

Scrutiny Reporting Back

Chorley Council's Annual Report on Overview and Scrutiny in 2016/17



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1. MEMBERSHIP OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2016/17



Councillor John Walker
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2016/17



Councillor Roy Lees
Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2016/17

Councillors Charlie Bromilow, Paul Clark, Jane Fitzsimons, Mark Jarnell, Margaret Lees, Matthew Lynch, June Molyneaux, Greg Morgan. Alistair Morwood, Mark Perks, Debra Platt and Kim Snape

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

Once again the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has had a busy year undertaking a varied and extensive work programme and two task group reviews. Councillor John Walker was appointed Chair of the Committee for another year and Councillor Roy Lees was welcomed as Vice Chair. There were also several new members welcomed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel, consisting of six members met quarterly to monitor the Council's Organisational Plan and Business Planning performance, along with a focus on a number of different service issues.

The two task group reviews which were established by the Committee were to undertake reviews on the topics of -

- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Rollout of Superfast Broadband

The Committee continued to receive six monthly monitoring reports following the Executive Cabinet's response on the implementation of outcomes and measure success from past scrutiny reviews:

Neighbourhood Working – the majority of the recommendations had either been implemented or were in the process of being implemented. The Committee had been pleased with the progress made on the recommendations and the number of initiatives which had taken place since the Neighbourhood Working task group review had taken place in 2014. The Committee recommended that members be kept fully informed of the progress made and of events due to take place.

Public Transport Issues in Chorley – since the Executive Cabinet accepted the task group recommendations in November 2015, there had been significant changes to transport provision within the borough, mainly due to Lancashire County Council's budget review. The Committee was informed that the Council was subsidising the 109A/24A and 6/6A bus services and was funding a temporary new service (7C). As a result of the recommendations from the task group, the Council continued to lobby transport service providers, and work with other organisations to improve resident access across the borough. In addition, the Committee was informed that a transport plan for Chorley would be considered as part of the Economic Development Strategy Refresh. Meanwhile the Council was continuing to work with Lancashire County Council to provide a permanent solution to Chorley's transport issues.

Single Front Office – progress on the task group recommendations had continued to progress which included:

- On-line forms being developed
- Further digital training being planned as part of the Chorley Inner East project.
- Further engagement was due to take place with parish clerks to improve digital access and support for more parishes. Support would also be made available to partners exploring Cyber Café opportunities throughout the borough.
- A general review of software was also to be conducted to ensure information made available to customers (as part of the workflows and processes stages) was clear and accurate.

Staff Sickness Absence – progress had been made on all the task group recommendations. The figure for quarter one for 2016/17 had shown an increased level of staff sickness absence which totalled 2.01 days lost per employee compared to the target figure of 1.75 days lost per employee. However, there had been a reduction in the number of days lost when compared with the previous years which totalled 2.19. It was confirmed that the figures for quarter 2 had reduced.

3 CHALLENGING PERFORMANCE

The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel focused on the performance elements of scrutiny, and considered all monitoring information. Scrutinising performance is a key role for scrutiny and one of the benefits to the dedicated resources was that a smaller number of members were able to drill down to the detail in key areas and adopt some consistency in approach.

The panel for 2016/17 consisted of the following membership -
Councillor John Walker (Chair)

Councillor Roy Lees (Vice Chair)
Councillor Matthew Lynch
Councillor June Molyneaux
Councillor Alistair Morwood
Councillor Mark Perks

The Panel met four times within the last twelve months, considering the Council's Corporate Strategy, key projects and monitoring that captured all the directorate and service level business improvement plans.

Each meeting also considered an additional performance focus, where the panel looked at directorates.

3.1 Community Development

By invitation, Councillor Beverley Murray, Executive Member (Early Intervention) and Jamie Carson, Deputy Chief Executive/Director (Early Intervention and Support) were in attendance.

Members of the Panel were provided with an update on the latest position on staffing following the Council's management restructure which resulted in some minor changes to the team. The Health and Wellbeing team had an additional Community Development Officer post. Get Up and Go sessions continued to attract positive levels of participation with a total of 26,642 young people attending sessions in 2015/16, which was an increase of over 20% on 2014/15.

