

Scrutiny Reporting Back

Chorley Council's Annual Report on Overview and Scrutiny in 2009 - 2010



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1. FOREWORD



Councillor Dennis Edgerley, Chair of the Committee 2009/10



Councillor Alan Cullens, Vice Chair of the Committee 2009/10

This year's work on scrutiny has resulted in two key reviews which address topics close to Members hearts – the vitality of Chorley Town Centre, particularly in the current economic climate and also Highways issues – one of the areas we as Councillors receive most complaints about. We also finally concluded the joint scrutiny review with Preston and South Ribble on Affordable Housing with a large number of recommendations on how we might tackle affordable

housing issues across the area. The Committee has this year taken on the new role of scrutinising crime and disorder. This has enabled a further piece of joint scrutiny with South Ribble reviewing the success of the merged Safer Chorley and South Ribble Partnership.

As last year we held a review at the end of the year looking at our achievements in 2009/10 and looking ahead to what we would like to look at in this new year.

This year I am handing the Chair over to my colleague, Councillor Adrian Lowe and wish him and the Committee a very productive year ahead.

2. THE YEAR AHEAD

Our review of 2009/10 reinforced some of the principles from last year around Members enthusiasm for topics, being a key driver to effective reviews. Whilst the Committee has not yet formally decided Task Group topics for 2010/11, there was a range of issues put forward for scrutiny of both internal services and external partners. This included a request from the Executive that a forthcoming Council Asset Management Review would be something that scrutiny could provide valuable input into. In addition we have received two requests from the public to consider a review into allotment provision – not just the length of waiting list and unmet demand but also the planning issues involved in establishing allotments and the use of farmland. This is an area which the Council has acknowledged as a priority and is investing in for 2010/11 and a scrutiny review would therefore be very relevant.

3. KEY MESSAGES FROM SCRUTINY REVIEWS IN 2009/10

3.1 Joint Scrutiny of Affordable Housing with South Ribble and Preston

Undertaking this scrutiny review has resulted in significant learning. Starting off as an IDeA hosted joint strategic housing session, the purpose of the scrutiny inquiry was to examine the delivery of affordable housing and to consider alternative methods to increase affordable housing supply.

The review has sometimes been difficult to progress and drive forward with three Councils each researching different elements, sharing information and comparing good practice. However after more than 12 months, 19 recommendations on affordable housing were agreed in a final report and have been submitted to the Executive Cabinet. The review also involved discussions with Register Social Landlords and other relevant partners

The key areas under scrutiny and the basis of the recommendations were:

- maximising housing corporation grant;
- social rented as against shared ownership;
- land availability;
- affordability in the private sector;
- empty properties and housing standards;
- layout and design issues; and
- use of S106 funding.

The Task Group recommendations are under consideration by the Executive in the current meetings cycle but the expectation is that many will be accepted and in fact some are already in place eg a Rental Bond Scheme; enhanced publicity on the concept of affordable housing; and on debt advice. The Site Allocations Development Plan documents which will include housing issues are currently being developed by all three Central Lancashire authorities.

3.2 Highways

Chaired by Councillor Mike Devaney, the Highways Task Group's aim was to improve the highways services delivered by Lancashire County Council and Chorley Council for the residents of Chorley.

The Task Group looked at the outcomes and key themes of other District Council scrutiny reviews of highways involving Lancashire County Council as a key contributor to the review. Their final report formed an action plan of 26 recommendations, based around four objectives, in summary:

- 1. Provision of information** – consideration of the Streetscene Service Agreement and the need for performance measures; better mechanisms and information sharing to keep Councillors and officers informed.
- 2. Communications cycles** – Lancashire County Council (and United Utilities) need to feedback to customers once issues have been reported – on when/whether work will be done to reduce need for further customer contact/frustration.
- 3. Consulting and influence** – more frequent meetings between LCC and Chorley Council – streamlining existing meetings to greater effect, consider Chorley taking on some wider enforcement functions eg on advertising boards, overhanging vegetation etc
- 4. Anomalies** – consider Chorley taking on some gritting responsibilities in the town centre; also request agreement that LCC maintain roads and pavements and Chorley maintain grass verges, weed control, tree and shrub maintenance etc.

