

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2006/2007

MAY 2007



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1. Introduction

I have pleasure in presenting this annual report on the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Panels for the period May 2006 to April 2007.

This has been a year of progress building on the developments of previous years. Last year's experience together with the earlier publication of the executive draft budget proposals enabled not only better scrutiny of the budget but also allowed scrutiny members to influence details of the budget. Also scrutiny members were able to engage in debate about revisions to the Corporate Strategy and help shape other policy documents and decisions of the executive.

Business Plans and Council performance in general have received closer scrutiny and this has contributed to improved performance. Three scrutiny inquiries were undertaken by the Committee/Panels and a series of recommendations were submitted to the Executive Cabinet to improve service delivery.

Proposals have been put in place to provide more member training in the scrutiny function.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and panels will I am sure be able to rise to the challenges in the local government white paper.

Thanks go to all those involved in the scrutiny process. They have responded in a positive manner to make the scrutiny process a success.

Councillor Dennis Edgerley

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 2006 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 two 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.
- Receive reports setting out performance against the Corporate Strategy and the Council’s Best Value Performance Indicators.

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 receives Business Plan Monitoring Statements in relation to the Policy and Performance Directorate.

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

12 Members
(including Chair + 2 Associate Chairs)

Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Carries out scrutiny inquiries/tasks, receive Business Plan Monitoring Statements from Directors and make recommendations on findings to O&S Ctte in relation to the services provided by the following Directorates/Units:

- Development and Regeneration
- Leisure and Cultural Services
- Health Matters
- Housing Services
- Streetscene Neighbourhoods & Environment

17 Members
(including 1 Associate Chair)

Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Carries out scrutiny inquiries/tasks, receive Business Plan Monitoring Statements from Directors and make recommendations on findings to O&S Ctte in relation to the services provided by the following Directorates/Units:

- Customer, Democratic and Legal Services
- Finance
- Human Resources
- ICT Services
- Property Services Unit

17 Members
(including 1 Associate Chair)

Ad Hoc Overview and Scrutiny Panels

If appointed, carry out task and finish investigations and make recommendations on findings to O&S Ctte.

5. The Achievements and Activities

(a) Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Chair

Councillor Dennis Edgerley

Members

Councillor Thomas McGowan (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Kenneth Ball

Councillor Thomas Bedford

Councillor Terry Brown

Councillor Francis Culshaw

Councillor Mrs Marie Gray

Councillor Harold Heaton

Councillor Greg Morgan

Councillor Geoffrey Russell

Councillor Mrs Iris Smith

Councillor Christopher Snow

Revision to the Scrutiny Process

As part of the revised scrutiny process for the 2006/07 Municipal year, the items for consideration by the Executive Cabinet would be a regular agenda item for meetings of the Committee. Members of the Committee are required to notify the Democratic Services Section if they wish the Committee to consider an item of the Executive Cabinet and this ensures the attendance of the appropriate Executive Member and Officers.

The timetable of meeting has been constructed in such a way that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held just a few days before the Executive Cabinet. This assists in any information or observation that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may make on reports to the Executive Cabinet.

The Overview and Scrutiny also receives the Council's Forward Plan which sets out details of the key decisions which the Executive Cabinet, individual Executive Members and Officers expect to take during the next four months period. The Plan is rolled forward every month and its submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee enables the Committee to identify any items it may wish to examine in advance of consideration by the Executive. Over the past months the Committee has received several requests such as reports on decisions relating to the Chorley Town Centre Strategy and Play Strategy for the Borough.

Chorley Community Safety Partnership Alcohol Strategy

The Committee continued to receive consultation documents with the receipt in June 2006 of a report entitled "Chorley and South Ribble Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy 2006".

The Strategy had been the result of a collaboration between Chorley Community Safety Partnership and the Chorley and South Ribble Primary Care NHS Trust.

Highlighted in its Strategy was the concern of substance abuse with the document setting out the background to alcohol harm and the issues that required to be addressed. A number of agencies would be implementing an action plan.

To inform the Members of the key issues that required to be addressed a representative from Chorley and South Ribble Primary Care NHS Trust gave a

presentation giving a summary of the key alcohol public health issues and the attitude to alcohol use.

The outcome was that the Committee supported the Strategy and its introduction through the work of the MAPS Team and recommended that the Council's Licensing Liaison Panel be used to get the message over to the licensing trade.

