

Scrutiny Reporting Back

Chorley Council's Annual
Report on Overview and
Scrutiny

2019/20

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1 MEMBERSHIP OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2019/20



**Councillor John Walker
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2019/20**



**Councillor Roy Lees
Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2019/20**

Councillors John Dalton, Peter Gabbott, Yvonne Hargreaves, Alex Hilton, Steve Holgate, Marion Lowe, Matthew Lynch, June Molyneaux, Steve Murfitt, Debra Platt Paul Sloan, Kim Snape

2 INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has had a busy year undertaking a range of service areas and one task group review. Councillors John Walker and Roy Lees were appointed as Chair and Vice Chair respectively. There were also several new members welcomed to the Committee and we undertook Overview and Scrutiny Committee training at the beginning of the municipal year.

The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel, consisting of six members met quarterly to monitor the Council's business planning and performance monitoring along with a focus on each of the Directorates in turn.

The task group review was "Developing the Council's Green Agenda".

The Committee continued to receive six monthly monitoring reports following the Executive Cabinet's response on the implementation of outcomes and measured success from past scrutiny reviews.

Impact of Covid-19

Following the outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic the final meeting of the municipal year in March had to be cancelled, therefore the following reports will be considered at our hybrid meeting in July or throughout the next municipal year:

- Adoption of Estates
- Air Quality Strategy
- Crime and Disorder Scrutiny
- Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Child Sexual Exploitation – Monitoring of Recommendations
- Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Rollout of Superfast Broadband by BT – Monitoring of Recommendations

3 CHALLENGING PERFORMANCE

The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel focused on the performance elements of scrutiny and considered all monitoring information. Scrutinising performance is a key role for scrutiny and one of the benefits to the dedicated resources was that a smaller number of members were able to drill down to the detail in key areas and adopt some consistency in approach.

The panel for 2019/20 consisted of the following membership;
Councillor John Walker (Chair)
Councillor Roy Lees (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Christopher France (Nov – May)
Councillor Alex Hilton
Councillor Marion Lowe
Councillor June Molyneaux
Councillor Gillian Sharples (May – Nov)

The Panel met four times within the last twelve months, considering the Council's Corporate Strategy, key projects and monitoring that captured all the directorate and service level business improvement plans. The Panel also considered an additional performance focus, where different directorates are put under the spotlight.

Customer and Digital

In July, Asim Khan (Director Customer and Digital) attended with Councillor Adrian Lowe, Executive Member (Customer, Advice and Streetscene) and Councillor Alistair Morwood, Executive Member (Public Protection).

We focused on the key areas of the Directorate, including; Enforcement, ICT, Council Tax, Streetscene and Waste, Planning and Customer Services.

We noted that over the last year the new Enforcement Team has been established. Additional powers such as, Section 215 notices have been exercised, and a continued focus and response to community concerns to address fly tipping and dog fouling is being made. IT Services have worked to support the delivery of the council's ICT and Digital strategies including the delivery of Office 365, and the successful introduction of public town centre Wi-Fi. With regards to council tax, the percentage of council tax collected (98.14%) was slightly behind target at quarter four in comparison to 2017/18, although this was in line with the trend across other Lancashire authorities.

We recognised that a new waste procurement exercise concluded with a focus to mobilise the contract in April 2019. New refuse collection vehicles had been ordered which realised significant savings for the council. The annual target for garden waste subscriptions was circa £710,000. We noted that there had been 22,370 subscriptions last year which indicated a shortfall against projected figures.

The council also procured new street cleansing vehicles with the service and maintenance built into the new contract to improve breakdown performance. Following discussion, we agreed that there has been a drastic improvement with regards to grass cutting with 94% resident satisfaction.

We noted the changes to the Planning team over the last year. The team's efficient progress was recognised as well as the decrease in the number of major planning applications the council was receiving. With regards to customer services, we commended the improvement to customer service call times. We were advised that the council would be changing phone suppliers and this work would provide the wider transformation of front-line services by supporting staff to have more phone functionality.

