

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 3 September 2007

Present: Councillor Dennis Edgerley (Chair), Councillor Laura Lennox (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Ken Ball, Alan Cain, Mrs Marie Gray, Margaret Lees, Greg Morgan and Geoffrey Russell

Also in attendance: Councillors Mark Perks (Executive Member for Health, Leisure and Well-Being)

07.OS.72 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors H Heaton, Miss M Iddon, E Smith and Mrs I Smith.

07.OS.73 CONDOLENCES

Councillor Mrs M Lees informed the Committee of the recent death of Councillor Margaret Iddon's father. The Chair (Councillor D Edgerley) asked for the sincere condolences of himself and all the Committee's Members and Officers to be conveyed to Councillor Iddon.

07.OS.74 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 August 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

In relation to Minute 07.OS.67 (Business Plan Monitoring Statement – Policy and Performance Directorate), it was reported that this Committee would have the opportunity of commenting on a future report to be presented to the Executive Cabinet following the Chorley Partnership's consideration of the re-freshed Community Strategy.

07.OS.75 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest by any of the Committee Members in any of the items on the agenda.

07.OS.76 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No member of the public had requested the opportunity to raise a question(s) on any of the agenda items.

07.OS.77 EXECUTIVE CABINET - 6 SEPTEMBER 2007

There had been no requests from any of the Committee Members for consideration of any of the reports to be presented to the 6 September meeting of the Executive Cabinet which were not already included on this meeting's agenda.

07.OS.78 LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The Chair welcomed the Executive Member for Health, Leisure and Well-Being (Councillor M Perks) and the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services who had been

invited to attend the meeting to report the outcomes of the two-tier meeting held on 28 August to discuss the 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 the targets within the Children and Young People's block of the Lancashire Area Agreement (LAA).

The Executive Member and the Director had made a joint presentation to the 28 August meeting on Chorley Council's approach to the 'Every Child Matters' 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.

The Council's programme and initiatives had been nationally recognised for their progressive and positive nature. The Executive Member and Director highlighted, in particular, the following elements of the Borough Council's planned programme to progress the 'Every Child Matters' agenda:

- The ECM agenda had been afforded priority in both the Chorley Community Strategy and the Council's Corporate Strategy.
- The Council was working to deliver the targets contained in the ECM Action Plan.
- Member 'Champions' and Officer led project groups had been appointed to spearhead collaborative working with a range of partners and to examine means of consulting and involving children and young people.
- The Chorley LSP's Children and Young People's Theme Group was pursuing a number of projects (eg an initiative to reduce the number of unwanted teenage pregnancies in the Borough, the Chorley Youth Offer, etc), in addition to other projects being taken forward by other Theme Groups which would impact on the well-being of young people.
- Chorley Council's successful 'Get Up and Go' programmes.
- An initiative in collaboration with the Police and the County Council's Youth and Community Service entailing 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 of the Committee welcomed the latter initiative in particular, suggesting that the Officers examine both the feasibility of the provision of transport to and from the venues for young people and the best means of promoting and raising awareness of the project to young people throughout the Borough.

In addition, the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services advised the Committee of the plans agreed by the Lancashire Strategic Partnership 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.

The Director also indicated that the minutes of the two-tier overview and scrutiny session on 28 August would be circulated to all Lancashire District partners. Further meetings would be held in advance of the production of the final report by the County Council.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Lancashire County Council overview and scrutiny session on the delivery of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee to allow Members the opportunity of determining any action that the Borough Council can take to enhance delivery of the project outcomes.

07.OS.79 STRATEGIC HOUSING PRIORITIES

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 Development and Regeneration Directorate following 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 were currently being devised to take account of collated 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.

The report generated a comprehensive and frank debate amongst the Committee members and officers, the principal concerns and discussions focusing on the following strategic priority areas:

(a) Homelessness and Housing Options

The Housing Options service for customers, incorporating advice on homelessness and housing issues had been contracted out to Chorley Community Housing in March 2007, with the Council remaining accountable for decisions on homeless presentations and responsibility for reporting on performance and prevention of homelessness.

The Members 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.

A Housing Options Partnership Steering Group between the Strategic Housing Team and Chorley Community Housing had been formed to address the current issues. The policies and procedures adopted in the determination of applications from homeless people would need to be revised, along with the renewal of the partnerships between local agencies.

