

REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND PANELS

1. This report summarises the business transacted at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 February and 25 March 2008, 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 – 12 FEBRUARY 2008

Central Lancashire Primary Care Trust

2. We welcomed Mark Wilkinson the Chief Executive of the Primary Care Trust to the meeting to present to Members the Trust's strategy for improving the health and well-being of the population the PCT served and in particular the area of Chorley.
3. The PCT had set the following goals for the Chorley area:
 - To improve the length and quality of life for the people of Chorley.
 - To expand health services where they are most needed.
 - To enable people to take greater responsibility for their own health.
4. The Chief Executive responded to the key issues members of the public had requested with the PCT responding to the following local needs:
 - Teenage pregnancies.
 - Binge drinking.
 - Road injuries and deaths – A figure higher in Chorley than the North West and England averages.
5. The area of Chorley East was focussed upon with the proposal for a Health Centre in Friday Street progressing well, with an aspiration for contractors being on site by the turn of the year. Also an additional four new dentists would shortly be secured to cover the Chorley area.

Budget Scrutiny for 2008/2009

6. We received a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) that had also been submitted to both Scrutiny Panels setting out the spending and performance context for key spending areas at the Council, details of the rationale between the Executive draft budget proposals and the details of the key budget proposals for 2008/09.
7. The Committee received from both Scrutiny Panels a number of suggestions, which would form part of this year's budget consultation exercise and which would be put forward to the Executive Cabinet for consideration. A number of the suggestions reflected those received from public consultation.
8. The Committees endorsed the suggestions for submission to the Executive Cabinet.

Revenue Budget 2007/08 – Third Quarterly Monitoring Report

9. We received a report from the Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) setting out the current financial position of the Council as compared against the budget and efficiency savings targets it set itself for 2007/08 for the General Fund.

10. Excellent progress had continued to be made in achieving the Corporate Saving Target of £278,000 from the management of the establishment and a further £60,000 of savings to come from efficiency and procurement related activities.
11. The report identified the important variations since the last monitoring report to Committee.

Business Improvement Plan Monitoring Statement – Policy and Performance Directorate

12. We received the Business Plan Monitoring Statement relating to the Policy and Performance Directorate identifying the progress made against the key actions and performance indicators for the period 1 October 2007 to 31 December 2007.
13. The report indicated the activities of the Directorate and reported that all the actions set out in the Business Improvement Plan scheduled for completion during the third quarter of 2007/08 had been delivered. In particular there had been considerable activity to support the work to continue the development of the Chorley Partnership, the highlight of which was a successful IDeA Peer Review of the Local Strategic Partnership.

Corporate Third Quarter Performance Report 2007/08 – Monitoring Report for the Period Ending 31 December 2007

14. The Assistant Chief Executive (Policy and Performance) submitted a report setting out the performance against the Corporate Strategy and the Council's Best Value Performance Indicators for the third quarter of 2007/08, 1 October to 31 December 2007. The performance was assessed based on the delivery of key projects in the Corporate Strategy and the performance of national Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI).
15. The report informed us that this was the first monitoring report on the key projects since the Corporate Strategy was refreshed in October 2007 and already the overall performance of the key projects was excellent, with 84% of the projects either completed, progressing ahead of plan or on plan.
16. Overall the BVPI performance trend showed a positive picture of continued improvement with limited instances of deteriorating performance, which are being carefully monitored and managed into the final quarter.
17. We focussed our attention on the action plans that had been drawn up to address deteriorating performance and to drive up the number of BVPI showing improving performance in the year.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 25 MARCH 2008

Executive Cabinet 27 March 2008

18. I requested that the item on the Executive Cabinet agenda for the 25 March meeting regarding the report on the proposal to merge Chorley, South Ribble and West Lancashire Community Safety Partnership into a Lancashire South Strategic Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership be discussed with the Members of the Committee.
19. We received a report from the Corporate Director (Neighbourhoods) on the proposal to merge the Partnerships as there had been a requirement from 2007 for each Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to produce a Strategic Assessment. Chorley along with the local authorities of South Ribble and West Lancashire had undertaken a joint Strategic Assessment under the agreement and guidance of the three Chief Executives and Chief Superintendents.

