

Scrutiny Reporting Back

Chorley Council's Annual Report on Overview and Scrutiny in 2014/15



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1. MEMBERSHIP OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Councillor John Walker
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2014/15



Councillor June Molyneaux
Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2014/15

Councillors Eric Bell, Julia Berry, Charlie Bromilow, Doreen Dickinson, Robert Finnamore, Margaret France, Mike Handley, Mark Jarnell, Matthew Lynch, Greg Morgan, Alistair Morwood and Kim Snape

2. INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2014/15 has been a busy year for Overview and Scrutiny with the Committee undertaking a varied and extensive Work Programme and Two task group reviews. We welcomed Councillor John Walker who had been appointed as the new Chair and Councillor June Molneaux took the Vice Chair. We also welcomed several new members to Overview and Scrutiny and Lesley-Ann Fenton, Director of Customer and Advice Services taking a Lead Director role in the work of overview and scrutiny.

At the start of the year, the Committee undertook some valuable scrutiny training. It has been a while since we undertook any scrutiny training so this session was a refresher for all Councillors and covered, how to prepare for reviews, how to choose topics for investigation, planning and developing questions, innovative ways of collecting evidence and making recommendations effective.

The training programme had been tailored to provide members with an opportunity of discussing different ways in which the Committee could effectively scrutinise the Executive. It was agreed that better scrutiny of the notice of executive decisions could highlight areas of interest and further information sought before decisions are taken.

Members of the administration could also seek further details or influence the decision of all Cabinet reports, at its Informal Cabinet meetings which take place before the items are determined by the Executive at Cabinet meetings, and the call-in procedure could be implemented by any Member that felt a decision had been an incorrect one.

Our dedicated Performance Monitoring Panel, consisting of six Councillors met quarterly to monitor the Councils Business Plan performance, along with a focus on a number of different service issues that included, streetscene services, customer dis-satisfaction, Market Walk shopping centre and the newly formed Chorley Public Service Reform Board.

We still continue to receive six monthly monitoring reports following the Executive's response on the implementation of outcomes and measure success from past scrutiny reviews that this year have included:

- **Health Impact Assessments** – We received the Executive's response to the final report that accepted all seven recommendations of the task group. A review of the toolkit had already been undertaken and the assessment criteria in relation to health and wellbeing had been amended to reflect the priorities of both the Lancashire Health and Wellbeing Board and the local Health and Wellbeing Partnership. Training of all key officers and elected members was also scheduled to take place.
- **Adoptions of Estates** – Many of the existing schemes now have agreed schedules and gradually areas are starting to be adopted across the borough, especially on the Gillibrand and Buckshaw Village estates. The culture of partnership working has been

one of the biggest development areas and massive improvements have been achieved, working together more effectively even amid personnel changes at Lancashire County Council.

- **Select Move** – The task group had identified some areas of Select Move that could be improved upon and with the implementation of the refreshed Allocations Policy and software system upgrade, there have been, and will be ongoing improvements for the customer interface and experience.
- **Private Rented Housing** – The implementation of a Housing Standards Enforcement Policy that sets out the process for inspection and enforcement. The proactive housing inspection scheme has also recently been re-branded as the council's 'Healthy Homes Scheme' and the Council announced a media campaign to target the link between health and housing standards and information will be placed in GP surgeries, health centres and pharmacies across the borough.

This year the Committee has undertaken two reviews:

A review of Neighbourhood Working was suggested by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee as the new arrangements had been in place since a review of the neighbourhood working model in 2012.

The Committee undertook a review of Public Transport Issues in Chorley in response to complaints from constituents across the borough with regards to reduced services particularly for those residents that lived in the more rural areas of Chorley.

We also received the final report of the scrutiny review undertaken by Lancashire County Council at our request on the proposed changes to the Disabled Facilities Grant Funding for 2015/16 and concluded the review of CCTV provision and infrastructure in Chorley.

3. CHALLENGING PERFORMANCE

Our dedicated Performance Panel focused on the performance elements of scrutiny and considered all monitoring information. Scrutinising performance is a key role for scrutiny and one of the benefits to the dedicated resource is that a smaller number of Members are able to drill down to the detail in key areas and adopt some consistency in approach.

