

REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. This report summarises the business transacted at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 April 2013, including the work to date on the Task Group on the Adoption of Estates Review. It also summarises the business that was considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panels on 11 and 20 March 2013 and the Overview and Scrutiny Call-in Panel meeting held on 3 April 2013.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 8 APRIL 2013

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2. Further information was sought on the Private Property Improvement Scheme and how households that may qualify would be identified. We were urged to report any such properties in our wards to the Neighbourhood Officers for further investigation.

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Adoption of Estates

3. We received the draft Final Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Adoption of Estates review that had recently been completed on the issues that faced many of the Borough's residents on the adoption processes.
4. The Task Group, Chaired by Councillor Matthew Crow produced a set of recommendations that they feel will improve the present procedures and policies to better serve our residents.
5. The 14 recommendations have the capacity to improve on the communication and provision of information for residents and partnership working with officers from other organisations and developers who are involved in the process.
6. Some recommendations are partly the responsibility of Lancashire County Council and it is intended to seek support and approval from their Executive Cabinet, although we have received initial feedback indicating support of their implementation.
7. We approved the Task Groups findings and recommendations for submission to the next meeting of the Executive Cabinet for consideration.

Update on Private Rented Sector Housing Standards Inspection Programme

8. We received a report of the Director of People and Places that provided the Committee with an update on the progress made to increase the level of programmed housing standards inspections in relation to the private sector housing stock in Chorley.
9. The report was in response to recommendations submitted to the Executive Cabinet in June 2012 from the Private Rented Housing Inspection Task Group asking for additional resource to be directed to establishing a programme of inspection works for private sector housing.

10. We were informed that a report providing a full response to the recommendations from the review would be submitted to a forthcoming Executive Cabinet, however in the meantime work had already commenced within the Environment and Neighbourhoods Team to establish a programmed inspection regime utilising the existing resources of officers who were trained to inspect housing to the Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme (HHSRS) standards.
11. In addition, the introduction of a new IDOX database system had enabled the team to build up a comprehensive database of private rented sector accommodation using local intelligence, housing benefits information and council tax details. Members also asked if the Council had any Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMO's) registered in the borough and were advised that this was a very small number.

Asset Management Scrutiny Task Group – Monitoring Report

12. The Head of Governance submitted a report updating Members on the progress made on the 13 Strategic Principles that had been proposed by the Asset Management Scrutiny Task Group and adopted by the Executive in February 2011.
13. In addition we were informed that the Council had now accommodated as far as was realistically possible, the maximum amount of staff in the Union Street offices, without having to provide additional support facilities such as toilets. There was also an update on the proposed arrangements for the sharing of the Bengal Street depot with the registered charity Recycling Lives and Members asked questions in relation to the accommodating of the credit union, Unify in the Town Centre.
14. This was the final monitoring report and the Committee were satisfied with the progress that had been made against each of the principles.

Lancastrian Scrutiny Task Group – Monitoring Report

15. We received an update report of the Chief Executive on the action to date against the implementation of the recommendations of the Lancastrian Scrutiny Task Group since their acceptance by the Executive approximately 12 months ago.
16. We were pleased to note that the use of the Lancastrian Suite had increased significantly and income had more than doubled in 2012/13. We also discussed how the venue could be best marketed in the future.
17. A staffing restructure had recently been undertaken within the Governance team that had resulted in the creation of an additional part time Civic Attendant that would provide enable more dedicated support to Lancastrian events.

Tourism and Supporting Chorley Task Group – Monitoring Report

18. The Chief Executive updated Members on the progress made on implementing the actions arising from the Executive response to the Tourism and Promoting Chorley Task Group.

19. The Committee was provided with a summary of the work that had been undertaken under each of the four main headings from the inquiry on town centre and markets, Astley Hall and park; promotional and partnership working. Progress had been made in all areas, with further events and attractions staged to encourage more visitors to the borough.
20. The traffic management plan continued to be developed and used for all major events held in the park and a development plan for the Astley Hall complex was soon to be completed and would include plans for attracting visitors to the Chorley Remembers exhibition that had been installed in the Coach House.
21. A Town Centre master plan was currently being undertaken and it was expected that this would incorporate greater promotion of town centre assets. The Committee asked if more could be done to work with businesses in the town centre to ascertain if visitors to the town were spending and thought that better transport deals needed to be negotiated as bus fares into the town from outlying areas appeared considerably higher in comparison to other areas across Lancashire.