Early Intervention and Support

Chris Sinnott (Director of Early Intervention and Support) attended the meeting in October.

We focused on the key projects being delivered by the Directorate, including:

- Delivery of a Wholly Owned Company
- Developing a framework for building community resilience and delivery of identified projects
- Continued delivery of the Integrated Community Wellbeing Service

We queried the performance indicators in relation to Cotswold House which have been affected due to multiple factors such as a reduction in the number of referrals coming in to the service, tenants moving on quicker due to new builds and the improved service provided by Calico (Accommodation Providing Service). This would be monitored in the next quarter. The indicators in relation to volunteering were also discussed and it was understood that a review of the scheme would be undertaken, including how the many small community groups, and the contribution they make within Chorley, could be recognised.

We also recognised that there was a service level business plan relating to community centre management. Phase one reviewed the charges for bandings and phase two would review how best to manage each centre. This would be specific to each centre rather than a one size fits all approach and the Council will retain ownership of the building itself.

Policy and Governance

In January, Chris Sinnott (Director of Policy and Governance) attended with Councillor Peter Wilson (Deputy Executive Leader and Executive Member Resources).

We noted the Directorate underspend by just under £82k, largely due to staffing and recognised that 31 (78%) of the 40 key performance indicators were performing above target, 3 (8%) were performing worse than target but within threshold and 6 (14%) were performing below target.

We focused on some of the high-profile projects as part of next year's corporate strategy that the Directorate would be responsible for, including:

- Renovation works at Astley Hall
- The refresh of the Council's website
- Delivering Shared Services
- Delivery of sustainable public services and the green agenda

We queried the progress of Shared Services, including:

- The appointment of shared posts
- Transferring of staff between South Ribble and Chorley
- Communication with officers/staff morale
- Seating arrangements and access to systems
- Aligning terms and conditions
- Aligning pay scales
- TUPE protection period
- Involvement of the unions

With regards to other aspects of the Directorate's performance, we discussed revenue figures for the Lancastrian Suite and noted that these reflected the cancellations of pre-Christmas events due to the general election. We also queried the sickness absence performance figures and noted that there had been a reduction in long-term sickness absence but not for short-term absences.

Commercial Services

In March, Mark Lester (Director for Commercial Services) attended with Councillor Alistair Bradley (Executive Leader and Executive Member Economic Development and Public Service Reform).

We noted that the Senior Management Restructure had changed some of the services within the Directorate and therefore, the functions that now made up the Commercial Services Directorate (formerly Business, Development and Growth) were;

- Accommodation – operational management of the Council's housing units, including Cotswold Supported Housing and Primrose Gardens Extra Care Scheme.
- Market Walk and Town Centre – management of Market Walk shopping centre, Chorley Markets, town centre car parks and borough wide CCTV monitoring services.
- Property and Facilities – the asset management and maintenance of all council owned buildings and assets.

We understood that there had been some difficulties in recruiting to some specialised posts, but these had subsequently been appointed to.

We noted an overspend across the Directorate but were reassured that this was due to the nature of the Directorate in delivering projects and taking investment opportunities as they arose. We were also advised that some of the performance indicators, such as those relating to the European Regional Development Fund, were not within the Council's control.

We focused on the Directorates key project updates which included;

- Wholly Owned Company - the "Delivery of the Housing Company" would become "developing the business plan for the Wholly Owned Company"
- Shared Services – the Directorate was not in the scope for phase one of Shared Services, but officers were working proactively with colleagues at South Ribble (including the potential to share an agency surveyor and sharing knowledge on IDOX software which is used by both authorities)
- A shortage of developed land for businesses to occupy – this was a complex issue.
- Numerous projects in the pipeline, including at Tatton and in the town centre.

We queried the current position of the Shady Lane and Alker Lane sites. It was hoped that full planning permission would be submitted in the summer for the Alker Lane site, however the Shady Lane site was more difficult.

