

# **REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND PANELS**

## **GENERAL REPORT**

1. This report summarises the business transacted at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 August and 3 September 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 and Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Lancashire County Council Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny – Partnership Working**

2. We received a request from Lancashire County Council inviting the authority to take part in a piece of work with the County Council Overview and Scrutiny on an undertaking regarding Every Child Matters.
3. The intention is to look at how partnership working could help to deliver the outcomes of Every Child Matters and examine partnership working between the County Council and District Council.
4. We were notified that a two-tier Overview and Scrutiny session was to take place on the morning of the 28 August in which the Executive Member for Health, Leisure and Well-Being and the Director of Finance and Cultural Services would be attending.
5. We requested that they report the outcome of the Lancashire Overview and Scrutiny session to the next meeting of the Committee.

### **Business Plan Monitoring Statement – Policy and Performance Directorate**

6. We received a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Policy and Performance) on the Business Plan Monitoring Statement, identifying the progress made against key actions and performance indicators for the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2007/08 (1 April to 30 June 2007).
7. The report indicated the activities of her area of responsibility, in particular the significant progress that had been made on developing and strengthening our approach to data quality to business planning, project management and equality diversity, all areas, which will have a positive impact on any future CPA re-assessment.
8. Large key pieces of work that were of high quality and delivered by their end of deadline were the production of the Annual Report (Best Value Performance Plan) and the development of the Beacon Bid for “Transforming Services, Citizens Engagement and Empowerment”.
9. There was now a full complement of staff covering Policy and Performance and Communication functions.
10. Some Members were concerned that they were not involved in discussions regarding the new action plan and targets being developed to ensure delivery of the refresh Council Strategy and we asked if this could be addressed.
11. Some Members expressed concern that they were not receiving a full and complete picture of the outcomes of consultation exercises with the Public, with particular reference made to the Council’s ‘Listening Day’ event, which took place on Sunday, 14 July.

12. Under Equality and Diversity, we were notified of the update on the Council's complaints system, which reviewed the recording of complaints, allowing the Council to analyse complaints, by race, gender and disability. A new recording procedure would be introduced over the Summer of 2007 and we requested that 6 monthly reports on the complaints be submitted to the Committee.

### **Corporate Fourth Quarter Performance – Receipt of Information Requested**

13. At the meeting of the Committee held on 21 May 2007 we requested the Director of Development and Regeneration to submit information relating to the undermentioned issues and queries that arose from the Corporate Fourth Quarter Performance Monitoring Report.

- Number of affordable housing units completed

An Action Plan was submitted explaining the reason why the performance measure had not reached target and the corrective action being undertaken to improve performance in the next financial year including the timetables for implementation. We noted that the Director would be submitting reports on strategic housing and affordable housing to a future meeting of the Executive Cabinet and we requested that it also be submitted to this Committee.

- Vacant Town Centre Floor Space in various areas of the Town Centre on the action to drive up performance

We received notification of the strategic objectives for improving the Town Centre. The Strategy had been prepared to enable improvements to be made to the viability and vitality of the Town Centre and to attract the right combination of activities to the town. We noted that vacancy levels for Chorley Town Centre tended to fluctuate with rate at 8% in April 2007 and between April to June 2007, 7%, but generally it had been between 8% to 9% over the last 5 years.

- Local Plan Milestones

An Action Plan was received setting out the reasons why the performance measures had not reached target and the corrective action being undertaken to improve performance in the next financial year, including details of timescales for implementation.

### **Equality and Diversity Overview and Scrutiny Inquiry – Feedback of Executive Responses**

14. We received the Executive Cabinet's response on the recommendations of the Equality and Diversity Sub-Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following the review of the Council's approach to the embodiment of equality and diversity in the culture of the Authority.
15. The recommendations contained a series of measures aimed at ensuring that the Council's services were delivered against equality and diversity objectives that all communities were afforded equality of access, outcome and opportunity.
16. Those measures and actions likely to incur additional costs would be implemented by virement or alternative measures.

### **Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme**

17. We received the current Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for this Municipal Year, which included the envisaged timescale for the ongoing scrutiny inquiries and the planned details of the respective scrutiny of past inquiries.

18. We received notification that the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel had requested the Committee to include the following issues in the Panel's Work Programme.
- To investigate the Council's environmental footprint and what the Council is currently doing to reduce its carbon emissions.
  - To examine the poor public attendance at the Chorley Community Forums providing an analysis of the attendance across each Forum.
  - Town Centre issues and management.
19. Action was already in progress on all these issues and duplication of effort should be avoided. The Panel would only provide an overview of those issues, assisting and developing ideas with the responsible Officers and seeking views on the way forward.

## **ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 16 JULY 2007**

### **Business Plan Monitoring**

20. The Panel at its last meeting held on 7 June 2007 requested further information relating to the undermentioned issues and queries that arose from the Business Plan Monitoring Statements for the period 1 January to 31 March 2007.