Review of Scrutiny Work Programme 2012/13

22. We received a report of the Chief Executive on the review of the work programme for overview and scrutiny in 2012/13, in particular, the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel, twelve months after its introduction.
23. At the beginning of the year the Committee had decided to introduce a dedicated Performance Panel to focus on the performance elements of scrutiny and consider monitoring information. This was to enable proper focus and consistency of approach.
24. The Performance Panel has now met four times in the last 12 months and has considered the Council's Corporate Strategy key projects monitoring; Chorley Partnership monitoring information and directorate business plan monitoring reports. Each meeting has also considered an additional performance focus that has looked at particular areas of concern or poor performance and the relevant Executive Member has been invited to attend.
25. The scrutiny of performance is a key role for scrutiny and one of the main benefits to this dedicated resource is that a smaller number of Members have been able to drill down to the detail in key areas. We have also seen a greater involvement by the Executive Members and it has allowed for the main Committee to focus on other business.
26. Although the Committee has only undertaken one review in 2012/13, the Adoption of Estates proved to be a complex subject, meeting on nine occasions and has undertaken some public consultation and interviewed developers and officers. It also included a Member Learning Session for all Councillors and we received a presentation from an officer of Northamptonshire County Council on work that was taking place nationally on this issue.

27. The Committee has also looked at a number of topics under our duty to scrutinise crime and disorder and there have been three call-in requests for Members to consider.
28. Members agreed to our proposals for eight scrutiny meetings for the 2013/14 calendar to include, four main Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings and four Performance Panel meetings. In addition we proposed a number of future review topic for inclusion on the work programme and agreed that Select Move would be our first Task Group topic with Councillor Graham Dunn taking the Chair.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL – 11 MARCH 2013

Scrutiny Focus - Selectmove

29. We welcomed the Executive Member for Homes and Business to the meeting along with Zoe Whiteside, Head of Housing and Mick Coogan, Strategic Housing Officer as we were considering a report of the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy that provided responses to a number of questions raised in advance by Members that included:
 - The time taken to process, determine and allocate priority banding to applicants of Selectmove.
 - Simplifying the Selectmove application to make it more user friendly but ensuring correct information is received.
 - Measures that could be taken to help those applicants who know their existing tenancy will be terminated before they become homeless.
 - Improvements to the interface between Selectmove and members of the public
 - Information on the bidding cycle; and
 - Ensuring that social housing providers get an allocations service that they value.
30. Members of the Panel also asked a variety of additional questions with regards to the policies and procedure of the Selectmove processes.
31. It was explained that although it was difficult to benchmark the service against other authorities, the Council had used comparative information when developing the application forms to make sure that they followed a consistent approach and captured all the relevant information needed from which to form an accurate assessment of the applicant's needs.
32. Additional support and guidance is given when necessary to ensure that all applicants are banded correctly and we were given assurances that the service did a lot of work that was over and above the requirements needed to make sure that the bandings were fairly allocated.

33. We were informed that a dedicated officer was currently in the process of setting up an early intervention scheme that would be able to identify those people that were struggling to pay their mortgages/rents and offer help and assistance before they find themselves in the situation of being or becoming homeless.
34. Members had concerns that the online service was not as good as it could be. Some of the Registered Social Landlords did not supply adequate information including photographs, whilst this was something that the Council sympathised with, they had very little control over it but with the support of the Executive Member they continued to lobby the companies in an effort to improve the process for the customers and the Council.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE PANEL – 20 MARCH 2013

Partnerships, Planning and Policy Directorate – Business Plan Monitoring Statement

35. The Panel received a report of the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy on progress made to date in delivering the key actions and performance indicators in the Partnerships, Planning and Policy Directorate Improvement Plan for 2012/13.
36. Of the 28 action/projects contained within the Directorate Business Plan only three projects were rate amber, the delivery of the second year of the S106 Play and Recreation Fund, the Introduction of supported accommodation for 16/17 year olds and the trial re-opening of Market Street, Chorley. An explanation about the issues and action being taken to address them were provided for the Members.
37. Of the 17 indicators that could be reported on, three were below target and outside the 5% threshold. Although the processing minor planning application was still under performing, Members were highlighted to the fact that the target had been exceeded for the past couple of months.
38. Members asked a number of questions relating to a actions contained within the report and we received information on the makeup and remit of the newly established Welfare Reform Group, the difficulties the Council were facing in delivering a consistent Court Desk Service at the Courts and assurances about how unplanned departures were dealt with at Cotswold House.
39. We also asked if the information contained within the Business Plan Monitoring reports could be presented differently to include more detail behind the statistical figures that would show evidence of how the administration's corporate priorities are being delivered. It was explained that this was an area that had already been discussed at Strategy Group and that in future a direction of travel would be incorporated into the reports which would provide the type of detail that Members were requesting.