The team continued to support local clubs and groups with 155 groups supported in 2015/16 which vary from luncheon clubs through to larger organisations such as the Prince's Trust. The total number of groups supported was lower than the same time last year (200 in 2014/15) which reflected a more targeted approach and also additional support was available from within the sector, for example from the VCFS Network.

3.2 Customer and Digital

Asim Khan, Director (Customer and Digital) was in attendance.

The primary focus of the directorate was on providing end to end customer services, dealt with at the first point of contact wherever possible and promoting the use of digital channels as a straightforward and efficient way of managing services. As the Contact Centre was undergoing a period of change, the panel focused their performance questions towards council tax and benefits processing, planning, streetscene and waste services. Members of the Panel received information about each service, feedback on their performance and any changes that had been implemented since the senior management restructure took place in 2016.

3.3 Review of PCSOs

Chris Sinnott, Director (Policy and Governance) was in attendance.

The Panel was informed that for the southern division (Chorley, South Ribble, Preston and West Lancashire), there were 47 part-funded posts, 27 of those being funded by Chorley Council. It was reported that Lancashire Police had 51 fully-funded PCSO posts across the division. However, none of those posts were provided to Chorley. It was therefore suggested, and later confirmed, that the fully funded posts were deployed elsewhere in the southern division, where partner contributions were lower.

The Panel raised concern about the report's findings and in its view Chorley Council was not receiving value for money on its investment. The outcome of the discussion resulted in the report being referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and circulated to all Members in advance of the Special Council meeting on 28 February 2017 which considered the Council's budget position for the next financial year.

3.4 Shared Services

Chris Sinnott, Director (Policy and Governance) was in attendance.

The Panel considered a report which detailed the performance of those services which were shared with South Ribble Borough Council.

The Business Improvement Plan translated those output and measures into specific deliverables and targets which needed to be achieved during 2016/17. The plan also covered the shared procurement service which continued to perform strongly.

To address the challenges facing local government it had been agreed that the Council would pursue an ambition to achieve integrated public services for the borough which would need to include further sharing of back office functions under different structures. The Council's Transformation Strategy also included an action to proactively investigate shared service opportunities.

3.5 Business, Development and Growth

Mark Lester, Director (Business, Development and Growth) was in attendance

The Director of Business, Development and Growth attended the meeting to answer questions in relation to the Business, Development and Growth directorate. The directorate, which was formed as part of the organisational restructure in May 2016, was primarily focused on driving economic growth and building the business rate base through the delivery of the Economic Development Strategy, and was responsible for delivering a number of the Council's strategic projects.

Future priorities for the directorate included –

- A refresh of the Economic Development Strategy.
- Identifying and bringing forward employment sites

4 KEY MESSAGES FROM SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS AND CRIME AND DISORDER

4.1 Rollout of Superfast Broadband – Chaired by Councillor Kim Snape

The topic of Superfast Broadband has been raised by residents over a number of years and identified as a potential task group topic. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee wanted to undertake a short review on the rollout, the current provision of Superfast Broadband and plans for any remaining properties. The task group was established and met twice in March and April 2017.

The objective of the task group was to understand the issues and concerns by BT and Lancashire County Council (LCC) on the rollout of Superfast Broadband, in particular:

1. How the areas to receive Superfast Broadband were prioritised and what will happen to those areas not eligible.
2. To understand why the speed of Superfast Broadband is not consistent throughout the borough and to receive the average speed of Superfast Broadband throughout Chorley.
3. To gain an understanding of the publicity campaign undertaken to make residents aware that they are able to access Superfast Broadband.
4. To understand if there are any budgetary implications due to the savings required by LCC.

The desired outcomes of the task group was -

- To gain an understanding of how areas were prioritised and the timescale for completion on the rollout.

- To be informed on other initiatives that LCC are exploring for those residents who will not qualify for Superfast Broadband.
- To make recommendations in line with the Council's Digital Strategy.

The final report, including recommendations, will be presented at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 6 July 2017 before being referred to the Executive Cabinet for consideration.

