

Scrutiny Reporting Back

Chorley Council's Annual Report on Overview and Scrutiny in 2011 / 12



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1. FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2011/12



Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2011/12

Overview and Scrutiny Committee now meets around two weeks after the Executive Cabinet meetings to enable the scrutiny of Executive Cabinet decisions and to enable the relevant Executive Member to be invited to attend.

The Committee still continues to receive six monthly monitoring reports following the Executive's response on the implementation of outcomes from scrutiny reviews. These take place, for a period of up to two years following the implementation of decisions and this year we have received reports for the following past reviews:

- Town Centre Vitality
- Allotments
- Asset Management
- Highways

In 2011/12 we have undertaken three reviews, one that was continued from the previous year on the Lancastrian Suite and two reviews at the request of Council Members on Private Rented Housing Conditions and Tourism and Promoting Chorley. The Committee also scrutinised the funding of the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy service under its requirement to scrutinise crime and disorder. To date, all the recommendations put forward to the Executive Cabinet in relation to the Lancastrian and IDVA reviews have been accepted and implemented.

The Committee also continues to monitor departmental performance, along with the Council and Local Strategic Partnership's key projects. We again scrutinised the Executive Cabinets budget principles and this year supported the other scrutiny committee's in Lancashire regarding Lancashire County Council's decision to remove the Bus Information Displays at Chorley Interchange.

2. THE YEAR AHEAD

Although the Committee has not yet formally decided the Task Group topics for 2012/13, Members had previously requested a review around Play Area provision. This was delayed pending the outcome of the Open Spaces Study and Playing Pitch and Open Spaces Assessment, two pieces of work that are now both nearing completion.. The Committee will also once again scrutinise an area relating to crime and disorder to fulfil our legal requirement. All Members of the Council will also be invited to put forward any suggestions for the Committee to consider at its first meeting of the new municipal year when the Committee will draw up its Work Programme for 2012/13.

3. KEY MESSAGES FROM SCRUTINY REVIEWS IN 2011/12

3.1 Lancastrian Suite

The need for a scrutiny review of the future use of the Lancastrian Suite was a recommendation of the Asset Management Scrutiny Review undertaken in 2010. The issues which arose were felt to be significant enough to require a separate scrutiny review. The Task Group was established earlier in 2011 and was chaired by Councillor Debra Platt.

The Task Group was asked to undertake a review of how the Lancastrian Room could be better utilised to contribute to maximising the use of the Councils assets, with more effective and economic use of the facility.

The Task Group considered both external and internal management of the Lancastrian Suite, undertook soft marketing testing with local event management companies and surveyed regular users. They also attended a site visit to South Ribbles's Hospitality Suite and met with their catering team.

The key recommendation of the review was that the resource provided by the Lancastrian Suite is highly valued for its internal needs. There is also however the need to maximise its use by commercial and community organisations. The Group put forward recommendations that would try to achieve its overall objective of increasing the use of the facility for all sections of the community and in doing so, increase income. These focused on a revised pricing structure and the return of private party bookings on a trial basis and complying with specific conditions.

3.2 Private Rented Housing Conditions

Suggested by a Member of the Council and Chaired by Councillor Beverley Murray, the Group aimed to identify and tackle poor housing standards in some private rented properties in the Borough, to improve housing conditions for those tenants.

The Group received information with regards to the compilation of a register of private rented accommodation in the Borough, options for the introduction of a private rented housing inspection regime, consideration of a housing conditions policy and options around a landlord accreditation scheme.

A final report is currently being drawn up but the Group are looking to recommend that the Executive Cabinet consider the introduction of a partially proactive scheme of inspection which would use current intelligence and data sources - ie councillor and officer knowledge; estate agents; housing register etc. The scheme would be reactive to tenant complaints and would provide a base service from which a full inspection programme could be developed. The scheme would not capture all poor housing standards but would target bedsit and multi occupied property and poor housing hotspots.