### **Management of Sickness Absence**

- i) The Panel received a short presentation from the Director of Human Resources on the management of sickness absence across the authority, specifically the Panel's request on how the figures are arrived at and the split between short-term and long-term sickness.
- ii) The presentation included the cost of sickness absence to the authority and the number of people currently on long-term sick.
- iii) Action taken for 2007/08 included improved monitoring of absences, targeting the main reasons for absence and the monitoring of return to work interviews.

### **Processing of Invoices within the 30 working days**

- iv) The Panel received a briefing note from the Director of Finance setting out an analysis of where and the reasons for the delay that were causing the fall in the performance targets for the processing of invoices within the 30 working days.
- v) The Panel welcomed the information provided but requested that further information on what had been the process changes made and their effects on the performance figures. Members questioned whether the right monitoring techniques were being used as the latest quarterly information for 30 June 2007 relating to Leisure and Culture had shown that they were still not achieving the Council's corporate target of 96%.
- vi) The Director of Finance would be invited to attend the next Panel meeting on 13 September 2007 to answer Members' questions and queries.

### **Neighbourhood Working Inquiry**

21. The Panel received from the Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment on the Neighbourhood Working inquiry providing an overview of the evidence heard by the inquiry, methods of neighbourhood working including three models of Neighbourhood

Management which might be appropriate for Chorley, which had been drawn from the evidence. The options were not mutually exclusive and the Panel would need to work out what recommendations it would take to the Executive Cabinet.

22. A final witness hearing was due to take place towards the end of August, beginning of September with the Chief Executive and Director of Finance invited to the meeting to answer Members questions and queries they may have on the inquiry and outcomes, with a need for a realistic view and proposals.

### **Work Programme**

23. The Panel accepted as urgent consideration of this item, not included on the agenda in order to bring to the Panel's attention the need for the Panel to commence consideration of future items on the Panels work programme. The recent Overview and Scrutiny Member Training Session had identified a need to consider further topics once the Neighbourhood Working Inquiry had been completed.
24. The Panel agreed to request the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider including the following topics into the Panel's Work Programme for the 2007/08 Municipal Year.
  - To investigate the Council's environmental carbon footprint and what the Council was currently doing to reduce its carbon emissions.
  - To examine the poor public attendance at the Community Forums providing an analysis of the attendances across each Forum.
  - Town Centre issues and management.

### **ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SPECIAL MEETING) – 23 AUGUST 2007**

#### **Neighbourhood Working – Inquiry**

26. This special meeting of the Panel was arranged in order to finalise the Neighbourhood Working Inquiry.
27. The Panel received a presentation from the consultant appointed to guide and advise on the Neighbourhood Working Inquiry with Members receiving a copy of the initial report entitled "The Scope and Prospects of Neighbourhood Working in Chorley" and the Position Statement which had been submitted to the Panel by the Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment at the last meeting of the Panel.
28. The Consultants presentation pulled together all the evidence that had been collected during the Inquiry, with members noting the key factors which had been identified for making Neighbourhood Working a success and those to be avoided.
29. The Director of Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment highlighted the key areas within his report and outlined three identified options. Option One (the Pathfinder model), Option Two (Neighbourhood Teams) and Option Three (Neighbourhood Team Plan). The Council is already working in a way that supports neighbourhoods, including Community Forums and work in the customer facing Directorates.
30. The Chief Executive and Director of Finance were invited to the meeting to discuss with Members the options available to the Council. It was agreed that Option One was not achievable for Chorley; and the Panel agreed to build on the Neighbourhood Working arrangements already in place, such as those with Parish Councils, Community Groups, the Local Strategic Partnership, Lancashire County Council and the Police.

31. Reference was also made regarding the impact of the new Local Government White Paper and noted there were references to Parish Councils and Community Call for Action that linked into Neighbourhood Working.
32. The Panel agreed that flexibility would be important, as each neighbourhood would have different needs and the take-up would vary in each area. There was a need to focus on intelligence led allocation of resources.
33. A report outlining the recommendations of the Inquiry would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October and the Executive Cabinet in November.

#### **CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL - 24 JULY 2007**

34. This report sets out a brief summary of the main items considered at the meeting of the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 24 July 2007.

#### **Scrutiny Inquiries - Efficiency and Absence Management**

35. We agreed that Councillor Mike Devaney would be the Chair of the Absence Management Sub-Group and that Councillor Stella Walsh would be the Chair of the Efficiency Sub-Group.
36. The two Sub-Groups broke off into different rooms to draft the scoping documents. The date of the first meeting of the Sub-Groups would be confirmed with the relevant members.

#### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3 SEPTEMBER 2007**

#### **Lancashire County Council Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny – Partnership Working**

37. The Executive Member for Health, Leisure and Well-Being (Councillor M Perks) and the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services attended the meeting to report on the two-tier meeting they had attended on 28 August 2007 to discuss Lancashire County Council's Overview and Scrutiny project to examine how partnership working could assist the delivery of the 'Every Child Matters' (ECM) outcomes and targets within the Children and Young People's block of the Lancashire Local Agreement. The Executive Member and the Director had made a joint presentation on Chorley Council's approach to the ECM agenda and the LAA targets, highlighting both the initiatives and projects currently being pursued by the Council and the plans and opportunities to be examined in the future.
38. The Council's programme and initiatives have been recognised nationally for their progressive and positive nature. These initiatives include the Council's successful 'Get Up and Go' programme of activities and the projects being pursued by a number of Chorley Partnership's Thematic Groups (eg the initiative to reduce the number of unwanted teenage pregnancies). The Committee, in particular, commented on the initiatives being pursued with the Police and the County Council's Youth and Community Service to allow the free use of the All Seasons Leisure Centre during certain weekend hours and the introduction of a young people's club in town centre premises. The Members asked the Officers to examine both the feasibility of the provision of transport to and from these venues for young people and the best means of promoting the new facilities to young people throughout the Borough.
39. The Director also advised the Committee of the plans agreed to establish by 2008 a network of 12 Children's Trusts to cover respective Lancashire District areas, with an overarching Trust for the whole of Lancashire.
40. The minutes of the Lancashire County Council overview and scrutiny session on 28 August will be submitted to the next Committee meeting on 1 October when we can determine

whether the Council should be recommended to take any action to enhance delivery of the ECM project outcomes.

## **Strategic Housing Priorities**

41. The Committee received and considered a report of the Director of Development and Regeneration on the strategic key priorities to be addressed either over the next 12 months or on a long term basis by the Strategic Housing Team established in the wake of the transfer of the housing stock to Chorley Community Housing in March 2007. The report identified and commented on each of the priority areas and objectives. Detailed action plans for each work area are currently being compiled to take account of collected data on the local and sub-regional housing market and the report emphasised the reliance of the delivery of the programme on effective project management, budgetary control and partnership working.

42. The Committee's comprehensive debate covered the majority of the priority areas, with particular attention being focused on the following areas:

- Homelessness and Housing Options

The Housing Options service for customers, incorporating advice on homelessness and housing issues, has been contracted out to Chorley Community Housing with the Council remaining accountable for decisions on homeless presentations and responsibility for the reporting on performance and prevention of homelessness. A Housing Options Partnership Steering Group comprising Officers from the Strategic Housing Team and Chorley Community Housing has been formed to address the current issues.

The Committee Members, in particular, expressed concern at the increasing use of bed and breakfast accommodation and the frequency of judicial challenges being made to the Council on decisions on applications from homeless applicants.

We have requested the Executive Cabinet to sanction the preparation and submission to our next meeting a further report analysing homelessness statistics, explaining the principal causes of applications for accommodation and containing general data on applicants (eg gender, age, ethnicity, employment status, former address, etc).

- Affordable Housing

The report commented on the factors influencing the difficulties in providing sufficient numbers of affordable housing units to meet increasing demand. While the Corporate Strategy calls for the provision of 250 affordable dwellings by March 2009, only 8 dwellings have been built since April 2006, with a further potential 104 dwellings in the pipeline.

The Director of Development and Regeneration confirmed the Strategic Housing Manager has been tasked with examining creative and innovative ways of expanding the development of affordable housing in the Borough, including partnership schemes with Registered Social Landlords to bring empty private sector houses back into residential use.

The Committee has also requested a further report from the Director on the definition and current situation in relation to the provision of affordable housing units and the means by which the number of available units can be increased.

## **Overview and Scrutiny Workshop Sessions – Key Issues**

43. The Committee received a report of the Director of Customer, Democratic and Legal Services which set out the key issues identified at the Overview and Scrutiny Workshop sessions held in June 2007. The sessions were facilitated by the Improvement and Development Agency to focus on means of achieving effective scrutiny, financial scrutiny and Charing Scrutiny bodies.
44. In addition to identifying numerous suggestions for the improvement of the delivery and effectiveness of the overview and scrutiny function, several potential scrutiny topics had been put forward.
45. We noted the contents of the report which we have agreed to form the basis of a discussion document for submission to an early meeting of the Executive Leader, the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny bodies and the Chief Executive to consider the current overview and scrutiny structure and means of improving the delivery of the function.

## **A Customer Focused Council – Implementing the outcomes of Chorley’s Business Process Review**

46. I drew attention to the fact that, under the top level management and organisational restructure agreed by the Executive Cabinet at its meeting on 9 August 2007, the role of Section 151 Officer would be undertaken by the new post of Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) and that the proposals included an exploration of Chorley and South Ribble Councils sharing financial services.
47. The Committee supported my request to seek a report for submission to our next meeting on (i) the clarification of the robustness of the projected financial arrangements; (ii) an explanation of how the proposed joint working arrangements will be delivered; and (iii) the contingency plans in the event of the joint working arrangements not being realised.

## **Recommendation**

48. The Council is recommended to note this report.

COUNCILLOR D EDGERLEY  
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

GKB/RH/AU

There are no background papers to this report.