(b) Affordable Housing

The report commented on the factors influencing the difficulties in providing sufficient numbers of affordable housing units to meet increasing needs for social rented accommodation and home ownership. A key measure included within the Corporate Strategy called for the provision of 250 affordable dwellings by March 2009. However, since April 2006, only 8 affordable dwellings had been built for local residents, with a further potential 144 dwellings in the pipeline.

The Committee suggested and discussed a number of alternative measures by which currently vacant private sector dwellings could be brought back into residential use. These measures included the encouragement of Registered Social Landlords to purchase and renovate empty properties; the use of compulsory purchase powers of property for subsequent renovation; and the issue of statutory notices of intended renovation at the owners' expense.

The Director confirmed that the Strategic Housing Manager had been tasked with examining creative and innovative ways of increasing the provision of affordable housing units within the Borough, including partnership schemes with Designated Social Landlords to bring empty private sector houses back into residential use.

(c) Strategic Housing Market and Needs Assessment

The report referred to the need to collate market data and information on current housing needs, property prices and income levels in order to inform objectives and strategic priorities. The Council was, therefore, exploring the joint procurement of the Hometrack Housing Market Intelligence System.

(d) Choice Based Lettings

The Council was committed to the introduction of choice based lettings in order to provide customers with a housing allocation service based on the principle of choice and control over the place where they live.

The Committee accepted that it would require a further report to explain the process of implementation.

(e) Private Sector Housing

The Committee agreed with the Director's view that the Council should strive to completely eradicate the number of non-decent dwellings in the Borough.

(f) Strategic Housing Partnership

The report outlined the proposals to establish a Chorley Strategic Housing Partnership between all key stakeholders to monitor the delivery of the existing Housing Strategy and to inform the development of a new strategy for 2009-2012.

In addition, the Chair raised the possibility of Council owned land being released for the development of affordable housing units by either Registered Social Landlords or private developers. In response, it was noted that a review of Council owned assets was underway.

The Chair also requested an examination of estate management issues and problems.

In conclusion, the Director of Development and Regeneration reiterated the significance of each of the key strategic housing areas that were being examined by the Strategic Housing Team and undertook to present further update reports on the measures being pursued.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and that the Executive Cabinet be requested to sanction the preparation and submission of the following two reports to a future meeting of this Committee:

- (1) A report from the Director of Development and Regeneration on a further analysis of the homelessness statistics, explaining the principal causes of applications by homeless people and containing greater details of applicants (ie gender, age, ethnicity, employment status, former home, etc).**
- (2) A further report from the Director on the definition of 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.**

07.OS.80 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKSHOP SESSIONS - KEY ISSUES

The Director of Customer, Democratic and Legal Services submitted a report which set out the key issues identified at the Overview and Scrutiny Workshop Sessions held in June 2007.

The sessions had been facilitated by the Improvement and Development Agency and had focused on means of achieving effective scrutiny, financial scrutiny and Chairing Scrutiny bodies.

The Members attending the sessions had put forward numerous issues and suggestions for improving the delivery and effectiveness of the overview and scrutiny function and had identified several topics which they considered might form suitable subjects for scrutiny by the responsible bodies.

RESOLVED – That the issues raised in the Workshop sessions be noted and that the content of the submitted report forms 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 overview and scrutiny function.

07.OS.81 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received the Council's Forward Plan which summarised details of the key executive decisions expected to be taken between 1 September and 31 December 2007.

The Executive had previously requested the opportunity to comment on the reports on two items before decisions were taken by the Executive Cabinet. In addition, the Committee asked the Officers to ensure that the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be consulted as an internal stakeholder on the preparation of the draft Streetscene Strategy document.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

07.OS.82 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the updated Overview and Scrutiny Programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

The programme included the envisaged timescale for the ongoing scrutiny inquiries and the planned monitoring of past inquiry recommendations.

RESOLVED – That the work programme be noted.

07.OS.83 A CUSTOMER FOCUSED COUNCIL - IMPLEMENTING THE OUTCOMES OF CHORLEY'S BUSINESS PROCESS REVIEW

The Chair had been unable to attend the last meeting of the Executive Cabinet on 9 August 2007 when a revised top level management and organisation structure had been approved. The Chair noted that, under the restructure proposals, the statutory 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. The Chair requested the Committee's support in seeking further clarification of those two elements of the plans.

RESOLVED – That the Officers be requested to prepare and submit to the next meeting of this Committee a report (i) to clarify the robustness of the projected financial arrangements; (ii) to explain how the proposed joint working arrangements will be delivered; and (iii) on the contingency plans in the event of the joint working arrangements not being realised.

Chair