

REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND PANELS

GENERAL REPORT

1. This report summarises the business transacted at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 February 2007, as well as a brief summary of the recent activities and matters discussed at meetings of the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 25 January 2007 and two meetings of the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 30 January and 15 February 2007 (Special Meeting).

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 FEBRUARY 2007

Executive Decision ‘Call-In’ Request

2. The Committee considered a call-in request in respect of an Executive decision taken by the Executive Leader.
3. The decision related to proposals to revise the staffing structure of the Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment Directorate.
4. The ‘call-in’ request received on 31 January 2007 requested the Committee to recommend that the Executive Leader or the Council should reconsider the Executive decision.
5. In accordance with the call in procedure the request was considered by myself as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and I agreed that the request be referred to this Committee for consideration.
6. The report set out the objection, the alternative decision/proposal and the case for the alternative.
7. The Committee agreed that the call-in request be rejected.

Overview and Scrutiny Inquiry

8. (a) Comprehensive Performance Assessment Service Performance Toolkit

We received a report and a presentation from the Director of Policy and Performance outlining the key messages emerging from the recently published CPA Performance Information Toolkit from the Audit Commission.

It was indicated that those District Councils that feel that they have made significant progress could apply for CPA reassessment and that the authority was currently working on a possible submission date of 1 October 2007. The strengths of case for re-categorisation would be the primary driver for determining whether a request for re-assessment is accepted.

The Audit Commission toolkit looks at each of the performance indicators in the CPA Basket in detail examining individual performance trends and quartile positions. This information will be utilised going forward to identify areas for improvement for target setting and to inform resource targeting.

The document produced by the Audit Commission is a powerful tool for us in demonstrating that we are delivering on our commitment to continuous improvement and to show that in terms of service performance we are an excellent Council.

(b) Presentation by Council's Relationship Officer

As part of the Committee's inquiry on the Council's performance against the key lines of inquiry to be assessed by the Audit Commission during CPA and Directions of Travel, the Committee received a presentation from the Council's Relationship Manager (Audit Commission) Mike Thomas. The presentation highlighted:

- The re-categorisation model.
- An assessment was required as to why we required to be re-categorised.
- The background to the Council's CPA inspection in 2003 and the significant improvements that have been made in the way the Council delivers its services.
- Specific areas of weakness had been identified which would require action if the Council's bid for re-categorisation was successful.

(c) Feedback on Deliberations of the Sub-Group

The Chair of the Capacity/Achievement Sub-Group and the Chair of the Equality and Diversity Sub-Group reported on the current position regarding their deliberations on the key issues of Overview and Scrutiny function and the Equality Standard for Local Governance relating to the CPA.

Significant progress had been made at meetings of these Sub-Groups.

The Capacity/Achievement Sub-Group had looked at the Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan and received information on the provision of Overview and Scrutiny Training Sessions for Members and Officers aimed at reviewing and updating the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Structure and Toolkit to ensure that it was fit for purpose and in line with best practice.

The Sub-Group had carried out a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis into the Council's current Overview and Scrutiny function and the results would be examined particularly those areas of weakness and threats to establish methods of improvements.

The Equality and Diversity Sub-Group had looked into the Equality and Diversity as an aspect of Comprehensive Performance Assessment with Members made aware of the Council's existing gaps and areas of under performance which may impact upon the Council's performance in any future CPA assessment.

Provision of Overview and Scrutiny Training Sessions

9. We received a report of the Director of Customer, Democratic and Legal Services on the proposal to provide Overview and Scrutiny Training Sessions for Members and officers by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in June 2007.
10. Following the completion of the Centre for Public Scrutiny Self Assessment Framework for Overview and Scrutiny, an Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan had been produced which had identified two key actions. The training sessions would be based around general Overview and Scrutiny issues, chairing Overview and Scrutiny and Financial Strategy.
11. The Committee fully supported the proposals in the report.

Planning Services Best Value Performance Indicators – Decisions on Major Planning Applications

12. The Committee at its last meeting had requested this report which advised us of the impact of the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's) on the decisions made on planning applications, in particular the more complex applications and the length of time they take for a decision.
13. The report outlined the practices and procedures in dealing with planning applications with limited time to deal with them. The majority of applications are dealt with within 8 weeks but major planning applications are more complex and they have 13 weeks in which to be determined. During that process it may become apparent that further information or amendments necessary before it may be considered acceptable such as requirement under the Habitats Directive. In these circumstances the applicants are advised to withdraw the application or it will be refused on the basis lack of information on an unacceptable scheme.
14. The report set out the three BVPIs and how these are reported to the Department of Communities and Local Government and in turn can reflect the amount of Planning Delivery Grant and on the Council's Comprehensive Performance Re-Assessment.