Future of Mental Health Services in Lancashire – Consultation

The Council's views were requested from the Lancashire Joint Primary Care Trust on their proposals to change in the way mental health services are provided in Lancashire.

The Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel had received prior to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee a presentation from the Chief Executive of the Chorley and South Ribble Primary Care NHS Trust on the proposals.

The Panel and Committee supported the Trust's proposal but requested that a comment be submitted on accessibility for those attending the new mental health hospitals.

Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement Scrutiny Inquiry

The Committee received in June 2006 the final report from the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel on their investigation into the effectiveness of the Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested the Panel back in 2005 to carry out the inquiry and to assess the impact the introduction of the Parkwise Scheme had on residents, visitors, traders and businesses in Chorley, to identify any future improvements for customer services and to compare with Best Practice elsewhere.

The investigations highlighted key points, including:

- There were no targets set for the number of Penalty Charge Notices issued. The motorists set the number of Penalty Charge Notices Issued as if no one parked in contravention no notices would be issued.
- Less than 1% of Pay and Display tickets bought received a Penalty Charge Notice.
- Parking Attendants provided other services to the public such as, directions, where disabled drivers could and could not park, where to purchase things, lost property such as keys and delivered residents parking permits. Parking Attendants reported faulty lighting, broken glass and litter and looked after people if they were taken ill.
- Blue Badge holders received a high proportion of the Penalty Charge Notices issued. This was partly due to confusion over which side of the badge should be displayed. It was a security risk if people displayed the wrong side as it displayed the photograph of the disabled person.

The Committee agreed the Panel's findings and recommendations before their submission to the Executive Cabinet for final approval. The Executive Cabinet subsequently approved all of the recommendations.

Two of the key recommendations were:

- That Parking Attendants use a leaflet showing traditional information as to why a Penalty Charge Notice had been issued to Blue Badge holders,
- That Lancashire County Council Social Services be requested to highlight which side of the Blue Badge should be displayed using a sticker,

These have been really well received and both had a significant impact.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

At the beginning of each Municipal Year the Committee receives the work programme for Overview and Scrutiny identifying the proposed areas of work to be undertaken by the Committee. For 2006/07 the Committee determined the order of priority for the implementation of the proposed scrutiny inquiries by the two newly established Panels.

The following scrutiny inquiries were identified for the Committee and Panels as being of priority for 2006/07.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- The Council's current performance against the key lines of inquiry to be assessed by the Commission during the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and Direction of Travel

Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- Contact Centre Efficiencies and Partnership with Lancashire County Council

Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- Neighbourhood Working

The topics were chosen because they relate to the Council's priorities in the Corporate Strategy and would provide added value to the delivery of services.

Revenue Budget/Capital Budget 2006/07 – Monitoring

The Committee continues to receive regular reports on the financial position of the Council compared against the budgets and efficiency saving targets it had set itself for 2006/07, with Members focusing on areas of increased costs and financial risks to the authority.

Reports on the additional schemes that had been made by the 2006/07 Capital Programme were submitted to the Committee.

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

The Committee's views were sought at the end of 2006 on the future role and involvement of the non-Executive Members in the scrutiny of the budget setting and monetary 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 2005/06 Overview and Scrutiny budget involved the areas of Environmental Services, Planning Services and Revenues and Benefits and had been 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.

For the 2006/07 budget scrutiny, it was agreed that the Panels should focus their attention on the following:

- To receive an update on the high cost areas identified during the 2006/07 scrutiny to Planning Services, Environmental Services and Revenues and Benefits.
- To review the 2006 cost profits proposed 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 and 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.

Both Panels submitted a number of questions and comments to the Executive Cabinet which would form part of the 2007/08 budget consultation exercise. The Executive submitted a response to the questions and made a number of amendments to the final budget outcome in the light of the comments made by the Panels.

Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan

The Committee received the revised and updated Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan on a quarterly basis which lists all the actions required to ensure that scrutiny improvement plans are kept on track in order to assist the delivery of the Council's performance agreement and corporate strategy.

Key areas which would be examined were to approach a number of external local government bodies to ascertain their likely interest in undertaking Member training and development on the overview and scrutiny function.

Corporate Strategy

The Committee was asked for its views on the amendments that had been made to the Corporate Strategy for 2006 – 2009.

The Corporate Strategy is the key document for the Council in taking forward its agenda for improvement. The Council has undertaken a process of reviewing the commitments made in the Corporate Strategy to ensure that these could be delivered and that they reflected the key objectives of the new political administration. The detailed changes made to the Strategy as a platform for taking forward the Council's ambitions. The Committee submitted several responses to the Executive Cabinet on the changes.