4.2 CRIME AND DISORDER: Child Sexual Exploitation – Chaired by Councillor Roy Lees

This year's scrutiny focus for crime and disorder, and the first task group of the year, was on the topic of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). CSE has been in the media spotlight for the last few years due to many high profile cases. Many of the investigations into CSE identified significant failings within local authorities and other public bodies across the country. The Committee wanted to review the Council's own policies and procedures to ensure they were robust and fit for purpose.

A task group was established and met five times between August and November 2016. The final report provided detailed information from the witnesses which the task group interviewed; the evidence received and the task group's deliberations.

At its meeting on 16 February, the Executive Cabinet was asked to consider and implement the following recommendations:

1. That the Council should raise awareness with elected members and officers,
 - by continuing to support campaigns raising awareness of CSE and other safeguarding issues;
 - by continuing to deliver training programmes to elected members and officers of the Council in regards to CSE; and by working with partners to produce an appropriate package of training specifically relating to CSE to be delivered to the targeted officers who already receive safeguarding training.
2. Ensure both Members and officers have an understanding of the partnership approach adopted and the key early intervention opportunities, whereby every contact with a child or young person matters.
3. Ensure both Members and officers have an understanding of the referral pathway in place for suspected cases of CSE or where there is a potential risk of CSE taking place.
4. That the Licensing and Public Safety Committee be requested to extend the CSE training beyond the taxi trade to the wider licensing community. To ensure a successful roll out, a distinct and comprehensive action plan should be first drawn up to include resource implications.
5. The Council should work with, and support partners in producing appropriate material/delivering events to raise CSE awareness amongst parents and guardians.
6. That a representative from Parklands Academy and a primary school be invited to put forward recommendations to the Chorley and South Ribble Community Safety Partnership.
7. The Council should improve links with all schools to ensure that the list of relevant contacts for each school is accurate and kept up to date.
8. In raising awareness about CSE, elected members are informed about those circumstances where CSE exists or where there is a potential for CSE to develop, so that they can ensure

they follow personal safety guidance in carrying out their ward councillor role. This matter to be referred to the Member Support Working Group for their consideration and guidance.

9. The Council should support and help develop a CSE awareness campaign with partnership agencies and the public using social media.
10. The Council should continue to raise awareness within the community, for example, by developing best practice toolkits used by fellow local authorities for voluntary community and faith sector organisations and licensees (taxi's and others).

5 CHALLENGING THE EXECUTIVE

In addition to challenging the Executive Members through the Performance Panel, the Committee worked together positively with the Executive Leader and the Executive Cabinet in scrutinising their proposals, which included the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) 123 list.

6 FINANCIAL SCRUTINY

At its meeting held in January 2017 the Committee welcomed the Executive Member (Resources) who attended to provide an overview of the draft budget proposals for 2017/18, including a forecast for the following two years to 2019/20 and also present the relevant proposals in respect of -

- The use of forecast resources identified in 2017/18
- Budget consultation

It was reported that the budget forecasts over the next three years had been updated to take account of a number of issues which included:

- Council Tax to be increased by 2% in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20
- The Draft Local Government Finance Settlement 2017/18 to 2020/21 published on 15 December 2016.
- Progress against the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) budget efficiency objectives including staffing reviews, contract savings and base budget reviews.

Despite the unprecedented decline in Government funding, the Council had maintained effective budgetary planning and continued delivering investment in its priorities while maintaining low Council Tax levels.

It was further reported that the Local Government Finance Settlement 2016 included core grant allocations for the forthcoming four years, from 2016/17 to 2019/20. To aide its medium term budget planning the Council opted to accept the Government's offer of four year RSG allocations. In accordance with Government requirements an Efficiency Plan was agreed at the Council meeting in September 2016.

During debate, there was a consensus that difficult decisions had to be made to protect services, and that it was important that a contingency strategy be adopted in anticipation of any further Government announcement which would further affect council funding. The committee noted that there was some budget saving potential in procurement and shared service arrangements. The Executive Member (Resources) also stressed the importance of the Council continuing to invest in major projects and events to generate income, and attract businesses and home owners to the borough to ensure the Council's stability.