Third Quartile Performance Report, 2006/07 – Monitoring Report for Period Ending 31 December 2006

15. We received the third quartile performance management report indicating the Authority's performance in relating to both the Best Value Performance Indicators and the Council's Corporate Key Performance Indicators.
16. The report indicated the full list of Best Value Performance Indicators that are relevant to this Council and which are collected in accordance with definitions issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The report impacts on all of the Corporate Priorities as the areas of performance covered by the report relate to all four the Council's priorities.
17. Overall, the performance of key projects continues to be good within the majority of projects performing as planned. Performance against BVPI's show 71% of our indicators are currently meeting targets, a significant improvement on quarter two (66%) and fewer of our indicators are showing deteriorating performance than in the second quarter (20 as opposed to 22).
18. The report indicated that the organisation continues to perform well and service performance levels remain high with the Council maintained in a good quartile position. Even though our quartile position remains high our relative position has dropped slightly in this quarter.

Policy and Performance Third Quarter Business Plan Monitoring Statement

19. We received from the Director of Policy and Performance a report relating to her Directorate, identifying the progress made against the key actions and performance indicators for the period 1 October to 31 December 2006.
20. The report indicated the activities of the Directorate and reported that good progress had been made with further strengthening of the Directorate's approach to performance management with the aim of driving forward real improvements.
21. Focus remained on evaluating the current position and preparation for a future CPA re-inspection as well as raising the profile of the Council with a view to raising citizen understanding of the work of the Council and of the services it provides with the aim of improving public perception.

Budget Scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels

22. The Committee received a report of the Director of Finance that had been submitted to both Scrutiny Panels on the way forward for the budget scrutiny for 2007/08 that had been suggested by this Committee at its meeting in December 2006.
23. For this year's budget scrutiny it was agreed for the Panels to focus their attention on the following:
 - To receive an update on the high cost areas identified during the 2006/2007 scrutiny relating to Planning Services, Environmental Services and Revenue Benefits.
 - To review the 2006 cost profiles prepared by the Audit Commission as compared to those in 2005 for the Planning Services and Environmental Services.
 - To review the likely impact of the efficiencies and savings on the Council's ability to deliver the promises in the Corporate Plan and the mitigation being put in place.
 - A review of the low cost areas where a small increase in cost may bring a relatively bigger improvement.
24. The Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel also examined the areas of recharges relating to ICT and Human Resources which affected the overall costs.
25. The Audit Commission had undertaken some benchmarking of costs compared with previous years data to provide analysis for the scrutiny review.
26. Both Panels agreed to submit a number of questions and comments to the Executive Cabinet which would form part of this year's budget consultation exercise. The Committee endorsed the questions for submission to the Executive Cabinet.

Revenue Budget 2006/07 – Monitoring

27. We received from the Director of Finance a report setting out the current financial position of the Council compared against the budgets and efficiency savings targets it set itself for 2006/07 for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.
28. The report confirmed an improved position in respect of the General Fund with the projected outturn forecast an overspend of just £12,000 compared to the figure of £67,000 reported in the last monitoring report. The report showed the areas of significant improvements since the last monitoring report.
29. Progress continues to be made towards the Corporate Savings Targets with £338,000 savings from management of the establishment and efficiency savings with further savings possible as the year progresses and more vacancies occur.

Capital Programme 2006/07 – Monitoring

30. We considered the report of the Director of Finance on the committed Capital Programme for 2007/08 to 2009/10 which listed the Category C bids for inclusion in the programme, together with a number of recommendations from the Corporate Improvement Board.
31. The report indicated that the Board was continuing to make good progress ensuring a more controlled and successful delivery of the programme. The latest Capital Programme forecast for 2006/07 showed a decrease in the programme of £2,928,060 to £13,767,340 with

slippage from 2006/07 of £2,402,730 to be added to the approved Capital Programme for 2007/08 to 2009/10.

Timetable of Meetings 2007/08

32. The Committee received a report from the Director of Customer, Democratic and Legal Services which included the draft schedule of dates for meetings to be held during the 2007/08 Municipal Year. The Committee endorsed the proposals for consideration by the Executive Cabinet and Council.

Forward Plan

33. We received the Council's Forward Plan, which sets out details of the key executive decisions expected to be taken between 1 March 2007 to 30 June 2007.
34. Members considered that one of the areas for possible examination by the Scrutiny Panels in the future would be the Strategic Housing function.

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 25 JANUARY 2007

Budget scrutiny for 2007/08

35. The Panel received from the Director of Finance a report on the way forward for the budget scrutiny for 2007/08 that had been suggested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2006.
36. Brief details and the areas the Panels focussed on are referred to elsewhere in this report. The Panel agreed a series of comments and questions for the Executive Cabinet to respond.

