

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
ANNUAL REPORT 2007/2008**

JUNE 2008



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1. Introduction

This report covers the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Panels for the period May 2007 to April 2008.

As in previous years the scrutiny process has contributed to the budget process and the setting of the corporate strategy as well as generally scrutinising the work and performance of the authority

The Committee/Panels undertook three scrutiny inquiries. The inquiry into efficiency gains and absence management submitted a series of recommendations that were largely accepted by the Executive Cabinet. The inquiry into the Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy whilst not yet complete will make important recommendations soon to all members of the Council. The inquiry into neighbourhood working has led to significant changes in the way the Council proposes to deliver its neighbourhoods agenda.

Following member training and prolonged discussion within and between the political groups it has been decided to replace the scrutiny panels with task and finish groups. This raises a number of issues. In particular the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will have to monitor business plans and the progress of scrutiny inquiry recommendations previously monitored by the panels. The challenge will be to do this in a meaningful way. It will also be important to ensure all members are given the opportunity to contribute to the work of the authority.

Thanks go to all those involved in the scrutiny process. Special thanks go to the chairs of the panels and the chairs of the subgroups.

Councillor Dennis Edgerley
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2. 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 under the requirements of the Local Government Act 2000.

The Council has recognised the key role Overview and Scrutiny has to play within its political management structure and its alignment with corporate priorities.

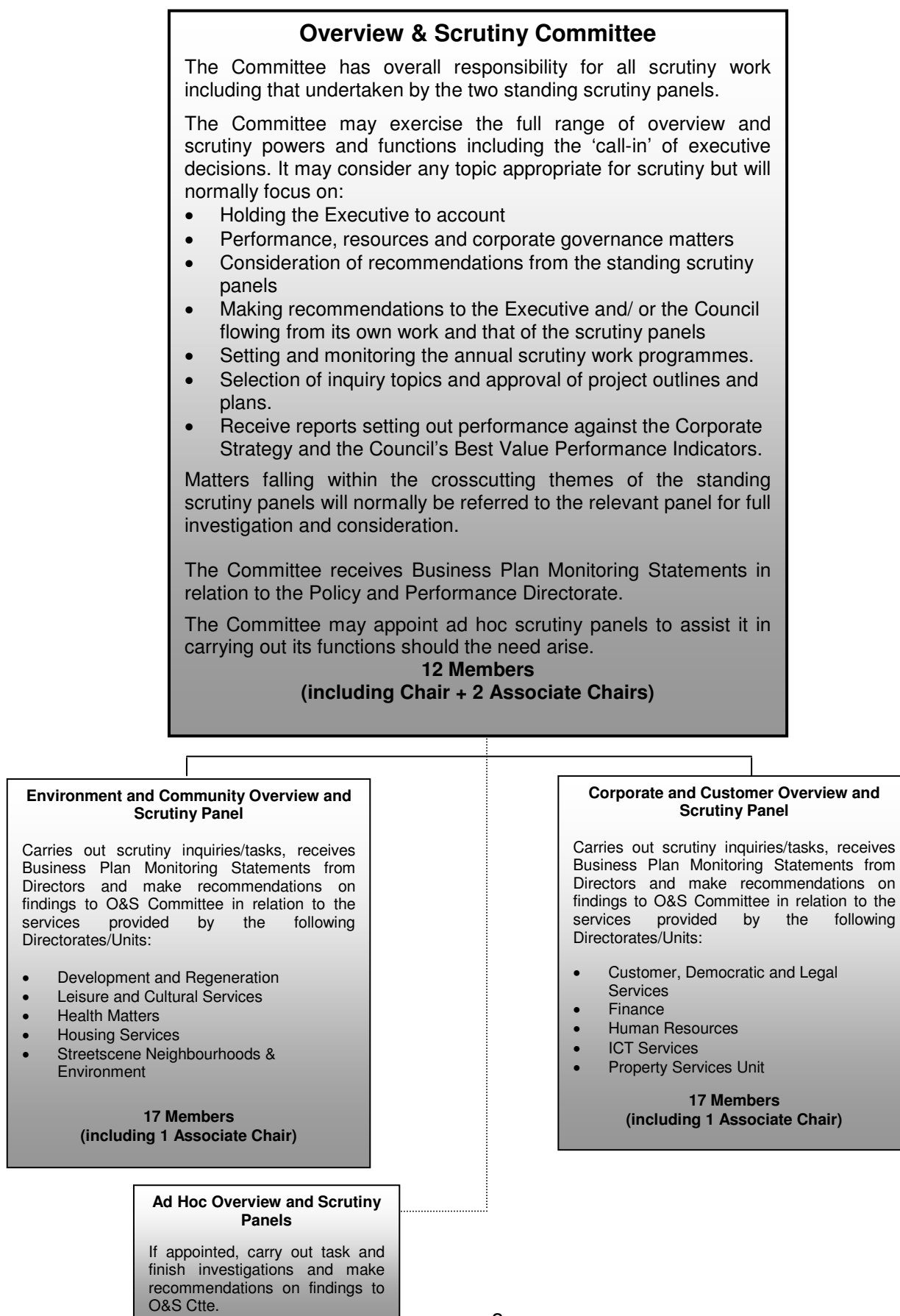
The Council in recent years has revised the way in which it delivers the overview and scrutiny function. Most recently an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee and two Panels, the Corporate and Customer Panel and the Environmental and Community Panel have been in place, with task groups being established to undertake some scrutiny inquiries.