Best Value Performance Indicators 2006/07 – Monitoring

The Committee continues to receive quarterly monitoring reports on the authority's performance in relation to both the Best Value Performance Indicators and the Council's Corporate Key Performance Indicators.

Reports to the Committee indicate the full list of Best Value Performance Indicators that are relevant to the Council and which are collected in accordance with the definitions issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Overall, the performance of key project continues to be good with the majority of projects performing as planned. The reports submitted to the Committee have shown that the organisation continues to perform well and service performance levels remain high with the Council maintained in a good quartile position.

Overview and Scrutiny Inquiry

Throughout the year the Committee received progress reports on the ongoing scrutiny inquiry into the Council's current performance against the key lines of inquiry to be assessed by the Audit Commission during the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and Direction of Travel.

The Council had to focus on the current and planned activity within the area of the new CPA key lines of inquiry if the Council was to achieve excellent status at a future assessment.

Two sub-groups were established by the Committee to examine each area and report back findings and recommendations to the Committee.

The first sub-group focused on Equality and Diversity and met several times during the months of January and February 2007.

The second sub-group took in the areas of Capacity and Achievement. This group has focussed its attention on ways in which the Council could strengthen the scrutiny functions, taking on board the areas outlined in the recent Government White Paper in particular, how we can achieve better and more meaningful community involvement in the scrutiny process.

During the inquiry the Committee has received feedbacks from the Sub-Groups along with information received from the Audit Commission in the form of a presentation from the Council's Relationship Manager which 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 had 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.

Feedback from the Sub-Groups had indicated the need for training sessions for Members and Officers aimed at reviewing the updating the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Structure and Toolkit, to ensure that it was fit for purpose and in line with best practice. Areas of weakness and strengths were examined in the current structure and methods of improvements established.

Equality and Diversity as an aspect of Comprehensive Performance Assessment had been examined and identifies the Council's existing gaps and areas of under performance which would impact on the Council's performance in any future CPA assessment.

In March 2007 the Committee received the key findings and recommendations of the Equality and Diversity Sub-Group and highlighted the examples of good work already being done by the Council in equality and diversity.

The recommendations identified the clearest ways in which we could achieve improvements using the tools at our disposal and learning from others which have already embedded equality and diversity in their organisation. By achieving these aims the Council would be meeting many of the requirements of the CPA and embedding best practice across the organisation. The recommendations were endorsed by the Committee and approved by the Executive Cabinet in May 2007 subject to a further report being submitted on the measures which are likely to incur additional costs.

The Capacity/Achievement Sub-Group is currently seeking the views of Members of the Council on the structure of Overview and Scrutiny in Chorley and asking Members to respond on topics such as performance information, budget scrutiny, call-in procedures, scrutiny toolkit and the findings will be submitted to the Committee early in the Municipal Year, 2007/08.

Lancashire Shared Services Contact Centre Efficiencies and Partnership with Lancashire County Council – Inquiry

In March 2007 the Committee received the draft final report of the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel into the Lancashire Shared Services Contact Centre.

The inquiry had been conducted by the Sub-Group of the Panel with remits to examine:

- i) the contribution of the Contact Centre to the achievement of the Council's efficiency agenda.
- ii) the effectiveness of the partnership arrangement with the Lancashire County Council and other District Councils, and
- iii) the delivery of a high quality customer service.

The investigations highlighted key points, including:

- Chorley is as far ahead as other Lancashire Authorities with regards efficiencies and that the potential to achieve efficiencies by utilising technology should not be underestimated.
- One of the reasons the Contact Centre has been so successful is the enthusiasm and willingness of the staff to embrace the new approach.
- The Partnership was a groundbreaking project with the initial vision for customers to access all services from a single point. This included a virtual network between the County and the six districts.
- The Customer Relationship Management system is key to the future of the Partnership and the cost to the Council would be significant to purchase the telephony, hardware and software outside the Partnership. The potential for additional opening hours, in the evenings and at weekend are significant benefits. It is critical in achieving Chorley's aims as it provides a better understanding of customer's needs and contact and therefore information on how to provide a better and more efficient service.