The Performance Panel for 2014/15 consisted of the following Membership:

Councillor John Walker – Chair
Councillor June Molyneaux – Vice Chair
Councillor Julia Berry
Councillor Mark Jarnell
Councillor Greg Morgan
Councillor Alistair Morwood

The Panel has met four times in the last 12 months and has considered the Council's Corporate Strategy key projects and monitoring and the Council's Organisational Improvement Plan that captures all the directorate and service level business improvement plans.

Each meeting also considered an additional performance focus, were we looked at particular areas of concern or poor performance and the relevant Executive Member was invited to attend. The areas of focus are summarised below:

3.1 STREETSCENE SERVICES

(Councillor Adrian Lowe, Executive Member for Streetscene Services attended)

Members had expressed an interest in scrutinising the performance of Streetscene Services, with a particular focus on grounds maintenance, street cleansing and parks and open spaces. We were presented with a report which gave key performance indicators for Streetscene Services and summarised project delivery, budget investment, modernisation and customer satisfaction information.

Councillor Adrian Lowe also answered Members questions in the following areas:

- Performance - the implementation of new IT systems to tackle underperforming performance indicators and promotion of the use of My Account to register and monitor service requests and issues.
- Project Delivery - the prioritisation of the 35 neighbourhood projects and how capacity is managed by staggering delivery throughout the year.
- Budget Investment – the erection of the new litter bins with larger capacity across the borough had received good feedback although due to issues around adoption, the siting of the litter bins was proving complicated in the Buckshaw area.
- Modernisation - the need to either cut grass more frequently or to collect the cuttings whilst mowing grassed areas. Both of these issues had cost implications and the Council would look at hotspot problem areas.
- Customer Satisfaction - IT solutions and calling cards were in place to improve this and the Council were analysing customer feedback to identify particular themes or recurrent issues.

3.2 CUSTOMER DISSATISFACTION

(Head of Customer and Advice Services and Head of Policy and Communications attended)

Ensuring that customers are satisfied with the services they receive from the Council is a high priority for the authority. The Council measures satisfaction in a number of ways including a comprehensive resident's survey every few years that captures residents' views on levels of satisfaction of the quality of life in their local area and of the Council and its services, together with a monthly survey which seeks feedback from customers on specific services they have requested from the Council.

A target of less than 20% had been set to measure customer levels of dissatisfaction with the services that they receive from the Council. This target reflected the Council's ambitious approach in continually improving its services and levels of customer satisfaction. The latest figures taken at the end of August reported current performance levels at 22.6% which indicated that the figures continued to fall and officers were confident that their target could be achieved.

My Account had been launched to enable customers to track the progress of their requests 24/7 via the website and contractors such as Veolia had been issued with mobile devices to enable them to provide up to date progress on customer requests.

There had also been an internal communications drive for all staff to get back to the customer within two working days. Customer dis-satisfaction levels are available via the Loop and articles appear on a regular basis reminding all staff of the importance of customer call backs. And everyone within the authority can use the My Tasks system to assess the current status of any request. Work is progressing to ensure that the same standards are implemented across all services, whether by email, phone or face to face.

3.3 MARKET WALK

(Councillor Peter Wilson, Executive Member for Resources attended)

The Market Walk shopping centre had been purchased by the Council on 29 November 2013 to help support the Council's priorities in developing a vibrant town centre. The purchase enabled the Council to have greater control and influence over the future development of the town centre and would improve opportunities to implement Economic Development Strategies and the Town Centre Masterplan over the long term. In addition the purchase supported the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy by providing an additional income stream which the Council could use to further invest in the Town Centre.

Following a review of the arrangements after the first 12 months, the Executive Cabinet agreed proposals to bring the operational and financial management of Market Walk in house at the end of the contract in 2015. In addition, work has been undertaken to look at the feasibility of a range of options for extending Market Walk.

It was reported that expected income from the 35 units within the centre would not only cover the loan repayments, but also bring in an additional income of at least £400,000 a year. The Market Walk centre has also been rebranded to demonstrate the change in ownership and in the summer the Council took on full responsibility for the marketing and promotion work. Since then work had also been undertaken to improve the number of events to increase footfall to the mall.