4 KEY MESSAGES FROM SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS

Developing the Council's Green Agenda – Chaired by Councillors Steve Holgate

In 2019, the Council recognised the need to address the global issue of climate change and investigated how the council could respond to this. Since its commencement in September 2019, the Task Group has met numerous times and has undertaken several sub-group meetings to consult with as many stakeholders as possible to help build an evidence base. Site visits to Lancaster City Council and GA Pet Food Partners Manufacturing Site in Bretherton also took place as well as students from Parklands High School meeting with members in the Town Hall to discuss their concerns with regards to climate change.

Funding has been secured as part of the budget process to further the council's commitment to become a carbon-neutral borough by 2030. The funding will help to appoint a climate change officer as well as setting aside reserves to help develop local climate change initiatives such as tree planting schemes.

The final report which included recommendations based on the evidence collated by the Task Group was taken to Executive Cabinet in March. All of the recommendations set out in the report were approved and an action plan would be developed to expedite the green agenda as a corporate priority.

5 CRIME AND DISRODER SCRUTINY: DRAFT COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

The Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009 state that "A crime and disorder committee shall meet to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions as the committee considers appropriate but no less than once in every twelve month period".

In line with this, it was planned that the Committee would scrutinise the draft Community Action Plan. This was due to go to the Committee in March 2020. However due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 this meeting was cancelled. Therefore, the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny will subsequently take place in July 2020.

6 CHALLENGING THE EXECUTIVE

In addition to challenging the Executive Members through the Performance Panel, the Committee worked together positively with the Executive Leader and the Executive Cabinet in scrutinising their proposals which included the subsidised bus services.

Following an Executive Member Decision in July to continue subsidising bus routes in the borough, an update on the current subsidised services in the borough was brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review and consider the current position and provision for the residents in rural districts.

7 FINANCIAL SCRUTINY

In January 2020 we welcomed Councillor Peter Wilson, Executive Member (Resources) who presented the report which set out the budget position for 2020/21 including the forecast for the following two years to 2022/23 and also presented proposals in respect of the use of forecast resources identified in 2020/21 as well as consultation on the budget.

The budget forecasts over the next 3 years had been updated to take account of the following;

- Due to the investments made by the Council and the efficiencies achieved, there was no proposed increase in council tax in 2020/21
- There was no proposed increase in council tax in 2021/2022 or 2022/23, this would be revisited every year and would be dependent on upon the outcome of the Government announcements regarding the Fair Funding Review and Business Rates Retention.
- Continued investment of approximately £1million that would deliver corporate strategy priorities
- Strategies to reduce the budget deficit in the medium term.

We discussed the following updates and the effects these would have for the council;

- **Government's four-year Settlement** - 2019-20 was due to be the final year of the settlement, however following the Spending Round 2019, councils would receive a further one-year Settlement as the planned changes from the Fair Funding Review and 75% Business Rates retention had been delayed by at least one year until April 2021 at the earliest.
- **Business Rates Pilot** - spending round 2019 announced that all 75% pilots would be disbanded
- **New Homes Bonus** - gradual reduction and ultimate removal of New Homes Bonus
- **Council Tax** - the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement announced a council tax referendum principle of up to 2% in 2020/21.
- **Lancashire County Pension Fund** - increase in employer pension contributions for 2020/21 to 2022/23 to meet the future costs of the scheme. The contributions had increased from 14.4% to 16.4% resulting in an increase in the council's contribution. This was lower than the 17.7% assumed in the previous year's budget.

We recognised that funding to Chorley Council had fallen from over £17m in 2016/17 to a forecast figure of under £12m by 2022/23. However, the council had been ambitious in its approach to meeting the budget deficit through generating efficiency savings and additional income to ensure the council was less reliant on the increasingly uncertain funding from Government.

With regards to this we discussed how the Flower Show could be made more profitable, the options available for the council to maintain the bus station, regenerating the traditional

markets and in-house procurement for the leisure contract. We were satisfied that the council had been successful in keeping costs down whilst continuing to provide the high-quality services expected from its residents.