3.3 Tourism and Promoting Chorley

Chaired by Councillor Peter Wilson, the main objective of the review was to further develop Chorley as a tourist destination by promoting the Borough's key assets and events and identifying other opportunities for making the Borough more attractive to outside visitors.

We collected evidence from a number of different sources including interviewing internal officers about Chorley Council's assets and events which contribute to the promotion of tourism within Chorley. We also spoke to representatives from external organisations to find out what they do in this area, to compare areas of best practice and find out how we could best work together in the future.

The 21 recommendations made, have the capacity to increase visitors to Chorley and improve partnership working within the industry and are around the following headings:

- Town Centre/Markets
- Astley Hall
- Promotional
- Partnership Working

By improving the content and providing better links, it is anticipated that the current redevelopment of the Council's website will help to improve our relationships with external providers and organisations that have a key stake in tourism within the Borough and help us to build on and create new partnerships to better work together to promote Chorley.

4. CRIME AND DISORDER

The Committee is required to scrutinise the work of the Community Safety Partnership through at least one meeting a year. This year we chose to scrutinise the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy (IDVA) service, to understand the value of the service to the residents of Chorley and South Ribble and to look at future delivery of the service.

The cost of providing the IDVA service in its current form across Chorley and South Ribble, was a total of £47,000 per annum. The Committee received a detailed presentation about the service and heard from a number of partners from the Community Safety Partnership, around three key themes:

- What value did they put on the IDVA service in the context of their organisation?
- How would they plug the gap if the IDVA service ceased when the area based grant ended?
- Would their organisation be prepared to contribute to funding if other partners did?

Having listened to the comments of each of the partners, the Committee agreed that the IDVA service was highly valued, not only in supporting victims of domestic abuse but also in preventing repeat cases. In doing so it was of benefit to all partners and, would in the long term, mean savings within each organisation.

There had been no clear commitment on funding from partners but Members felt that one organisation should take the lead by making a financial commitment and then work with the other partners through the Community Safety Partnership to urge them to contribute and ensure the continuation of the IDVA service.

The Committee felt that Chorley Council should take the lead and requested that the Executive Cabinet considered making a provision for funding for the Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service for Chorley and South Ribble in the 2012/13 budget and for Chorley to lead the way in seeking funding from the other key partners who benefited from the service, namely the Police, South Ribble Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, the PCT and CCH and other social landlords.

Lancashire County Council have since determined the service needs in the Chorley and South Ribble Community Safety Partnership area in relation to the IDVA service as

amounting to £89,600 for 2012/13. This level of service effectively doubles our current service provision and will be funded by a 50% contribution from the Safer Lancashire Board with the remaining funding coming from both local authorities and county wide partner organisations. These contributions have been determined on a percentage benefit basis that the contributing organisations are deemed to be receiving from the provision of the service.

Both Chorley Council and South Ribble Borough Council have made budget provision for their contributions and LCC are currently discussing with the countywide organisation their contributions which will make up the difference.

5. CHALLENGING THE EXECUTIVE

The following areas are Executive Cabinet items that we have considered at scrutiny and made recommendations in 2010/11

- Community Safety and Crime and Disorder
- Update Report on Section 106 monies
- Key Partnerships Mid Year progress
- Budget Principles

6. CHALLENGING PERFORMANCE

Scrutiny continues to challenge directorate and service performance, through the reporting of monitoring information on a six monthly basis. Members receive:

- Business plan monitoring and performance information for each of the three directorates:
 - Partnerships, Planning and Policy
 - People and Places
 - Transformation
- Project updates under the Corporate Strategy; and
- Monitoring information from Chorley Partnership, including projects being run by the Partnership.

7. FINANCIAL SCRUTINY

The Executive Member for Resources has attended Committee to answer Members questions about the Executives budget principles for 2012/13.

8. CONCLUSION

2011/12 has been an interesting and productive year for scrutiny, resulting in some key recommendations on topics which fully engaged Councillors. 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.