Overall the Council was happy with its decision to purchase the Market Walk shopping centre and had been pleased with the additional income generated over the past 12 months. There was greater confidence going forward in facilitating the actual management of the centre and had plans are in place to develop the asset in the future.

3.4 CHORLEY PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM BOARD

(Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Leader attended)

The Chorley Partnership had changed to become the Chorley Public Service Reform Board. This was to focus the partnership on a collaborative approach to transforming public services. Whilst being ambitious, this has enabled the Board to move from a traditional 'local strategic partnership' approach and structure, to one that has real focus and objective on improving services for the residents of Chorley by bringing together leaders from across public services that will consider how they can make changes within their organisations to improve quality and access of services.

The Board is chaired by the Leader and members of the board include, Chorley Council, Lancashire County Council, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Services, Lancashire Constabulary, Lancashire Teaching Hospital, Chorley and South Ribble CCG, Lancashire Care NHS Trust, VCFS Network, Live Well Champion, Age UK Lancashire, Department for Work and Pensions, Runshaw College and a business representative from Porter Lancastrian.

The Board operates to a terms of reference with its key objective being to work together to ensure high quality public services with the best outcomes and value for residents and provide better coordinated and integrated services which are intelligence led and would be delivered through an annual work plan consisting of three enabling workstreams (data sharing, assets and commissioning) it was thought that if the Board could deliver some agreements and improvements in these areas, it would lay the foundations for future integration and joint working.

4. KEY MESSAGES FROM SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS IN 2014/15

4.1 NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING – Chaired by Councillor June Molyneux

The Scrutiny inquiry into Neighbourhood Working had been chosen by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the new arrangements had been in place since a review of the neighbourhood working model in 2012. It was intended that the new neighbourhood working arrangements should start to transcend all Council delivery and integrate with Council and partners services and Members were tasked to provide the evidence that this was starting to take place.

The Council had recently developed a Civic Pride Campaign and were currently reviewing how to promote this work effectively. Members felt that Civic Pride should be integrated fully into the Neighbourhood Working regime and Members should be engaged in all aspects of Civic Pride so we took this opportunity to explore how this could be improved upon.

The success of Neighbourhood Working is not totally reliant on the Council so it was important that we consulted with existing stakeholders to understand their strength of engagement and to explore better ways of working together in partnership.

The review identified that strengthening partnership working was key to the successful implementation of a neighbourhood working regime which was embedded throughout all communities across the borough. Partnership structures brought together agencies, such as the police, council, housing associations and others to tackle problems that no single agency could solve alone. Problems could be solved by using local knowledge gained through experience, talking to local people and front-line workers, as well as being 'out and about' in the neighbourhoods.

The feedback from parish councils, community groups and organisations involved in Neighbourhood Working was generally positive with regards to the current approach being taken to implement and develop neighbourhood working.

There was recognition by the Group that communication on the delivery of projects and activities in the neighbourhood areas to all interested parties could be improved upon along with a view that networking and the sharing of best practices between Voluntary Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) groups across the borough could be developed further. This work was not solely reliant on the Council as engagement with residents by Parish Councils, community groups and members varied across the neighbourhood areas and a view was taken that these stakeholders, especially Parish Councils and District Council members could be more pro-active in their approach particularly when nominating projects to be considered at the neighbourhood area meetings.

4.2 PUBLIC TRANSPORT ISSUES IN CHORLEY – Chaired by Councillor Robert Finnamore

The review of public transport issues in Chorley is still currently underway. The Group have undertaken consultation on the proposed new criteria of Lancashire County Council for subsidised bus services, researched rural bus schemes that operate elsewhere in the country, sought to clarify and understand issues with those providers of trains that service Chorley and consulted with parish councils to understand current bus provision and where improvements can be made. The Group aims to complete the review shortly and present its final report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October.

4.3 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT FUNDING

We received for information, the final report of the Disabled Facilities Grant Funding review that had been undertaken by Lancashire County Council following a request made by this Committee in January 2014. Councillor Julia Berry had been appointed to the Committee to represent Chorley and both officers and councillors had attended and contributed to a workshop that scoped the review.