Despite the identified budget savings there remained large forecast budget deficits of £1.206m in 2021/22 and £2.093m in 2022/23. To achieve a sufficient reduction in net expenditure the Council's strategy would be:

1. To realise savings through the procurement of its contracts
2. To identify the efficiencies through investment in infrastructure and through exploring alternative delivery models that will enable the Council to balance the budget whilst seeking to minimize the impact on the front-line service users
3. To make the Council more financially self-sufficient with specific emphasis on creating investment that generates income.

We recognised that through these strategies the council would balance its budget in the medium-term.

8 OTHER TOPICS CONSIDERED

GRT Encampments

We received a report updating the committee on the actions taken with regards to Gypsy-Romany-Traveller (GRT) Encampments.

Earlier in the year there had been a number of unauthorised GRT Encampments that proceeded to move around the borough, between both Council owned and private land. In response to this, an Overview and Scrutiny Committee was convened to review the procedures, the legal provisions, deterrents, and the role of the Police in these incidents. At this time, we noted that the original procedure for dealing with encampments was too linear and did not accurately reflect the process. Subsequently, the GRT procedure has been updated to reflect the activities undertaken by all teams and partners.

We were advised that further legal advice was sought from Counsel which confirmed that the updated process and legal procedures followed by Chorley Council were appropriate and the most expedient use of legislation. We queried the police reluctance to use force and requested that officers contact Counsel again regarding the powers of the police.

The Council completed works to install height barriers on two of the town centre car parks and has received estimated costs for further deterrents. Following queries, we were advised that no negative feedback had been received regarding the installation of the car park barriers and there have been no parking issues for the Market Traders as many parked on different town centre car parks. We supported the introduction of the barriers.

We extended our thanks to the officers for their work in updating the procedure and gave a special thanks to Carol Roscoe, the Council's Animal Welfare Officer, for her work with the animals, particularly dogs, associated with the GRT groups.

Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities

In July, we were provided with the Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in May 2019. The guidance was published to ensure that local and combined authorities are aware of the purpose of overview and scrutiny and how to conduct its functions effectively.

We were satisfied and reassured that the Council already complies with a lot of the criteria included in the guidance. It was recognised that one area which could be addressed was

creating an Executive/Scrutiny protocol. However, following discussion we agreed that this was not required due to the small nature of the Democratic Services Team and the absence of a specific scrutiny team.

Syrian Refugee Settlement Programme

The Committee received an update on the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme taking place in the borough. We noted the progress of the families who had arrived in 2018/19 as well as those families who had recently arrived in 2019/20 and discussed the ongoing support that was being provided.

We requested the exact cost to Chorley Council for the programme and thanked the Housing Solutions Team for all their work on the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme.

Subsidised Bus Services

In September we received an update on the subsidised bus routes across the borough. We noted that in July, the daytime 109A daytime service was withdrawn by Stagecoach due to a lack of commercial viability; this had implications for the services funded by Chorley Council (357, 109B and 4A). Previously, bus subsidies had been reactive and cost a significant amount, but in this instance the Council worked with LCC to come up with a more viable solution that would incorporate the majority of the provision within the subsidised routes. The reconfigured services would deliver a replacement for the 109A within existing resources. The services created were the 118/119 and the 24A. As a result of these changes there has been a reduction of £27,000 in funding for subsidised bus services compared to 2018/19.

Chorley Council provided a contribution towards the delivery of the 118/119 and 24A services. The contribution was split with LCC; with the Council providing 25% funding for the day services (LCC 75%) and 75% funding (LCC 25%) for the evening services. The approximate cost to the Council per annum was £65,731. This was agreed through an Executive Member decision and funding was committed towards these services for a 12-month period from 1 September 2019 – 31 August 2020.