The Executive will be responding to the comprehensive recommendations later in the summer.

3.3 Town Centre Vitality

Chaired by Councillor Peter Wilson, the Town Centre Vitality Task Group looked at specific areas of the vitality and viability of the town centre and formulated a total of 15 recommendations over 8 objectives:

- 1. A Comprehensive Marketing Action Plan**
- 2. A Strategy for an Evening Economy**
- 3. Signage Strategy**
- 4. Car Parking Strategy**
- 5. Town Centre Living**
- 6. Vacant Property Policy**
- 7. Develop and Deliver Short Term Plans for the Markets**
- 8. Develop and Deliver a Pavement Café Policy**

The Executive is currently considering a response to the recommendations and will report back in this meetings cycle. It is expected that many of the recommendations will be adopted and will be fed into corporate strategy projects like the review of the town centre marketing strategy; the corporate accommodation review and the proposals for the improvements to the Flat Iron.

4. CRIME & DISORDER SCRUTINY

In response to guidance under the Local Government and Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Council implemented a new duty to scrutinise crime and disorder matters in 2009/10

through the crime and disorder reduction partnership.

The Council decided that this duty would form part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which will dedicate at least one meeting a year to this work. A protocol for scrutinising the partnership – the Safer Chorley and South Ribble Partnership (Responsible Authorities Group) has been agreed and Superintendent Stuart Williams, Chair of the Partnership attended our first crime and disorder scrutiny meeting.

Since then we have undertaken a joint piece of scrutiny with South Ribble Scrutiny Committee Members on the success of the merged Partnership and have supported the view that a collaboration rather than a fully merged Partnership is the best way forward.

We have two Member learning session planned around increasing Member awareness of crime and disorder matters – again these will be jointly with South Ribble Councillors

- 16 June in Leyland - Understanding the Safer Chorley and South Ribble Partnership
- 5 July in Chorley – Drug and Alcohol Abuse

5. CHALLENGING THE EXECUTIVE

The following areas are Executive Cabinet items we have considered at scrutiny and made recommendations in 2009/10.

- “Get Up and Play” Rangers
- Affordable Housing task group - service improvement plan
- Updated attendance policy
- Work undertaken by Groundwork
- Central Lancashire and Blackpool Growth Point
- Information and Communication Technology availability for Members
- Value for Money review of the Corporate Support Services
- Performance of key partnerships
- Review of free swimming scheme

The Executive Members for Business, Neighbourhoods and Resources have all attended Overview and Scrutiny Committees to answer Members questions

6. CHALLENGING PERFORMANCE

Scrutiny continues to challenge directorate and service performance based on quarterly monitoring information. Members receive:

- Directorate business plan monitoring and performance information.
- Project updates under the Corporate Strategy; and
- Monitoring information from Chorley Partnership, including projects being run by the partnership.

The Committee has remained concerned about performance under NI 195 environmental cleanliness; performance on the time taken to process housing and council tax benefit claims and collection of debts older than 90 days.

7. FINANCIAL SCRUTINY

As well as scrutinising the Executive's budget principles and quarterly budget monitoring information, the Executive Member (Resources) has attended the Committee to answer Members questions about the Council's treasury management strategy.

8. CONCLUSION

2009/10 has been an interesting year for scrutiny with the implementation of the duty to scrutinise crime and disorder matters. It has also been a productive year resulting in some key recommendations on topics of concern to Members – affordable housing, the town centre and highways issues. Challenges ahead are to continue to scrutinise areas of interest and concern to Councillors and their constituents; to follow up on the implementation of scrutiny recommendations; to work more effectively with our partners on scrutiny and to continue to challenge our Executive Members in a constructive way with recommendations that result in positive outcomes for the residents in Chorley.