The key recommendations were:

- To examine the reasons why customers contact the Council to determine any root causes that can be resolved and therefore reduce unnecessary contact by customers.
- To take up the opportunity to deliver more services via home visits, such as the offer of a free bus pass and other service providers, for example, the Fire Service.
- To ensure that the governance arrangements for the Partnership are effective by revisiting the terms of reference for the Joint Committee and to review the vision and project plan every 6 months and monitoring effectively the timescales set down in the project plan.

The Committee endorsed the report's findings and recommendations for submission to the Executive Cabinet for approval. The Executive Committee approved the recommendations subject to a further report on those measures which are likely to incur additional costs.

Timetable of Meetings 2007/08

In February 2007 the Committee was given the opportunity to comment on the draft timetable of meetings for the 2007/08 Municipal year, proposing the dates for meetings of the Council, Executive Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Panels, the various Committees, Community Forums and Liaison Groups.

The timetable continues the practice of enabling the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be reported to and taken into account by the Executive Cabinet with meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held two days prior to the Executive Cabinet.

(b) **Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel**



Chair
Councillor Geoffrey Russell

Members

Councillor Peter Baker
Councillor Andrew Birchall
Councillor Alan Cain
Councillor Henry Counce
Councillor Magda Cullens
Councillor David Dickinson
Councillor Doreen Dickinson
Councillor Catherine Hoyle
Councillor Hasina Khan
Councillor Keith Iddon
Councillor Margaret Lees
Councillor Miss June Molyneaux
Councillor Thomas McGowan
Councillor Edward Smith
Councillor Mrs Joyce Snape
Councillor Mrs Stella Walsh

The areas of responsibilities of the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel relate to the services provided by the following Council Directorates/Units:

- Customer, Democratic and Legal Services
- Finance
- Human Resources
- ICT Services
- Property Services Unit

The Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel met 8 times during 2006/07.

At the beginning of the year the Panel considered the draft final report on the inquiry regarding Decriminalisation of Parking Enforcement with a number of recommendations reworded, before its submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Contact Centre Efficiencies and Partnership with Lancashire County Council

The start of the Municipal Year saw the Panel commencing its inquiry entitled 'Contact Centre Efficiencies and Partnership with Lancashire County Council'.

The Government agenda had challenged Councils to think beyond the traditional methods of service delivery and to create efficiencies with a desire to create a single point of contact for the customer to access both district and county services and to improve access to public services. A feasibility study was undertaken in 2002 and following this, the three models put forward. A decision was taken by partners to go forward with a virtual contact centre approach in a Partnership with Lancashire County Council and six District Councils.

The Panel had discussed the challenges facing the partnership such as the different speeds and approaches to the implementation of the Partnership across the various Partners. There was a need to refocus the Customer Relationship Management system.

Two Sub-Groups of the Panel were established to consider detailed information about the efficiencies of the Contact Centre and the partnership aspect.

During the Inquiry the Panel received the minutes of the Efficiency Sub-Group and the Partnership Sub-Group with the groups interviewing representatives from Pendle and Ribble

Valley Borough Councils as well as a site visit to Red Rose Hub at Lancashire County Council.

In March 2007 the Panel considered the draft final report containing the findings and recommendations pulled from the two Sub-Groups.

The report after considering the recommendations into a more manageable number was submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2007. The recommendations were endorsed and submitted to the Executive Cabinet in May 2007.

Chorley Market Inquiry - Monitoring of Inquiry Recommendations

The Panel received in February 2007 a report updating Members on the progress made in implementing the Panel's recommendations following the Inquiry into the performance of Chorley Markets.

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 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.

The Markets would be reviewed as part of the Town Centre Management Initiative and development of Phase 2 of Market Walk. The Panel requested the Executive Cabinet to reconsider the implementation of several recommendations with limited budget implications.

Decriminalised Parking Enforcement – Monitoring of Inquiry Recommendations

The Panel received in February 2007 a progress report on the implementation of the recommendations made following the Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Inquiry.

A number of recommendations that had been implemented had received a good response, including the use of a sticker to indicate the side Blue Badges are displayed for disabled drivers. This recommendation had been implemented throughout Lancashire.

One-Stop Shop Inquiry – Monitoring of Inquiry Recommendations

Update reports made on the progress on the implementation of the recommendations made to the Executive Cabinet on 30 June 2004 in respect of the One Stop Shop were received by the Panel indicating the progress made and the action taken against each recommendation. The Panel welcomed the outcomes of the Inquiry and agreed that this be the last update report for this Inquiry.