The report also outlined the approximate current bus provision within the rural areas into the town centre and surrounding areas. Findings indicated that there were bus services reaching most areas of the borough, however the Council were looking for alternatives to better use funding in rural areas such as the dial-a-ride service.

We queried whether residents in Astley Village were happy with the new replacement service. It was understood that there had been initial issues, but these have been addressed. Following questions regarding the amount per passenger that was being subsidised by the council, we were advised that calculating cost per passenger was complex due to the way fare data was recorded and presented by LCC with costs varying depending on the location and frequency of the service. Generally, buses are operating significantly under capacity.

We agreed that further work needed to be undertaken to get more people on the buses and discussed how a reduction in costs could achieve this. It was also suggested that some of the 125 services be rerouted to accommodate more residents in Adlington. We subsequently agreed that Stagecoach be invited to a future meeting to discuss these issues and the potential solutions or for a wider task group review be undertaken.

New Waste and Recycling Collection Contract Update

The committee received an update on the Council's new Waste and Recycling Collection Contract that was implemented in April 2019. We discussed the new contract, including its commencement and performance to date. We were satisfied with the new service and thanked officers for all of their work in delivering this.

We were also advised that changes to recycling were being implemented from 1 October which would ultimately make it easier for residents to recycle more plastic waste. Additional items such as clean plastic pots, tubs and food tray could also be recycled. Information of these changes would be made readily available for residents.

Review of Neighbourhood Working Following the Boundary Review

At the meeting in January we agreed to hold a special committee meeting the following month to review neighbourhood working and neighbourhood area meetings following the boundary review. The Chairs of each of the neighbourhood area meetings were also invited to this meeting.

The first task of the review was to create new Neighbourhood Areas as a result of the ward boundary changes. When considering the options, we were keen for the meetings in June and July 2020 to go ahead as the meetings in January and February had already been cancelled.

We expressed some concerns about proposing new groupings without undertaking a full review of neighbourhood working. We suggested that the detailed review needed to consider issues such as funding (including CIL monies), representation at meetings including consideration of parished and non-parished areas, definition of neighbourhood working and defining the criteria for projects.

Updates on the Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Steering Group

As the Council's representative on Lancashire County Council's Health Scrutiny Steering Group, Cllr Margaret France provided regular updates to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In July, we were advised that the LCC Health Scrutiny Steering Group had considered the future of acute services in Central Lancashire and the Delayed Transfer of Care (DToC). They had assessed thirteen options with regards to the future of acute services. These were shortlisted to seven option, which would subsequently be going out for public consultation. It was also reported that in the last twelve months, the Delayed Transfer of Care was at 10% across Lancashire but reassurances were made that improvements had been made in June/July.

In September, Cllr Margaret France informed us that the main focus was on the health service reorganisation with the Integrated Care System (ICS) and an update on Our Health Our Care. We understood that there were not enough details with regards to the reorganisation and the Steering Group would therefore be asking the ICS for more information before they could make a formal decision. With regards to Our Health Our Care, we noted that the Clinical Senate had recently visited both Chorley and Preston and would be making a final decision on the proposals that would be moving forward. Once shortlisted, the proposals would be going out for public consultation.

9

CONCLUSION AND THE YEAR AHEAD

It has been an interesting year for scrutiny, resulting in some key recommendations on topics of concern to members and the public. The challenges ahead, following the impacts of Covid-19, are to continue to scrutinise areas of interest for members and their constituents and to follow up on the implementations of scrutiny recommendations. We need to work effectively with our partners on scrutiny and continue to challenge the Executive in a constructive way with recommendations that result in positive outcomes for the residents in Chorley.

The Council will hold four meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and four meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel in 2020/21. Councillor John Walker will remain Chair and Councillor Roy Lees will remain Vice-Chair.

Due to the cancellation of the local elections in May as a result of Covid-19 there will be no major changes to the committee memberships, however we may welcome some new members to the committee along the way. The draft work programme will be considered at the first meeting of the Committee in July. This includes the monitoring of previous inquiry recommendations and potential future topics.