The review included assessment of the funding allocation process, consistency of approach across the county, different ways of working, member involvement and enhancing their role.

A number of recommendations had been identified that included:

- The development of a single consistent approach to the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants across Lancashire.
- Commitment from the Chief Executives of the 12 Lancashire District Councils and Lancashire County Council to work in partnership with Clinical Commissioning Groups to redesign the system to deliver an integrated service across Lancashire
- Areas of best practice identified, acknowledged and shared across the different aspects of the system.

The Director of Customer and Advice Services for the Council commented that Chorley was one of the districts that had good working practices already in place and applications were dealt with efficiently.

4.4 CCTV PROVISION AND INFRASTRUCTURE – Chaired by Councillor Robert Finnamore

We concluded the review of CCTV Provision and Infrastructure in Chorley that had commenced the year before. Following the consideration of a report of the Director of People and Places on the Chorley's CCTV service the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had asked the Task Group to undertake a scrutiny inquiry to look at CCTV provision in more detail.

Chorley Council's closed circuit television system (CCTV) is solely owned and operated by the Council and comprises a number of overt cameras located across the Chorley borough area. The infrastructure has been in place for 18 years with some upgrades and improvements to equipment during that time but is essentially analogue based whereas current technology has moved to a digital format.

There are three main areas to the system:

- CCTV suite with monitored screens
- Recording capability for images
- Image capturing hardware – cameras

Improvements over recent years have been to partially digitise recording capacity which is now at full capacity; upgrading of monitoring screens; and the replacement of some cameras when irreparable or

requiring excessive maintenance. Present monitoring operating times meet current periods of high demand and are regularly reviewed based on crime and other intelligence data. This element of the service has been the subject of a recent internal audit and several management actions arising out of the review have been implemented.

Overall there was significant support for the provision a CCTV service from key partners such as police; from public response to a consultation; from local town centre businesses and Parish Councils and the Group were satisfied that they had received the appropriate data that was required to evidence the continued need for CCTV in Chorley.

After considering the information obtained during the review of Chorley Council's CCTV service, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee concluded that the provision of CCTV plays an integral role in the tackling of Crime and Antisocial Behaviour. Evidence suggests that Chorley Council's CCTV is a key tool which supports the reporting, detection and prosecution of crime and antisocial behaviour which occurs across the Borough. Additionally the results of a resident survey commissioned as part of the review, shows that for the majority of residents, the presence of CCTV makes them feel safe. It is evident that CCTV proves useful in helping to safeguard vulnerable residents, including those who go missing from home.

The Executive have agreed to set aside a significant sum for the upgrade of the Council's CCTV infrastructure and at a full Council meeting Members decided to accept the recommendations which included investing £250,000 from the capital budget to fund the upgrading of the existing CCTV provision and its maintenance over the next three years. New guidance was also available and the siting of the cameras would be re-evaluated based upon need. The Council are currently conducting a procurement exercise and consultation on the siting of the cameras will be undertaken in due course.

5. CRIME AND DISORDER: NEW COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

Under the requirement to undertake scrutiny of crime and disorder matters, the Committee considered the new arrangements for the Chorley and South Ribble Community Safety Partnership that had been established over the last year. It was explained that the Partnership consists of a number of key agencies that form a statutorily determined Responsible Authorities Group (RAG). In previous years this Group met on a quarterly basis to oversee the delivery of the partnerships strategic assessment. However, the decision was taken in 2014, that in an effort to increase partner's capacity, the number of meetings would be reduced to one single meeting per year with the ability to call an extraordinary meeting as necessary.

An annual open meeting and conference was held in October 2014 and many members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee attended to experience at first hand the new arrangements and actively participate in the process. The conference was well attended by over 40 people who represented a wide and varied cross section of partner agencies, Ward Members, County Councillors and the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector. The conference resulted in the production of a Partnership Plan for 2015/16, identifying the five main strategic priorities that would be delivered by the Officer Working Group (OWG) over the forthcoming year.

