

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 7 July 2005

Present: Councillor J Walker (Chair), Councillors (none) (Associate Chairs) and Councillors M Davies, T McGowan, R Parr and M Perks

Also in attendance: Councillors (none)

05.OS.30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bell, Mrs Case, Goldsworthy and Mrs M Wilson.

05.OS.31 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

None of the Members disclosed any interests in relation to matters under consideration at the meeting.

05.OS.32 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 June 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

05.OS.33 PARLIAMENTARY AND LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS, 2005 - ISSUES ARISING

The Chairman welcomed Mr M O'Loughlin , Head of Customer, Democratic and Office Support Services, who had been invited to attend the meeting to report on the May 2005 Parliamentary and Lancashire County Council Elections and highlight the issues that would need to be addressed for future elections.

Mr O'Loughlin confirmed that, while a number of potential improvements and refinements to the electoral arrangements had been identified, generally no major problems had been encountered with either the operation of the elections or the evening count.

The Committee were advised that, although the elections had been organised in the conventional manner, with the use of polling stations, approximately 20,000 post votes had been issued by the Borough Council by way of a labour intensive process. A number of electors had queried the receipt of postal votes, but Mr O'Loughlin explained that past applications for permanent postal votes may have been completed by residents without the full realisation of the implications at future elections. In addition, a substantial number of completed postal votes had either been delivered to the polling stations or even returned to the Town Hall after the date of the elections on 5 May. This was attributed mainly to the fact that postal votes could be issued up to only five days before the elections.

Mr O'Loughlin also reported receipt of a Consultation Document issued by the Government and the Electoral Commission reviewing the current

electoral arrangements and proposing a number of revisions to the Regulations to improve the processes and reduce the potential for fraud. The changes proposed included plans to allow applications for registration on the electoral roll up to the day before an election and to extend the period between the closing date for the receipt of postal vote applications and the actual election. The Government also planned to introduce a centralised electoral register and to permit individual electoral registration.

Mr O'Loughlin anticipated that a number of the planned changes would take effect in 2006, whilst others would need to be delayed until 2007.

A number of queries and issues were raised by the Committee Members, including reference to the following matters:

- The piloting of several innovative polling systems and voting methods (eg electronic voting, extended hours of voting etc) did not appear to have had any significant impact on election turnouts.
- The emphasis on and simpler means of applying for postal votes were commendable in that it was likely that they had contributed to the increased election turnout in Chorley in recent years.
- The suitability of a number of currently used polling stations and access for disabled persons was questioned. In this context, the Committee was advised that the Borough Council's polling arrangements were fully compliant with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Chair thanked Mr O'Loughlin for his attendance and address.

05.OS.34 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2004/05

The Committee received and considered the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2004/05.

The Members suggested the following revisions to the layout of the document:

- the inclusion of the Chair's photograph on the Introduction page;
- the inclusion of photographs of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Associate Chairs of the three Overview and Scrutiny Panels, together with the respective membership lists, at the top of the pages devoted to the Committee and the three Panels;
- the transfer of the information in Appendix 2 (Overview and Scrutiny Structure, Functions and Responsibilities) closer to the beginning of the document.

In response to a Member's query, it was pointed out that the purpose of the document was to summarise the Inquiries undertaken and activities of the Committee and the three Panels over the past year, and to indicate the future work programme and initiatives to be pursued during 2005/06. The document was not intended to incorporate all of the recommendations contained in the respective Inquiry reports. The Committee requested, however, that the Annual Report include reference to the fact that each Inquiry report and its recommendations is available for inspection either on the Council's website or on deposit in the Democratic Services Section of the Customer, Democratic and Office Support Services Unit.

RESOLVED - That, subject to the alterations agreed by the Committee, the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2004/05 be approved and presented to the Executive Cabinet.

05.OS.35 THE COUNCIL'S TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS FOR 2005/06

The item had been deferred from 16th June meeting to this meeting as an opportunity for Members to comment on the volume of meetings included on the Council's timetable for 2005/06.

The Members appreciated that the timetable for 2005/06 had accommodated a greater number of Overview and Scrutiny meetings than the original timetable for 2004/05 in order to avoid the necessity for any further unscheduled meetings during the year.

The Committee was also made aware of the intention to compile the draft 2006/07 calendar of meetings before the end of 2005, in order to allow a longer period for consultation with Members before the timetable was finalised.

05.OS.36 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS

The item had been deferred from the 16 June meeting to this meeting in order to allow the three Associate Chairs to report the recent activities of their respective Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

The Chair of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Councillor McGowan) said that the Panel hoped to conclude shortly its inquiry into the accessibility of cycling as a leisure pursuit. The Panel would also be reviewing the Council's recycling scheme. The recommendations made in the Panel's report on its examination of the grass cutting service had proved successful in improving the service.

The Chair of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Councillor Perks) indicated that the Executive Cabinet had endorsed the Panel's report and recommendations on its inquiry into the provision of youth activities in the Borough, subject to the proviso, in relation to the recommendation which recommended the Council to sustain its commitment to the provision of facilities for young persons activities by confirming a budget provision in future years for a continued rolling

programme of improvement, that the recommendation be considered during the budget cycle for 2006/07. Following the Panel's examination of the Autumn Street Fair, it was likely that the 2005 Fair would be held on the same basis as the 2004 Fair. The Panel's current inquiry into public participation in the Council's decision making process was progressing, with planned visits to selected Authorities to examine how they engage with and involve the public. In addition, a monitoring report on the implementation of the Panel's inquiry recommendations on juvenile nuisance would be submitted to the 13 September 2005 meeting.

In the absence of the Chair of the Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Walker reported that the Executive Cabinet had approved the Panel's report and recommendations on its inquiry into the One Stop Shop. The Panel would now be embarking on its review of the ParkWise Scheme.

05.OS.37 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2005/06

The Committee received the Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its three associated Panels for the remainder of 2005/06, which illustrated the status of current inquiries, ongoing items and issues presently being monitored.

The Chair also suggested the incorporation of the following items on the work programme:

- An examination of the role, function and work of each of the Council's Service Units by the Committee or Panel under whose remit the Unit falls. The reviews would be undertaken by reference to the Unit's Business Plans and performance indicators, etc, and could commence in September 2005.
- A review of the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan.
- A regular examination of the Council's Forward Plan from September 2005.
- The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel to consider the Council's recycling scheme at regular intervals.

The Committee noted the work programme and endorsed the Chair's suggestions.

Chair