

Report of	Meeting	Date
Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	9 August 2010

REFOCUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To consider a range of changes to the current overview and scrutiny arrangements in Chorley.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- That there is a refocus of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and approval be given to:
 - A reduction in the frequency of all performance information provided for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from quarterly to twice yearly.
 - A change to how we scrutinise Executive decisions by having the minutes of the last Executive Cabinet meeting on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda, rather than forthcoming Executive Cabinet agenda items.
 - Request that the Executive consults scrutiny at an early stage on the budget principles being applied and shares information available on the Council's financial position at the appropriate time.

Members views on the structure and frequency of meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are also sought

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Put Chorley at the heart of regional economic development in the Central Lancashire sub-region		Develop local solutions to climate change.	
Improving equality of opportunity and life chances		Develop the Character and feel of Chorley as a good place to live	
Involving people in their communities		Ensure Chorley Borough Council is a performing organization	/

CURRENT SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS

4. There has been a range of changes to the structure and delivery of overview and scrutiny at Chorley Council in recent years. The current structure of one overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee and dedicated Task Groups set up to undertake scrutiny reviews seems to work reasonably well. However with the current financial situation there is a need for both Member and Officer time to be focussed on those areas of work that bring direct improvements and outcomes to the Council. This has prompted discussion between ourselves and the Chief Executive to look at how scrutiny can change to focus on its key role of scrutinising Executive decisions. We have produced a number of recommendations for wider discussion with Committee Members.

CHANGING THE FOCUS OF SCRUTINY IN CHORLEY

5. **Performance information.** As a Committee we have been very focussed on the Council's performance and as such received quarterly monitoring reports on
 - Business Plan monitoring information for Transformation, People and Places and the Partnerships, Planning and Policy departments - including revenue budget updates
 - Project monitoring information for the Corporate Strategy
 - Chorley Partnership project monitoring
 - Capital budget monitoring

These reports dominate the scrutiny agendas when they appear at four out of the eight Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings each year. They are extremely time intensive for Officers to prepare and often provoke little discussion. We feel they should be reduced. However performance is still an important element of scrutiny and therefore **we suggest that the above performance information is received every 6 months rather than on a quarterly basis.**

6. **Scrutinising Executive decisions.** The key reason for establishing scrutiny arrangements under the Local Government Act 2000 was to give non Executive Members the opportunity to scrutinise Executive decisions. However in Chorley we operate a very open style of Executive Cabinet where any Councillor can go along to any Executive Cabinet meeting, speak on any item and try to influence the decision. This is not so at other Councils resulting in scrutiny meetings that are controversial and lead to regular call in meetings. This has not happened in Chorley and we think this shows effective political management across all parties. **We suggest however that rather than scrutinising the forthcoming reports on Executive Cabinet, we scrutinise the decisions of the previous Executive Cabinet by receiving those minutes and following up items and issues where we may have interests or concern.**
7. **Budget scrutiny.** Last year there was some concern that Overview and Scrutiny Committee was unable to provide effective scrutiny of the budget as only budget principles were offered in advance by the Executive. The next few years are going to be very challenging financially with tough decisions to make. We would like to ensure that scrutiny can play its part in consultation on budget decision making and **would like to formally request that the Executive consults scrutiny at an early stage on the budget principles being applied and shares information available on the Council's financial position at the appropriate time.**
8. **Meeting frequency and structure.** In line with a reduction in the number of Executive Cabinet meetings, Overview and Scrutiny Committee is scheduled to meet eight times this year plus Task Group meetings. Views on whether the frequency of those meetings could be reduced are sought – including any further thoughts on the effectiveness of the scrutiny committee structure.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

9. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance		Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal		No significant implications in this area	/

COUNCILLOR ADRIAN LOWE, CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE
COUNCILLOR ALAN CULLENS, VICE CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Carol Russell	5196	22 July 2010	