corporate, Community and Customer Services outlined work taking place on recovery arrangements.

To conclude, members thanked officers for their excellent and informative report.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) the Assistant Director – Education and Skills circulate to members details of the capability of laptops for vulnerable children and provide information on the uptake of the school meal voucher scheme;
- (3) further guidance on allocation of government funding be circulated to members;
- (4) officers continue to advertise support measures that were available to staff.

61 WAYS OF WORKING AND RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE

Members received a report and presentation from the Executive Director - Corporate, Customer and Community Services and the Executive Director – Economy and Infrastructure on ways of working and return to the workplace. The officers gave an overview of the impact on the Council's ways of working during the pandemic and resulting lockdown measures. The presentation outlined work that was being undertaken to ensure staff and members could return to workplaces safely as the lockdown measures were lifted in a phased approach.

Members were informed on the different working approach that had been taken by the council during the pandemic. The Executive Director – Corporate, Customer and Community Services outlined the comprehensive health and wellbeing support package available to staff. It was recognised that this would not be a short term crisis and Covid-19 would have a long term impact on the way council services would be delivered. Work was taking place on new ways of working to hold on to and embed and build on and the presentation outlined the early work on the objectives and principles guiding this programme of work. It was recognised that the planning phase of the recovery was critical to the health, safety and wellbeing of staff. Members were assured that the recovery phase work would be integrated into and, not an addition to, the current work stream.

A working focus group had been established to look at various issues. In answer to a question, the Executive Director – Economy and Infrastructure confirmed that plans were being considered on utilising council vehicles to assist with transport for staff.

Members highlighted digital inclusion and conducting virtual meetings. Members discussed the advantages and disadvantages of home and virtual working raising some concerns on the isolation aspect of it whilst recognising the benefits of it too. In answer to a member's question, the need to have additional council buildings to achieve lower staff density was discussed. It was recognised that this was an economic crisis as well as a health one and consideration was being given to restart the Cumbrian economy in conjunction with other organisations such as Cumbria LEP and District Councils. The officers confirmed that support, guidance and advice was available to businesses to assist with reopening.

Members' raised the issue of support available to upskill managers to assist with the management of staff whilst home working such as sickness absence. It was suggested and agreed that the Organisational Development Plan be reviewed and discussed at the next meeting of the Board. It was further suggested that an item for the Board's future consideration was to look at community level work, incorporating this long term into existing plans and the workforce to help capacity.

A member raised the issue of putting support measures in place for services users, as well as staff, during the recovery period. The Assistant Director – Strategic Commissioning informed members that day services were currently being reviewed to see what could be re-established.

The officers were thanked for their very informative presentation.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) the report be noted;
- (2) a review of the Organisational Development Plan be an item on the next Board meeting's agenda.

62 SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE

The Board received an update on the work of the Scrutiny Advisory Boards, Panels and Committees from each of the Chairs.

(1) Cumbria Police and Crime Panel

The Board received an update on the work of the Cumbria Police and Crime Panel. Members noted that the Chair was receiving regular briefings on issues in relation to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. A number of national policy initiatives and issues had emerged during this period which were of significance.

The Chair of the Panel informed members of the "Bright Side" app and discussed all the work undertaken during lockdown on Domestic Abuse.

(2) Scrutiny Advisory Board – Children and Young People

Members received an update on the work of the Scrutiny Advisory Board – Children and Young People. During the COVID-19 lockdown period the Chair has received regular briefings from the Executive Director – People on emerging issues. Consideration was now being given to future arrangements with all Board Members.

(3) Scrutiny Advisory Board – Adults

The Chair of the Scrutiny Advisory Board – Adults submitted a report updating members of the work of the Board. All Members were receiving the weekly briefings from the directorate, which outlined the challenges presented by the COVID 19 outbreak and how Adult Social Care, Provider Services and Commissioning teams were responding to these.

(4) Cumbria Health Scrutiny Committee

Members received a report on the work of the Cumbria Health Scrutiny Committee. Members were informed that during the COVID-19 lockdown period the Chair of the Committee has had regular briefings from the Executive Director – People. There had also been meetings with the Chief Executive of University Hospitals Morecambe Bay Trust and similar arrangements were being put in place with North Cumbria. The Chair has attended the first Health & Wellbeing

Board development session, and would continue to attend monthly to ensure the work programme was in line with system developments as moving from the response to recovery phase.

(5) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Scrutiny Board

The Chair of the LEP Scrutiny Partnership Board updated members on the work of the Board, details of which was appended to the report.

(6) Scrutiny Advisory Board – Communities and Place

Members received a report on the work of the Scrutiny Advisory Board – Communities and Place. The Chair was continuing to receive updates from the Council's leadership team on key issues arising from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The Chair had also received updates on the reopening of Household Waste Recycling Centres and measures ensuring staff and the public could operate safely.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Management Board encouraged the establishment of the Task and Finish Group to scrutinise the Council's approach to development and management of Section Agreements, agreed at the previous meeting of the Board

Discussion centred around the standing up of the Scrutiny Advisory Boards. It was agreed that an informal joint meeting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Scrutiny Boards be arranged.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) the reports be noted;
- (2) an informal meeting of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Scrutiny Boards be arranged;
- (3) the officers look to establish the Task and Finish Group to scrutinise the Council's approach to development and management of Section Agreements

63 SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD UPDATE REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered a report which provided an update on issues and developments that had occurred since the meeting of the Board in March 2020.

The Senior Manager Customer, Policy and Scrutiny advised that, as a result of lockdown in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, all Scrutiny meetings had been stood down. Members were informed that, as the Council's Annual General Meeting was postponed in April, the Scrutiny Annual Report had been circulated to all Members.

Members were asked to consider a review of the Scrutiny Development Plan and Work Programme for 2020/21 to ensure effective scrutiny on issues prioritised, taking into account the effects of the pandemic on Cumbria and on the way the Council operates, and the capacity of Members, staff and partners during the response and recovery work.

Members were also asked to consider that an item for the next agenda for the meeting of the Board included an update on the Organisational Development Plan and implementation of Task and Finish Group recommendations to Cabinet, specifically, an update on workforce and absence management.

RESOLVED, that

- (1) the range of activity be noted;
- (2) the work programme presented in Appendix 1 of the report be noted and reviewed to include decisions made at this meeting;
- (3) an item on the Organisational Development Plan and implementation of Task and Finish Group recommendations to Cabinet, specifically on workforce and absence management be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Board.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked officers, specifically Democratic Services and the IT Team, on the work undertaken for the meeting.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm