

# Chorley

Borough Council

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2005/2006**



Councillor John Walker -  
Councillor Thomas McGowan -  
Councillor Mark Perks -  
Councillor Mrs Stella Walsh -

Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Chair Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel  
Chair Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel  
Chair Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel

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## **1. Introduction**

Welcome to the third annual report on the work of the Overview and Scrutiny at Chorley. It covers the period from May 2005 to April 2006.

It has been a pleasure to continue as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a further year.

I feel we have continued with effective work and scrutinised in a constructive, robust and purposeful way.

We continued with scrutiny of the Business Plans of all the departments of the Council along with other reviews which were submitted to the Executive Cabinet for approval.

After a disappointing scrutiny of the budget last year we decided to scrutinise the three highest spending departments which proved to be very successful and also a learning experience for all the Members. We hope to continue this format for all departments this coming year.

We held a self assessment evening in October which highlighted several areas of success and also areas for improvement in the scrutiny process which we hope will be incorporated in this years work and training.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Chairs, Members and Officers for their dedication and hard work during the last year and hopefully the scrutiny process will continue to benefit all aspects of Council business.

Thank you.

Regards.

Councillor John Walker

## 2. What is Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny was introduced as part of the modernisation agenda for local government and the Local Government Act 2000 requires Councils to have at least one overview and scrutiny committee.

In 1999 the government commenced plans to reform and modernise the way local authorities operate.

This was designed to streamline and improve decision making, make elected members more mobile and accountable and improve services.

In particular the proposals required local authorities such as Chorley to replace its Committee system with Leader within Cabinet, Elected Mayor and Cabinet or Elected Mayor and Cabinet or Elected Mayor and Council Manager system. Chorley chose the option of having a Leader with Cabinet. In a 'Cabinet' system, a small number of Councillors are responsible for implementing the Council's policies and for service delivery, which should make it easier for people to see who is responsible for making decisions.

The main role of Overview and Scrutiny is to help improve the Council's performance through monitoring and review, to look at decisions taken by the Cabinet to help develop and monitor the Council's policies and strategies. Overview and Scrutiny is based upon the model of Select Committees at Westminster. It is an effective method by which Councillors who are not on the Cabinet can challenge and influence those making decisions.

There is no single definition of overview and scrutiny. It therefore should be viewed as an umbrella term covering a wide range of possible roles. However, the four key legislative roles are:

- holding the Executive to account
- policy development and review
- best value reviews
- external scrutiny for example the health service

This suggests an emphasis towards:

- acting as a watchdog for Executive decision making
- checking on whether existing policies are effective and helping to share and develop new ones
- contributing toward the continuous improvement of Council services
- reviewing the investigating matters of particular concern either within the Council or within the community.

The scrutiny role also provides new opportunities for public involvement and debate. This can support elected members in taking a community-orientated approach and bring new ideas and experience to scrutiny.

Council members and officers continue to learn about the best way forward for the Scrutiny process and are continually seeking to improve. One of the biggest challenges remains how to generate more interest with the public, press and partners, by demonstrating that effective Scrutiny can make a difference.

### 3. **Overview and Scrutiny in Chorley - A Background**

The Council first established and appointed Overview and Scrutiny Committees in September 1999 as part of the proposals for the introduction of a new system of Executive Leader and Cabinet style of local governance. Chorley was one of the first authorities to introduce its new political management arrangements.

The Council has recognised the key role Overview and Scrutiny has to play within its new modernised structure. This role is emphasised in the overarching objectives for the Council's overview and scrutiny functions.

The Council initially appointed two Overview and Scrutiny Committees to discharge the functions covering the whole of the Council's services (one Committee overseeing the Service Group A and the other overseeing Service Group B) comprising 17 members, excluding those members who have Executive responsibilities and serve on the Executive Cabinet.

In May 2003, the Council established and appointed an Overview and Scrutiny Committee and three standing Overview and Scrutiny Panels. The three standing panels were the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel, the Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The purpose of the Committee was to discharge the functions conferred by Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and any Regulations made by the Secretary of State under Section 32 of the Local Government Act 2000. The Committee and the Panels were expected to play an important role in ensuring that all the services of the Council are efficient and effective and meet the needs of the local community.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would normally refer a matter falling within the cross-cutting theme of any of the Panels to the appropriate Panel for investigation and reference back to the Committee with recommendations. As well as the Standing Panels, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could appoint additional ad hoc Overview and Scrutiny Panels to assist it in carrying out its functions should the need arise.

More recently the Council decided in May of this year to reduce the number of Panels down to two to bring them in line with the Council's management structure for providing services - the Corporate and Customer Panel and the Environment and Community Panel.

#### 4. Overview and Scrutiny Structure, Functions and Responsibilities

**Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee has an overall responsibility for all scrutiny work including that undertaken by the three standing scrutiny panels.

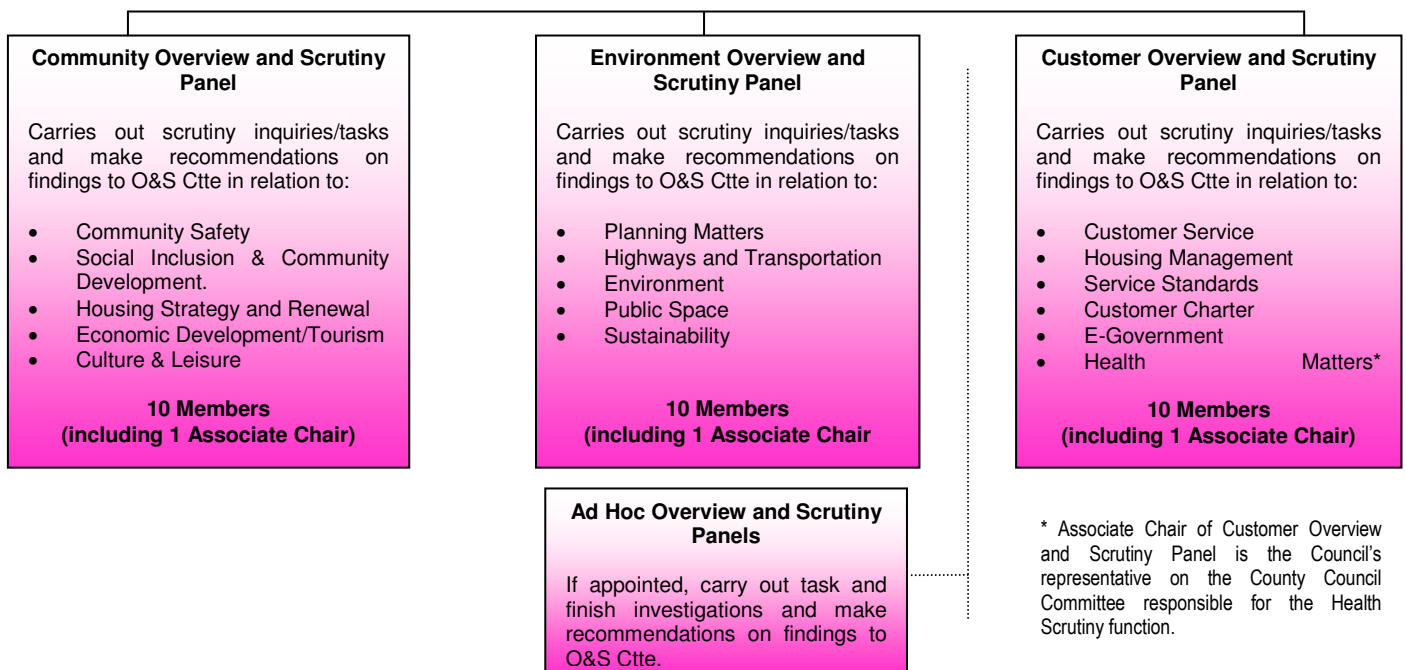
The Committee may exercise the full range of overview and scrutiny powers and functions including the 'call-in' of executive decisions. It may consider any topic appropriate for scrutiny but will normally focus on:

- Holding the Executive to account
- Performance, resources and corporate governance matters
- Consideration of recommendations from the standing scrutiny panels
- Making recommendations to the Executive and/or the Council flowing from its own work and that of the scrutiny panels
- Setting and monitoring the annual scrutiny work programmes.
- Selection of inquiry topics and approval of project outlines and plans.

Matters falling within the crosscutting themes of the standing scrutiny panels will normally be referred to the relevant panel for full investigation and consideration.

The Committee may appoint ad hoc scrutiny panels to assist it in carrying out its functions should the need arise.

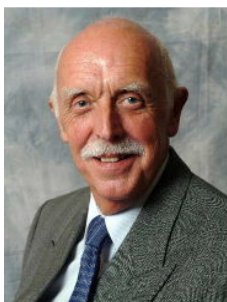
**10 Members  
(including Chair + 3 Associate Chairs)**



The Structure of Overview and Scrutiny in Chorley for the period 2005/06. This will be amended following its restructure in May 2006.

## 5. The Achievements and Activities

### (a) Overview and Scrutiny Committee



#### **Chair**

John Walker

#### **Members**

Councillor Eric Bell  
Councillor Mrs Pat Case  
Councillor Michael Davies  
Councillor Peter Goldsworthy  
Councillor Thomas McGowan (Associate Chair)  
Councillor Raymond Parr  
Councillor Mrs Stella Walsh (Associate Chair)  
Councillor Mark Perks (Associate Chair)  
Councillor Mary Wilson

#### Training and Development

The Committee continued to receive update reports on the training and development for Members. It has highlighted the need for Members to have training in order to develop their existing skills and equip them to carry out their scrutiny roles in a robust and effective manner.

The Member Development Steering Group was established and the Council has developed training sessions for Members on a regular basis with a Member Learning Hour and training sessions prior to meetings of Development Control and sessions for members involved in Licensing activities.

It is envisaged that the Council will be seeking the award of the North West Elected Member Development Charter later this year.

#### Monitoring of Sickness Absence

The Committee received six monthly update reports from the Director of Human Resources on the sickness absence across the authority and the process of reducing absence within the authority.

There continues to be a reduced trend in sickness absence levels and improvements in the health and well-being of employees as well as the targeting of short-term persistent absence.

#### Inquiry into the Provision of Youth Activities in Chorley

At the beginning of the Municipal Year the Committee received from the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel its draft final report and recommendations into the provision of youth activities in the Borough.

The recommendations contained in the report were aimed to enhance and complement facilities for sports, arts and cultural activities for young people by facilitating more effective co-ordination and co-operation between service providers and funding bodies and encouraging maximum use of current facilities.

### Inquiry into the One Stop Shop

At the same time as the above report the Committee received the draft final report and recommendations of the Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel inquiry into the Council's One Stop Shop.

The recommendations contained in the report had been formulated by the Panel to assess the effectiveness of the One Stop Shop in improving Customer Service and to identify improvements to customer service.

### Budget Timetable and the Involvement of Overview and Scrutiny in the Budget Process

In September the Committee's views were sought on the future role and involvement of the non-Executive Members in the scrutiny of the budget setting and monitoring process.

Members were reminded of the revised guidance in relation to the new Comprehensive Performance Assessment regime, which places greater emphasis and relevance on Authorities' financial management processes and an internal 'value for money' assessment of the use of resources. The Members of the Committee were asked to identify any particular area or key issue on which non-Executive Members should concentrate and how much the overview and scrutiny regime might contribute effectively to the budget setting process and subsequent performance management.

Late in January 2006 the Committee received the proposals for the budget for revenue spending and Council Tax for the General Fund for the 2006/07 financial year. The purpose was to give initial consideration of the proposals and seek the Committees views on the Executive Cabinet draft budget proposals.

This was part of the consultation exercise and feedback would be received from the three Panels and review of the budget consultation documents.

The key issues and areas that non-executive Members could concentrate on had been chosen as the area of Environment Services, Planning Services and Revenues and Benefits. They were examined in detail by the Panels responsible for the particular area. These services had been identified by the Audit Commission as they appeared as upper quartile costs in the Value for Money Self Assessment. A series of recommendations for the provision of improved comparative data were submitted to the Executive Cabinet in 2006 and were all approved.

### Corporate Improvement Plan 2004 - 2007

The Committee continued to be consulted on the position in respect of the delivery of the Corporate Improvement Plan for 2004 - 2007, which showed good progress had been achieved across a broad range of areas and that many of the planned actions had been completed.

### Revenue Budget/Capital Budget 2005/06 - Monitoring

The Committee received regular reports on the financial position of the Council compared against the budgets and efficiency saving targets it had set itself for 2005/06.

Reports on the additional schemes that had been made by the 2005/06 Capital Programme were made to the Committee.



## Business Plan and Performance Monitoring

Every quarter the Committee received updates of the Business Plan relating to Corporate and Policy Services, Human Resources, Legal Services and Financial Services.

Members are able to discuss with the Service Head specific areas of concern and whether performance is being achieved.

## Performance Management and the Role of Overview and Scrutiny

The Committee received in September 2005 a report clarifying the different roles and responsibilities of Executive and non-Executive Members in relation to performance and management. The role and objectives of Overview and Scrutiny Members was identified as:

- Providing a check on the activities of the Executive through its 'Call In' powers.
- Involvement in policy development and monitoring and review of policy formulation and implementation within the community-planning framework.
- Involvement in improvement review.
- Scrutiny of external bodies and agencies.

In order to assist the roles of Members the Committee have received quarterly reports on both the Corporate Plan Key Performance Indicators and Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs). In addition, quarterly Business Plan updates were presented to the Committee and the three Panels.

## Timetable of Meeting

In February 2006 the Committee was given a chance to comment on the draft timetable of meetings for the 2006/07 Municipal Year, proposing the dates for meetings of the Council, Executive Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Panels, the various Committees, Area Forum Pilots and Liaison Groups.

To enable the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be reported to and taken into account by the Executive Cabinet, meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be held two days prior to the Executive Cabinet.

## Consultation Papers

Over the months the Committee has been requested for its views and comments on various Consultation papers.

More recently the Committee has been asked to respond to a paper issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister entitled 'Local Strategic Partnership : Shaping their Future' which raised a number of questions in relation to the future role of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP's) and suggestions as to how the Council should respond to the paper.

Other Consultation papers received related to the changes of the Strategic Health Authority, The Primary Care Trusts and the Ambulance Service NHS Trusts in Lancashire and Cumbria, and a Consultation paper produced by Lancashire City Council entitled 'Plan for all the Children and Young People in Lancashire'.

(b) **Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel**



**Chairman**  
Mark Perks

**Members**

Councillor Thomas Bedford  
Councillor Andrew Birchall  
Councillor Peter Buckley  
Councillor Lesley Brownlee  
Councillor Francis Culshaw  
Councillor Mrs Marie Gray  
Councillor Gregory Morgan  
Councillor Mrs Iris Smith  
Councillor Alan Whittaker

The areas of responsibility of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel relate to:

- Community Safety
- Social Inclusion and Community Development
- Housing Strategy and Renewal
- Economic Development and Tourism
- Culture and Leisure

The Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel met 8 times during 2005/06.

At the beginning of the year the Panel received an update on the progress that had been made to implement the recommendations contained in the Panel's Inquiry report into Juvenile Nuisance. The actions that had been so far instigated had been pleasing in view of the constraints caused by the limited resources and capacity of a number of the organisations and agencies with whom collaboration to effect the implementation of a number of the recommendations is dependent. In view of this the Panel urged officers to actively encourage these bodies to commit adequate funding for suggested projects.

Public Participation in the Council's Decision-Making Process

Throughout the year the Panel has been charged to examine in depth the process of public participation in the Council's decision-making process.

The Panel was charged with conducting an investigation into the means by which the Council can more effectively engaged with the local community on the provision of services by specifically investigating the possible provision of Area Forums or Committees (after taking account of the experiences of the 3 Area Forum Pilot Schemes in Clayton-le-Woods North, Coppull and Lostock) and introduction of public speaking at meetings of the Council and its Committee bodies on a trial basis.

Two Sub-Groups were established to examine the two separate strands of the inquiry, with Members of the two Sub-Groups charged with responsibility to visit a number of surrounding local authorities to examine at first hand the operating arrangements and perceived effectiveness of the respective Authorities' specific arrangements and report their findings to the Panel. The Area Forum Working Group established by the Council was invited to accompany the Members of the two Sub-Groups on their visits.

Throughout the year the Panel received reports from a number of Members on their reactions to and comments on their visits to a number of Area Forums, Council meetings and Planning Committees in surrounding Districts as part of the evidence gathering for the inquiry.

Visits had been made to appropriate meetings of Pendle, South Ribble, Hyndburn, Ribble Valley and Rossendale Borough Councils and West Lancashire District Council.

The Panel, after assessing survey evidence and Members experience of neighbouring Authorities practices have agreed to support recommendations to allow the public to speak at meetings of the Council, Executive Cabinet, Development Control Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny bodies within specific parameters. The Development Control Committee has indicated its support of the proposals to allow the public to speak at meetings of the Committee within restrictions defined in agreed Procedure Rules.

Following the changes in the Council's political leadership and to the Overview and Scrutiny structure it is intended that the Scrutiny Inquiry will be concluded by a Special Cabinet Sub-Committee comprising of former members of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

(c) **Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel**



**Chair**  
Mrs Stella Walsh

**Members**

Councillor Alan Cullens  
Councillor Mrs Doreen Dickinson  
Councillor Margaret Lees  
Councillor Peter Malpas  
Councillor Miss June Molyneaux  
Councillor Geoffrey Russell  
Councillor Edward Smith  
Councillor Mrs Joyce Snape  
Councillor Christopher Snow

The areas of responsibilities of the Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel relate to:

- Customer Service
- Housing Management
- Service Standards
- Customer Charter
- e-government
- Health Matters

The Panel met 9 times during 2005/06.

One Stop Shop Inquiry

At the beginning of the year the Panel received an update on the actions taken following the recommendations from the inquiry into the Council's 'One Stop Shop' service at the Union Street offices. The service objective was 'to provide customers with a single point of access to Council and partner services using their preferred method of contact and to provide a quality service that fully meets customer requirements'.

The Council and its staff have subsequently received an Excellent rating following the Customer Access and Focus Best Value Inspection and the award of Chartermark for Customer Services.

Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement Inquiry

Throughout the year the Panels main focus of attention was on the ongoing Inquiry in to the Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement.

The main objectives of the inquiry was:

- to investigate the effectiveness of Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement (DPE)
- to assess the impact the introduction of the Parkwise scheme has had on residents, visitors, motorists, trades and business
- to compare with Best Practice elsewhere
- to identify any future improvements for customer service

The Inquiry had been called following the receipt over a period of time of complaints regarding the enforcement of car parking in Chorley.

Several Sub-Groups were established to consider evidence in detail and submitted reports to the Panel which formed part of the evidence.

In September 2005 a public survey was undertaken with the results showing that the positives outweighed the negatives. The main challenge for the Panel was to improve the public perception of Parking Attendants.

Through the inquiry there had been articles and letters in the press, with Members feeling that some of the comments were not helpful to the vitality of Chorley Town Centre.

Members visited Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council as Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement had operated for a number of years to consider Best Practice and their lessons learned.

The inquiry report will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to the Executive Cabinet on 27 and 29 June 2006 respectively.

Several of the recommendations, including a sticker to highlight which side of the Blue Badge (for disabled drivers) should be displayed, have already been implemented across Lancashire.

(d) **Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel**



**Chair**  
Thomas McGowan

**Members**

Councillor David Dickinson  
Councillor Thomas Gray  
Councillor Henry Counce  
Councillor Harold Heaton  
Councillor Miss Margaret Iddon  
Councillor Roy Lees  
Councillor Marion Lowe  
Councillor Roger Livesey  
Councillor Shaun Smith

The areas of responsibility of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel relate to:

- Planning
- Highways and Transportation
- Environment
- Public Space and Sustainability

The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel has met eight times during the 2005/06 Municipal Year.

Accessibility of Cycling as a Leisure Pursuit

Continuing on from last year the Panel has been gathering evidence for the accessibility of cycling as a leisure pursuit with the main objectives being:

- to assess the dual use of areas (ie recreation grounds, car parks, parkland)
- to highlight the areas of development and improvement
- to identify the current areas and can they be extended
- to reduce confrontation between the various activities

Several witnesses have been called to give evidence on the various activities associated with the inquiry.

The Panel considered that the Inquiry had gone on long enough and was a topic that could run and run without coming to any real conclusion.

A number of recommendations and findings had come out of the Inquiry. These will result in raising awareness of confrontation between the various leisure activities, as well as bringing potential funding for cycling schemes in the Chorley area.

Business Plan 2005/06

Like the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and other Panels, Business Plans were submitted for Members to comment on the services provided under the responsibility of the Panel.

Particular attention was paid to the implementation of the Enhanced Recycling Scheme following the introduction of the second and final phases and the associated move to attempt weekly collection of an increased range of recyclable materials.

During its implementation the scheme design had been substantially amended which meant that promised delivery of the service to the rural and difficult access households could be delivered.

As part of the 2006/07 Budget process, the Environmental Services budget was chosen to be reviewed as the service had been identified to be looked at in more detail because it appeared as upper quartile costs in the Value for Money (VFM) Self Assessment undertaken by the Audit Commission.

The Panel received detailed findings of the Audit Commissions review of costs undertaken as part of their use of resources value for money review.

The exercise allowed the Panel the opportunity to establish if the Council's policy objectives are being met and if the benchmark findings are a means of the reality of Member and Stakeholders experience.

A number of comments came out of the review and submitted to the Executive Cabinet as part of the 2006/07 budget consultation process. These would be reviewed over 2006/07.

### Sustainable Resources

Recently the Panel had been given the task to pursue the use of renewable energy within the Borough and the area the Council would take a lead on this issue on a cost neutral basis and this matter will be considered during the compilation of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2006/07.

## **6. What has the Work of Overview and Scrutiny led to?**

The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panels have led to improvements in the Council's services, in the value for money that it provides.

Contributions have been made to:

- (a) ensuring that the objectives and actions in the Council's plans and strategies are more focused and relate to the Council's providers
- (b) ensuring that the Council's targets and outturns are achieved
- (c) ensuring that performance reports are submitted and that it is easier to see where services are improving
- (d) ensuring a greater emphasis on member training

In addition the work of the Committee and its Panels has identified what the Council is doing well and where action is needed to improve the delivery of Customer Services at the One Stop Shop and the Council's grass cutting service.



## 7. The Way Forward

As can be seen from this third Annual Overview and Scrutiny report, like the previous years it has been a busy one for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panels. A number of inquiries have been undertaken and completed as well as smaller reviews. If Overview and Scrutiny is to be seen as workable it must be seen to be making a difference to the organisation. The ultimate test of effectiveness of overview and scrutiny is not how much work is done but whether the decision (or policies or services) which result from its intervention are better than those which would have resulted had that intervention not taken place.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment identified a number of weaknesses in the Overview and Scrutiny processes and these are being addressed.

The following subjects will assist in the development of Overview and Scrutiny:

- Continuing the monitoring and progress of the recommendations for inquiries.
- Ensure that there is appropriate induction and training for Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members especially to any new Members on the Council following the elections.
- Ensure that there is awareness training to all members and relevant officers to promote an understanding of the role and importance of Overview and Scrutiny.
- To continue to consider the issues raised from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
- to continue to improve the holding of the Executive to account.

A positive step forward was made in October 2005 when a workshop session was held for all Members of the Council, Management Team and Senior Management Group to complete the Centre for Public Scrutiny Self Evaluation framework for the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function and enable the production of an Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan.

The Self-Assessment provided a picture of how the Scrutiny function was operating, what it does well and how improvements could be made.

Coming out of the Self Evaluation Workshop has been publishing of an Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan which forms part of the Council's Performance Management process. The Plan has been compiled taking account of outcomes of the workshop.

The Improvement Plan identifies 13 actions aimed at improving the delivery of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny action. The action required to be undertaken in order to:

- ensure that the Plan adds value to the Council's wider improvement programme and delivery of the Corporate Strategy and Community Strategy;
- communicate the potential of scrutiny to local communities;
- encourage involvement in the process of scrutiny;
- strengthen the confidence of persons undertaking scrutiny activities;
- demonstrate the value of the scrutiny role.

The Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan will be kept up to date and will form the key control document for the Executive Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure that our plans are kept on track.

The Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit will be reviewed to reflect the changes that have been made since it was introduced.

Each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panels agree a work programme. This is a standing agenda item for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and in this way Members can routinely monitor progress.

For the next Municipal Year 2006/07 the work programme will be linked to items in the Council's Corporate Strategy.

The work programme will be based on the following:

- The issue must be related to the Council's priorities.
- It must be of concern to elected members and members of the public.
- It should not be under review by any other body.
- It is an issue about which something can be done and which scrutiny can add value.

The Council continues to meet officers/Councillors from neighbouring authorities by way of the North West Scrutiny Support Officers Network and the Lancashire Scrutiny Parties Forum.

The principle source of support is from the Democratic Services Section where all Overview and Scrutiny members can seek advice and guidance. In addition to the traditional 'Committee' functions the officers also provide the research and analysis to Overview and Scrutiny.

Information regarding each Inquiry report and their recommendations as well as the regular updates on the Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan can be available for inspection on either the Council's website [www.chorley.gov.uk/scrutiny](http://www.chorley.gov.uk/scrutiny) or on deposit in the Democratic Services Section.