7 OTHER TOPICS CONSIDERED

7.1 LCC Health Scrutiny Committee: A & E Services at Chorley Hospital

In October, County Councillor Steve Holgate, Chair of LCC Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee and the Council's representative that sits on this Committee, Councillor Hasina Khan attended the meeting to present the findings of a recent task group review which considered the temporary closure of the A & E Department at Chorley Hospital.

Discussion at the meeting was dominated by the recent announcement that the A & E Department would be re-opened on a part-time basis from mid-January 2017 following the occupation of the Urgent Care Unit. This announcement followed an independent report that had been commissioned by NHS England and NHS Improvement on the temporary closure of the A & E Department following public pressure. The report's findings concluded that the department could re-open on a part-time basis from mid-January once the Urgent Care Unit was fully operational.

Following the meeting, the Chair of the Committee wrote to the Chair of the Commissioning Group on behalf of the Committee seeking early occupation of the Urgent Care Unit so that personnel could be redeployed to the A & E Department. A response was received which explained the reasons why the early occupation of the Urgent Care Unit could not be brought forward. The letter, also explained that the expertise required in the A & E Department was not the same as those required for the Urgent Care Unit, therefore personnel could not be redeployed as suggested.

7.2 Flooding issues across the borough

A total of 426 properties in the borough had been confirmed as flooded as a result of Storm Eva on 26 December 2015. The DCLG and LCC issued guidance and criteria to councils to help those people affected by flooding. Based on that guidance and criteria the Council set up its own Flood Relief Scheme.

The Committee received a breakdown of financial assistance awarded to those properties affected. In addition, it was reported that –

- 214 residents also applied to the government for a Property Level Resilience Grant worth up to £5,000 per property. As part of the application process a survey carried out by Pell Frischmann of each property to ascertain the most effective form of prevention work appropriate.
- LCC was also in the process of undertaking a Section 19 investigation to ensure that their legal obligations had been met and that affected communities had been identified and appropriate county-wide prioritised actions put in place.

Following clarification, it was confirmed that there had been only one report of a farm being flooded as a result of Storm Eva. After initial contact was made with the resident, further approaches from the Council had proved unsuccessful.

7.3 Section 106 update

Following an Internal Audit investigation into the identification of missed Section 106 trigger points, the Committee wanted to satisfy itself that robust measures had been implemented to prevent further trigger points being missed, which had resulted in a loss of revenue to the Council.

It was reported that the Governance Committee had been provided with details of the work that had been undertaken to prevent a reoccurrences of trigger points being missed, and to mitigate the loss of income to the Council by ensuring that a robust system was now in place.

The Governance Committee would continue to monitor this activity.

7.4 United Utilities charging policy for schools

United Utilities charging policy for schools had been of great concern to Members of the Council, so much so that a resolution was made in 2016 for a letter to be sent expressing those concerns on behalf of the Council. Although a reply to the letter was received from United Utilities, the response did not alleviate Members concerns.

The Chair of the Committee invited representatives from Ofwat to attend the meeting in March 2017 to discuss Members concern. Ofwat chose to defer the invitation on this occasion to allow United Utilities the opportunity to review their policy once again.

Meanwhile, the Chief Executive of United Utilities wrote a letter to the Chief Executive of Lancashire County Council stating that it had reviewed its policy for charging schools and that a concession rate was to be introduced in 2018/19 which for the majority of schools would represent a reduction of approximately 40% in their overall water bill. United Utilities had also decided to provide a credit to schools for 2017/18 worth approximately 15% of their wholesale site area charges.

8 CONCLUSION AND THE YEAR AHEAD

It has been an interesting year for scrutiny, resulting in some key recommendations on topics of concern to Members and the public. Challenges ahead are to continue to scrutinise areas of interest for Members and their constituents; to follow up on the implementations of scrutiny recommendations, to work more effectively with our partners on scrutiny and to continue to challenge the Executive in a constructive way with recommendations that result in positive outcomes for the residents in Chorley.

The Council will hold four meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and four meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel in 2017/18, Councillor John Walker, will remain Chair and Councillor Roy Lees remain as Vice Chair, we also welcome some new Members to the committee.

The topic for the first task group has already been agreed and will be on the subject of the Leisure Contract.