20. The principle of merging the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to form a larger strategic partnership was supported by the Home Office in order to further reduce crime and disorder and in tackling the nuisance of drugs. Other beneficial factors included the pooling of resources to increase capacity, the co-ordination of displacement and the ability to focus resources on front line action.
21. A number of Members of the Committee expressed their concern at the speed of implementing the new structure. This was a significant change to the existing structure and it was considered that greater consultation was necessary.
22. Accordingly we agreed a series of recommendations for the Executive Cabinet to consider at their meeting on 27 March 2008.

Capital Programme 2008/09 – Monitoring

23. We received a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) updating us on the 2007/08 capital programme and seeking recommendations for the revision of the Programme which would need to be determined by the Executive Cabinet at its meeting on 27 March 2008. The report identified the split between slippage and other budget changes that were taken into account in the revision to the programme.
24. The Committee focussed upon the proposed alteration to the capital programme and in particular a major recommended change to the programme in 2007/08 being the capitalisation of interest in respect of the land assembly required for the Gillibrand Link Road, for which the Council had received the necessary capitalisation direction.

Scrutiny Inquiries – Efficiency Gains and Absence Management

25. We received the final reports from the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel on its inquiries into Efficiency Gains and Absence Management.
26. We discussed the reports and the recommendations that the Panel had made and agreed that the recommendations including an amendment to recommendation 12 of the Efficiency Gains inquiry be forwarded to the Executive Cabinet for approval.

Review of the Council's Scrutiny Process

27. We received a report of the Corporate Director of Governance setting out the review that had taken place over the last 12 months on the Council's overview and scrutiny function.
28. The report indicated the means to address concerns that the current structure was not as efficient as it could be and to increase Member engagement with the scrutiny process by promoting scrutiny reviews undertaken by small task and finish groups.
29. The proposal was for an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the two current scrutiny panels (Corporate and Customer Environment and Community) being disbanded. The membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was suggested to be 12, with the Committee establishing and appointing task and finish groups to undertake reviews. It was suggested that a task and finish groups could consist of four or five members from the membership of the main committee but could include other Council Members (other than Executive Members) who could be interested in the topics under scrutiny.
30. Some Committee Members expressed concern that the membership of 12 Councillors for the Committee would be too small and suggested 15 would be more appropriate.

31. Discussions took place on the size of the task and finish groups with a view that two Members from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be a more appropriate number with other interested Members.
32. I pointed out that I would express my views to the Executive Cabinet and other Members of the Committee could voice their opinions through their respective political groups or at the Council meeting on 22 April 2008.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2008/09

33. We received a report of the Corporate Director of Governance seeking approval to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2008/09 which identified the proposed areas of work to be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Task and Finish Groups.
34. The Committee was recommended to consider the topics suggested for scrutiny inquiries and to choose an initial three topics for the 2008/09 Municipal Year.
35. It had become apparent following the I&DeA training sessions with Members last year that a large number of ideas for topics could be scrutinised. Other topics had also been suggested since those training sessions.
36. We noted that Overview and Scrutiny would be continuing into the 2008/09 Municipal Year with the Joint Central Lancashire Scrutiny Inquiry into affordable housing as well as the Chorley Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy Scrutiny Inquiry.
37. We agreed that the following scrutiny inquiries be undertaken during 2008/09 by the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups.
 - To examine the contract and other issues relating to the service provided by Chorley Community Housing (CCH).
 - Streetscene Issues.
38. A third topic for an inquiry would be considered at the second meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the 2008/09 Municipal Year.

CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 22 JANUARY 2008

Budget Scrutiny for 2008/09

39. The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) on budget scrutiny. The report set out the spending and performance context for key spending areas at the Council, details of the rationale between the Executives draft budget proposals and details of the key budget proposals for 2008/09.
40. It was noted that the budget proposals aimed to achieve the objectives set out in the refreshed corporate strategy. The updated Corporate Strategy includes new targets, particularly in relation to climate change and older and younger peoples activities.
41. The Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) outlined the spending and performance context for key spending areas at the Council and answered a number of queries raised by Members. The Panel congratulated the Council on the achievement of maximum scores for both the use of its resources and value for money in the annual use of resources assessment. Improvements in satisfaction have been seen alongside improvements in performance and this score demonstrates that the Council continues to offer good value for money.