People and Places Directorate – Business Plan Monitoring Statement

40. We received a report of the Director of People and Places on the progress made to date in delivering the key actions and performance indicators in the People and Places directorate business plan for 2012/13.
41. At the end of January 19 actions were rated green and had been completed or are on-going. No actions were rated amber and none rated red.
42. The Director of People and Places reported that the review of neighbourhood working was now complete and that 24 priorities had been identified in the last round of neighbourhood meetings. A number of changes had also been made to internal reporting procedure and process that would improve how day to day activities were carried out that would ensure better response times to both Elected Members and the public. It was important to know if these changes were effective and Members were encouraged to give feedback as and when required. The Panel were happy with how the neighbourhood working agenda was progressing but there was a view that additional meetings may be needed going forwards to effectively monitor the work of the priorities.
43. I asked about the present position of the Councillor Community Grant funding and it was reported that over £11,000 had been allocated to various groups and community organisations across the borough with more application pending. There was still funding available; however the deadline for applications was fast approaching on 28 March 2013.
44. We received a list of all the performance indicators that the service reported against. Only one, Overall Crime Rate was below target and outside the 5% threshold. A combination of factors had impacted on the performance of this indicator. Crime levels in the previous year had been low and the 2012/13 target was always going to prove challenging from such a low base. In addition, an Integrated Offender Management framework which was due to be in place had continued to have delivery issues in recent months, and as a consequence, had not effectively managed offenders on release.
45. Members asked if more information could be provide on the type of work that was involved on the Integrated Offender Management framework so that a more holistic view could be achieved and how Councillors could help to influence by having a better understanding of the problems, challenges and work needing to be done.
46. We were also informed about the implementation of high profile campaigns to highlight to potential victims of acquisitive crime the need to ensure vehicles, property and personal belongings are effectively secured to deter opportunistic crime.

Transformation Directorate – Business Plan Monitoring Statement

47. The Panel received a report of the Chief Executive on progress made in delivering the key actions and performance indicators in delivering the Transformation directorate business improvement plan for 2012/13.

48. Good progress had been made with a number of key projects completed and large proportion was rated green with notable progress of ICT projects. Where projects were rated as amber; actions were in place to ensure that the project delivers on schedule and by the end of the year.
49. A number of performance indicators were off track, in particular those relating to sickness absence which was being closely monitored given links with service capacity. Customer satisfaction also continued to be in decline since the change in measurement and the report explained the reasons and actions in place to address this.
50. Members commented on a number of issues contained within the report that included action being taken to address the reduction in customer satisfaction, identifying patterns in relation to long term sickness across the authority and current take-up figures of the collective energy switching programme that was being pushed to residents across Lancashire.

Supported People in Chorley

51. We received a report of the Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy informing them of the nature of Supporting People in Chorley and the Council's role. The report explained that the Supported People funding pays for Housing Related Support to assist vulnerable people to live in their own home whilst remaining independent. Members received information on the history of the funding along with the details of support which is eligible and how this is distinct from care.
52. It was explained that all Supported People funding was now allocated from Lancashire County Council's mainstream funding after being a ring fenced grant until 2009 then part of the area based grant until 2011. The total value of the supporting People programme for Chorley is £1.34M.
53. There is an established governance structure that oversees the programme and through which decisions regarding services, for example, the commissioning and decommissioning are made. A Locality Group, comprising of a small cluster of local authorities discuss initial recommendations by each district council or partner before being agreed at the Lancashire wide Commissioning Body. Chorley Council is the joint Chair of the Commissioning Body and therefore plays an important role. However, whilst this afforded Chorley some influence on services commissioned in its area, all decisions had to be made through the governance structure including both the relevant Locality Group and Commissioning Body.
54. The Panel received a list of Supporting People funding services that were commissioned in Chorley or joint commissioned for a wider area taken from Lancashire County Council Supporting People Team's directory of support services. All services were commissioned on fixed term contracts with the majority up for review at the end of 2013/14.

55. Members raised concerns that the implementation of one project could have a knock-on effect that would be detrimental to another project. This was because there was simply not enough funding to support all the projects that were needed and had to be prioritised according to need. Partners continued to work together more effectively and the Council were starting to see the benefits of more joined up working that were addressing local need and starting to fill the gaps in service provision.
56. Officers assured us that the work of the Supporting People was a more co-ordinated approach than had previously been and that all the relevant partners were collectively making the key decisions that needed to be taken. With the current economic climate there were going to be some difficult decisions to be taken around the delivery of services over the next twelve months as Lancashire County Council have indicated that Supporting People Funding may be reduced in future years.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CALL IN PANEL - 3 APRIL 2013

57. The Overview and Scrutiny Call-in Panel were asked to consider a confidential report advising us of a request that had been submitted by Councillor Paul Walmsley for the call-in of a decision made by the Executive Member for Homes and Business on 18 March 2013 for the granting of a Town Centre Grants Package.
58. In light of the representations we received and the discussions that took place, the Call-in Panel decided that the request be accepted and that the Executive Member for Homes and Business be asked to reconsider the decision and to also consider reviewing the application processes to ensure future compliance with Council policies.

Recommendation

59. That the report be noted.

COUNCILLOR STEVE HOLGATE
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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