Neighbourhood Working – Inquiry

37. The Panel's inquiry on "Neighbourhood Working" continues, within a Sub-Group established for Members to meet witnesses that will provide evidence for the Inquiry.
38. To date, three meetings have taken place with a main theme for each meeting with selected witnesses present to give evidence to the Panel.
39. The Inquiry will:
 - consider the extent to which Council and other public services are now provided on a 'neighbourhood' basis in some form.
 - Examine the costs and benefits of neighbourhood management generally and of alternative models as they might apply to Chorley.
 - Recommend an appropriate model for neighbourhood working for Chorley.
 - Produce a final report including a practical action plan for implementing the proposed mode.

CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 30 JANUARY 2007

Budget Scrutiny for 2007/2008

40. The Panel received the report of the Director of Finance entitled "Budget Scrutiny for 2007/2008". The objective of the item was to consider the aspects relating to Corporate and Customer and to formulate any questions on the report to the Executive Cabinet. The Director of Finance highlighted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had determined that the budget scrutiny exercise should concentrate on Value for Money (VFM) and the provision of quality services. The Panel agreed to a series of questions to be put to the Executive Cabinet.

Contact Centre Efficiencies and Partnership with Lancashire County Council Inquiry

41. The Chair of the Partnership Sub-Group, updated the Panel on the deliberations of the Sub-Group under the above Inquiry. The Group have recently visited the Red Rose Hub at Lancashire County Council, received feedback from representatives from Pendle and Ribble Valley Borough Councils and received feedback from Councillors Dennis Edgerley and John Walker. The Group will formulate their recommendations at the next meeting and report back to the Panel.
42. The Chair of the Efficiency Sub-Group updated the Panel on the work undertaken by the Sub-Group. She explained that information had been requested from Partner districts in the County, with a limited response. There was a lot of complex information considered and being collated. The findings and recommendations of the Group would be reported to the Panel.

SPECIAL CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 15 FEBRUARY 2007

Chorley Markets Inquiry – Monitoring of Inquiry Recommendations

43. The Panel received the report of the Deputy Chief Executive updating Members on the progress made in implementing the Panel's recommendations following the Inquiry into the performance of Chorley Markets.
44. The Executive Cabinet had initially accepted two, and later three, of the recommendations but had deferred a decision on the remaining recommendations pending the outcome of the investigation into partnering or outsourcing opportunities. A preferred bidder had been selected as a partner to run the markets but the Executive Cabinet had decided not to proceed with the outsourcing after the due diligence exercise had revealed a number of issues of concern.
45. The Markets would be reviewed as part of the Town Centre management initiative and development of phase two of Market Walk. Members highlighted the enthusiasm and support for the Markets from Traders and the public and the need to continually strive for improvements. Officers had worked on those recommendations with no budgetary implications.
46. The Panel agreed to request the Executive Cabinet to reconsider implementing the recommendations with limited budget implications. A report on this issue will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration prior to its submission to the Executive Cabinet.

Decriminalised Parking Enforcement – Monitoring of Inquiry Recommendations

47. The Panel considered the report of the Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment reporting progress on the implementation of the recommendations made during the Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Inquiry.
48. The Panel discussed the recommendations and noted that excellent progress had been made, in particular relating to Blue Badges. A sticker was now used to indicate which side the Blue Badge should be displayed and this had been implemented throughout Lancashire.
49. The recommendation to trial mystery shoppers had been implemented with a good response. In future a member of the contractor's Management Team will act as the mystery shopper.

Attendance Management

50. The Panel received a report of the Director of Human Resources updating Members on progress against BVPI 12 sickness absence for 2006/2007 and advising how sickness absence is managed since the implementation of a revised Absence Policy in March 2006.
51. The revised policy introduced return to work interviews and a proactive use of Occupational Health. Disciplinary warnings were triggered at certain times. Employees who were on long term sick were managed in accordance with the policy.
52. It was noted that at the third quarter there was a slight reduction on last years figure, although slightly higher in comparison with other Lancashire districts. From 1 April the way sickness was reported would be amended to reflect long term sickness as over 20 working days. It had come to light that the first 20 days are currently recorded as short-term absence with the remainder shown as long term, this meant that figures were incorrect and skewed.
53. In 2005/2006 173 employees had no sickness absence at all and that the Chief Executive had introduced "The Chief Executives Award for Attendance" to reward the team with the lowest sickness absence. It was noted that the amount of half-day sickness had reduced since the implementation of the new flexi policy.
54. Future actions included a more proactive approach, for example, blood pressure monitoring and to review the monitoring of attendance to identify trends, for example, if there was a pattern of Monday and Friday sickness. It was noted that there was a cost associated with sickness in terms of their impact on other members of staff having to cover their colleagues' work.

COUNCILLOR DENNIS EDGERLEY
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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There are no background papers to this report.