42. The Panel made several general suggestions for the Executive Cabinet to consider:
 - a. To increase the number of Environmental Wardens.
 - b. To provide another vehicle for the Environmental Wardens.
 - c. To improve the process to request the cleaning of footpaths, clearing of hedgerows and ditches outside the urban core. Currently there can be confusion as to where the responsibility for this lies and how best to deal with Lancashire County Council when the responsibility lies with them.
 - d. To increase the use of the machine that removes chewing gum throughout the Borough.
 - e. To distribute to Members the schedule of work for street cleaning and grass cutting for their information and comments.
 - f. To identify areas where there is a lack of recreational facilities and either provide additional facilities or improve transport links to existing facilities nearby.
 - g. To explore concessionary arrangements with South Ribble where residents would be entitled to concessions within Chorley but South Ribble recreational facilities are closer.
43. The Panel made observations on the following:
 - a. The customer service received when a missed bin was reported was excellent and the bin had then been collected promptly.
 - b. The conditions of the new waste and recycling contract to put financial penalties on the contractor for not returning the receptacle to the point of collection and new style receptacles for recycling were commended.
 - c. It was hoped that the issue of waste littering areas after collection would be reduced under the new contract.
 - d. It was hoped that the plans for Market Walk phase 2 would come into fruition in the future.
44. On the base budget review savings 2008/09, Members asked for clarification on several items and commented that the maintenance of bus shelters and street furniture, although not the responsibility of Chorley Council, did have a positive impact on the streetscene. It was noted that one of the corporate priorities was to “develop the character and feel of Chorley as a good place to live”. The increase in charges for the hire of the Lancastrian was noted with some concern.
45. Members considered the schedule of potential savings for Directorate savings targets 2008/09. It was highlighted that proposed savings should not have a negative impact on the service delivered to the customer. Support was given to merging the enforcement functions currently delivered by Governance and Neighbourhoods.
46. The Panel discussed the proposals for increasing fees and charges in 2008/09. Members discussed the increase proposed for grant of right of burial fees and a suggestion was made that the increase be phased.
47. Members considered the plans for Capital Resources and noted that the priorities were affordable housing, the town centre, sustainability and climate change and investing in the green corridor. Members clarified several points and supported the proposals relating to affordable housing and the green corridor. It was noted that Chorley Council would manage the homelessness function in the future.
48. We thanked the Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) for his report and attendance at the meeting. It was noted that the discussion on budget scrutiny had been useful and the approach to budget scrutiny had been an improvement on last year.

Scrutiny Inquiries - Efficiency Gains and Absence Management

49. The Chair of the Efficiency Gains Sub-Group, Councillor Mrs Stella Walsh, updated the Panel on the ongoing inquiry. Feedback sessions had been held with Directors in December and there were further sessions later this month to receive information from the remaining Directors, the Corporate Procurement Officer, Customer Access Officer and the external auditor. The Sub-Group would be considering it's final report on 27 February and would report to the Panel on 11 March.
50. Councillor Mike Devaney, Chair of the Absence Management Sub-Group reported that the inquiry was progressing well. It was noted that there were pockets within the Council where there were still issues with absence management and this would be investigated further.
51. The Sub-Group met with the Executive Member for Resources on 19 February to discuss the recommendations and final report which was then presented to the Panel on 11 March.

CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL –11 March 2008

Scrutiny Inquiries - Efficiency Gains and Absence Management

52. The Chair welcomed the Panel's final reports on it's inquiries into Absence Management and Efficiency Gains asked the Chair of each sub-group to introduce their respective reports.

Absence Management

53. Councillor Mike Devaney outlined the objectives and desired outcomes of the inquiry. Members considered the report and it's recommendations and noted that at the third quarter the average sickness absence of the authorities employees' equated to 7.11 days, against an annual target of 9.22 days. Members commended this as an excellent achievement.
54. Councillor Devaney thanked the Members and officers for their contributions to the inquiry and commented on how positive the piece of work had been.

Efficiency Gains

55. Councillor Stella Walsh explained that the sub-group had heard and evaluated a great deal of documentary evidence relating to the efficiency agenda. The sub-group had undertaken interviews with the directors and the external auditor whose responses had been compiled into a schedule enclosed with the report.
56. Members discussed the report and the recommendations made, noting specifically how the council has been recognised for its excellent work in its use of resources and value for money by the Audit Commission.

Quarterly Business Plan Monitoring Statements

57. The Panel considered the Business Plan Monitoring Statements from Customer, Democratic and Legal Services, Human Resources, Financial Services and Information and Communication Technology.
58. The Members of the Panel queried several points within the reports with the Directors who were in attendance at the meeting.