It was the general consensus of the Partnership that the new arrangements were an improvement on the previous regime, there was recognition that further improvements could be made around public engagement, although the web based consultation used to engage the public in the process had been more successful than in previous years, where the public had been invited to attend an open meeting.

The public consultation and conference provided an opportunity for representatives, partners and the public to identify more local issues which appeared to fit with the overall strategic themes that the Partnership were seeking to address which are, Domestic Abuse, Road Safety, Child Sexual Exploitation, Counter Terrorism and Anti-Social Behaviour and Hate Crime.

The importance of improving the sharing of intelligence based information was also discussed and it was agreed that vital work was needed, to overcome barriers to data sharing and better use of intelligence, that different organisations hold about vulnerable people in order to target support where is most needed.

6. CHALLENGING THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee has continued to work together positively with the Executive Leader and his Cabinet in scrutinising the delivery of their proposals.

The following areas are additional areas that Overview and Scrutiny has considered in 2014/15

- Chorley Big Grant Funding
- Key Partnerships Monitoring Report.
- Refreshed Economic Development Strategy
- Budget Principles

7. CALL-IN OF AN EXECUTIVE DESION – 118a The Fathings, Astley Village (Councillor Pater Wilson – Executive Member for Resources attended the meeting)

A request was received for the call-in of an Executive Member decision of 5 February by the Executive Member for Resources on the proposed sale of land to the rear of 18A, The Farthings, Astley Village. The call-in request was on the grounds that the land was open space and formed a protective barrier.

Executive Member Approval had been granted on 13 December 2013 declaring land to the rear of 18A The Farthings to be surplus to Council requirements and authorising the sale to the resident for garden and garage/parking use. Approval was granted to declare the land surplus to Council requirements to enable a sale, authority was also granted for the negotiation of the terms of sale of the land and placing of advertisements/notices in accordance with provisions of the Local Government Act 1972, Section 123(2A).

Councillor Peter Wilson explained that as part of the original request to purchase the land, the intended area had included an area of the existing shelter belt, but that this had been reduced to exclude existing trees and shrubs from the sale. The area did form part of the larger open space provision in that area but was not openly accessible to members of the public and the existing trees and shrubs forming the shelter belt between the land and adjoining road (West Way) would still serve as a buffer for the estate and would be retained in Council ownership if the sale were to proceed. The administration were committed to ensuring that they invested any S106 money back into the area via projects like the £14,000 invested into improving Astley Village Community Centre through the Neighbourhood Area meeting process and after a thorough discussion on all the points raised at the Committee members were satisfied with the decision made and so the call in request was rejected.

8. FINANCIAL SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the agenda papers that were submitted to the Executive Cabinet on 22 January 2015 setting out the 2015/16 budget including the forecast for the following two years to 2017/18 and provided a presentation of relevent proposals of potential investment in the Council's Corporate Streategy priorities in 2015/16 and details of the budget consultation.

Council Tax was to be frozen and not increase in 2015/16. This would be the third consecutive year that the Council had achieved a balanced budget position for the forthcoming financial year without increasing Council Tax, even though the Council had seen large scale reductions in Central Government grant placing unprecedented levels of pressure on the budget.

Proposed budgeted new investments for 2015/16 were set out within the report and capital schemes included the delivery of CCTV provision, which would mean improvements to the existing service and was in response to recommendations made by a scrutiny task group.

The projected budget position consistently showed a significant budget gap in future years 2016/17 and 2017/18. This shortfall, together with heightened uncertainty and risk in the form of year on year variable new funding regimes, meant that budget austerity measures would continue to impact on the Council's budget.

9. CONCLUSION AND THE YEAR AHEAD

2014/15 has been an interesting year for scrutiny, resulting in some key recommendations on topics of concern to Members and the public. 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.

The Council will hold a total of eight scrutiny meetings in 2015/16, with four main Overview and Scrutiny Committee and four Performance Panel meetings. Councillor John Walker will continue as the Chair of the Committee, with Councillor Hasina Khan taking the Vice Chair and we welcome several new Members to the Committee. In addition, at its first meeting, Members will agree a number of scrutiny review topics for inclusion in the Work Programme for 2015/16.