Business Plan and Performance Monitoring Reports

The Panel continues to receive the Business Plan Monitoring Statements on a quarterly basis for the following areas of responsibility:

- Human Resources
- Information, Communication Technology Services
- Customer, Democratic and Legal Services
- Financial Services

The Plans drew Members attention to those areas of the service that have not reached the performance targets with Action Plans formulated with corrective action to be undertaken to improve performance.

Attendance Management

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well as the Panel have received over the previous months monitoring reports on the sickness absence across the authority and the process of reducing absence within the authority.

The Panel in February received a report updating Members on the progress against Best Value Performance Indicator 12, sickness absence for 2006/07 and informing Members how sickness absence is managed since the implementation of a revised Absence Policy in March 2006.

The revised policy introduced return to work interviews and a proactive use of Occupational Health. A more proactive approach, would be used, for example, blood pressure monitoring and to review the monitoring of attendance to identify trends, for example, if there was a problem of Monday and Friday sickness. There was a cost associated with sickness in terms of impact on other members of staff having to cover their colleagues work.

(c) **Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel**



Chair
Councillor Greg Morgan

Members

Councillor Peter Baker
Councillor Kenneth Ball
Councillor Alan Cain
Councillor Anthony Gee
Councillor Daniel Gee
Councillor Michael Davies
Councillor Doreen Dickinson
Councillor Keith Iddon
Councillor Roy Lees
Councillor Miss Margaret Iddon
Councillor Adrian Lowe
Councillor Marion Lowe
Councillor Michael Muncaster
Councillor Rosemary Russell
Councillor Shaun Smith
Councillor Edward Smith

The areas of responsibility of the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel relate to the services by the following Directorates:

- Development and Regeneration
- Leisure and Cultural Services
- Health Matters
- Housing
- Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment

The Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel has met 7 times during the 2006/07 Municipal Year.

Business Plan and Performance Monitoring Reports

The Panel continues to receive the Business Plan Monitoring Statement on a quarterly basis for areas of its responsibility.

The Plans have drawn Members attention to those areas of the service that have not reached the performance targets. Particular attention has been paid to the Enhanced Recycling Scheme following its introduction and an increased range of recyclable materials. Reports have indicated the performance variations in particular Members have focused on household waste collection and the performance figure of missed recycling collection and the service in general.

Members have also focused on the Neighbourhood Warden Service and the percentage of major planning applications processed on time which had resulted in the target dates not being achieved. Action Plan had been produced to address this to improve the performance.

Neighbourhood Working – Inquiry

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had identified Neighbourhood Working as a priority for an inquiry by the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

A consultant had been appointed to complete a number of tasks as well as presenting and supplying the Council with a number of output for the following objectives:

- Improving service delivery of the Council and its partners

- Localising consultation and improving satisfaction in neighbourhoods
- Acting jointly, with partners, to reduce pockets of deprivation and social exclusion
- Promoting community development and cohesion
- Maximising community involvement in neighbourhood management for active citizens, including young people, voluntary and private organisations.

The reports submitted to the Panel had shown the various models and practical examples, the potential costs and benefits and the elements of neighbourhood working that exist in Chorley.

To enable Members to meet witnesses that will provide evidence for the inquiry a Sub-Group was established and met several times during January and February 2007. Each meeting had a main theme with selected witnesses present to give evidence.

The findings of the inquiry will:

- consider the extent to which the 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 model

It is currently envisaged that the Panel will produce a draft report containing an action plan with recommendations in July 2007.

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) the scrutiny of the revenue and capital budgets and the budget proposals for 2007/08.
- (e) the improved delivery of services by a series of recommendations set out in scrutiny reports.
- (f) 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 services.

7. The Way Forward

As can be seen from this fourth 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 along with specific reports relating to services the Council provides. 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 the 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.

In association with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDEA) there will be held in June 2007 training sessions for Members based around general Overview and Scrutiny issues, chairing Overview and Scrutiny and Financial Strategy and these will be extended to other Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

The effects of the Local Government White Paper and its implication on scrutiny will impact on the Council's scrutiny function.

The White Paper has identified the need to strengthen and make more effective the role of scrutiny. The new proposals identify a strengthening of the scrutiny of Police and their community safety portfolio. The new proposals encourage the scrutiny focus on areas, communities and neighbourhoods.

The Government has subsequently published the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill and the final outcome will need to be assessed and taken into consideration during the review of the Council's scrutiny function.

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.

This Municipal Year the work programme has been 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 or on deposit in the Democratic Services Section (Contact Gordon Bankes).