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 24 JANUARY 2008

Scrutiny Inquiries – Chorley Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy

59. The Panel Members along with other Members of the Council received a presentation from a representative of Landscape Projects commissioned to undertake a town centre audit.
60. The Panel had chosen to consider for a full scrutiny enquiry the Town Centre Audit. This was part of the Town Centre Strategy. Members of the Panel were conscious of the need to focus their attention on a specific area of the strategy, in view of the wide range of issues and for the potential outcome of the inquiry to be worthwhile.
61. The audit involved information gathering, collection and analysis as well as consultation with stakeholders and the public.
62. The Panel approved the draft Project Outline for the Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy.

Budget Scrutiny for 2008/09

63. The Panel received a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation) setting out the spending and performance context for key spending areas of the Council, details of the rationale between the Executive draft budget proposals and the details of the key budget prospects for 2008/09.
64. Members of the Panel were requested to consider the Executive draft budget proposals in the interest of current spending and the Council's corporate priorities and make appropriate representations to the Executive for consideration during the finalising of the budget proposals.
65. Several suggestions had been put forward by the Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel that had met on 22 July 2008 and Members noted that a majority of them related to this Panel.
66. The Panel endorsed the suggestions and agreed that they be submitted to the Executive Cabinet as part of the 2007/08 budget consultation exercise.

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 17 MARCH 2008

Scrutiny Inquiry – Chorley Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy

67. As part of the ongoing inquiry into the Chorley Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy the Panel received a presentation from a representative of Landscape Projects. The presentation outlined the results of the audit following the consultation and listening to the views of stakeholders including Councillors and their opinions.
68. Some Members of the Panel had visited the St George's area of St Helens town centre where there had been a regeneration of the area resulting in a dynamic centre which has utilised European best practice, reflecting a 21st century design approach that is contributing towards making St Helens a regional location of choice and has been seen to be a catalytic role with regard to the wider transformation of St Helens. The site visit enabled those attending to see for themselves the improvements that had been made and how a multi-disciplinary team involving environmental professionals and Members can improve the area.

Business Plan Monitoring Statements – 1 October 2007 to 31 December 2007

69. The Panel received the third quarter Business Plan Monitoring Statements for the period 1 October 2007 to 31 December 2007 relating to the undermentioned services and functions which fall within the remit and area of responsibility of the Panel:
- Leisure and Culture.
 - Development and Regeneration.
 - Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment.
70. The Corporate Director (People) informed the Panel that his Directorate had made good progress across all areas in the first nine months with no significant variations to report.
71. As had been reported at previous meetings it was noted that the performance target for the processing of invoices within 30 working days had now improved following changes made to the process.
72. The report indicated that progress had been made in a number of areas, with Members requested to be kept up to date on the progress on the management of capital projects.
73. Members would be kept up to date on 6 monthly intervals with the use of the new publication "In the Know" providing the information to Councillors.
74. The Corporate Director (Business) informed the Panel that the third quarter of the year had seen excellent progress on meeting the Directorate's targets set out in the Corporate Strategy and the Business Improvement Plan.
75. A number of projects had been completed including an actioned proposal for an enterprise/green technology centre on the Strategic Regional Site at Buckshaw, implementation of the investment strategy had commenced with the appointment of a Town Centre Manager as well as the Design Audit for the Town Centre.
76. Concern had been expressed at previous meetings at the continuing problem with housing allocations and the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. It had been agreed with Chorley Community Housing that the Housing Allocation Team be brought back into the Council.
77. The Panel received the Business Plan Monitoring Statement relating to the Neighbourhoods Directorate.
78. The report indicated that it was during this third quarter that the new Neighbourhoods Directorate was formed and consequently it was in a transition period whilst the placing of work activities were agreed between Directorates.
79. The report set out the service developments of the Directorate.
80. The Directorate had performed well during the third quarter, with the majority of indicators being on target or showing improvement. Those areas such as graffiti removal and sickness absence had shown poor performance. Action Plans had been completed to address these issues.

81. Members raised concern that the Pest Control Service performance was down, with the service not responding quick enough to reports of rodents. It was noted that this service was already being examined to address the concern.

Recommendation

82. The Council is recommended to note this report.

COUNCILLOR D EDGERLEY
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

There are no background papers to this report.