A very positive step forward was made in June 2007 when the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) was invited to facilitate a workshop session, held for all Members of the Council, Management Team and Senior Management Group. The sessions were based on the delivery of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function, in particular chairing O&S, effective O&S and financial O&S. There was a genuine enthusiasm as to the potential of the scrutiny functions and a real will to improve it further and to ensure it fulfils its role effectively and adds value to the Council.

Following this work the Council has initiated a further streamlining of the overview and scrutiny function and has just introduced a new structure with one overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 12 members and task and finish groups consisting of a small number of members from the membership of the main Committee and including other Council Members (other than Executive members) who are interested in the topics under scrutiny.

3. Overview and Scrutiny Structure, Functions and Responsibilities (2007/08)

This report reflects work undertaken in 2007/08 when the following structure was in place.



4. The Achievements and Activities

(a) Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Chair

Councillor Dennis Edgerley

Members

Councillor Laura Lennox (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Kenneth Ball

Councillor Alan Cain

Councillor Marie Gray

Councillor Harold Heaton

Councillor Margaret Iddon

Councillor Margaret Lees

Councillor Gregory Morgan (Associate Chair)

Councillor Geoffrey Russell (Associate Chair)

Councillor Edward Smith

Councillor Iris Smith

1. Scrutiny Process and the Executive

A key role of Scrutiny is to hold the Executive to account. In Chorley this is a proactive rather than a reactive process. 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 meetings is constructed in such a way that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held just a few days before the Executive Cabinet and there is a standard agenda item to allow for consideration of matters going to the Cabinet. Members of the Committee notify Democratic Services if they wish the Committee to consider an item of the Executive Cabinet and the appropriate Executive Member and Officers then attend the meeting. This assists in any information or observations that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may make on reports to the Executive Cabinet.

The Committee has received over the months several requests for reports on decisions including a report relating to Communications and Marketing Strategy and a report on the Council's shared financial services arrangements with South Ribble.

Job Evaluation

At the request of the Committee a report was received on the process and progress of Job Evaluation in Chorley outlining the potential risks and the steps that had been taken to manage those risks. The Committee raised issues on the cost and impact on the organisation and the percentage of posts that went up, down and stayed the same.

Community Safety Partnership

In March 2008 the Committee requested that the Committee discusses the Executive Cabinet report on the proposal to merge Chorley, South Ribble and West Lancashire Community Safety Partnerships. The report detailed the principle of the merger to form a larger strategic partnership as supported by the Home Office in order to further reduce crime and disorder, however, the Committee expressed their concern at the speed of implementing the new structure. This was a significant change to the existing structure and that it was considered that greater consultation was necessary.

The Committee agreed that a series of recommendations be submitted to the Executive Cabinet including delaying the implementation of the proposals to allow for

greater consultation and that the proposal be brought back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Executive accepted this.

2. **Consultation and discussion on policy development**

Lancashire County Council Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Partnership Working

In August 2007 the Committee 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 Committee on the 'Every Child Matters' agenda

The intention was 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.

A two tier Overview and Scrutiny session took place on 28 August 2007 in which the Executive Member and Officers attended and the outcome was reported back to the Committee by way of a presentation highlighting both the initiatives and projects being pursued by the Council and the plans and opportunities to be examined in the future.

The Council's programme and initiatives had been recognised nationally for their progressive and positive nature. These initiatives included the Council's successful "Get Up and Go" programme of activities and the projects being pursued by a number of Chorley Partnership Thematic Groups.

Strategic Housing Priorities

The Committee received in September 2007 a report on the key strategic housing priorities to be addressed 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 Committee fed their views back to the Executive on the priority areas, in particular:

- Homelessness and Housing Options; and
- Affordable Housing

Joint District and Lancashire County Council Locality Plan for Chorley

In November 2007 the Committee considered a report on the Joint Locality Plan for Chorley, which had been produced by Lancashire County Council, and Chorley Council.

The plan had emerged from the enhanced two-tier working arrangements with the aim of identifying a number of the main objectives and projects linked to both Councils corporate priorities to be pursued over the next 12 months by both authorities either separately or jointly. The Plan emphasised that it represented an indicative illustration of the principal schemes for which both Authorities will be responsible to assist the community's understanding of their district councils.

The Committee fed back to the Executive, views on areas of the plan which required improving or to be made more specific.

Central Lancashire Primary Care Trust

In February 2008 the Committee invited 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 focusing on plans Chorley.

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

The Chief Executive responded to key issues members of the public had requested and in particular local needs.

The area of Chorley East was focussed upon with the proposal for a Health Centre on Friday Street and additional dental care covering the Chorley area.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

At the beginning of each Year the Committee receives the work programme for Overview and Scrutiny identifying the proposed work to be undertaken by the Committee. For 2007/08 the Committee determined the order of priority for the implementation of the proposed scrutiny inquiries by the two Scrutiny Panels.

The following scrutiny inquiries were identified for the Panels as being priorities for 2007/08:

Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- Efficiency Gains and Absence Management

Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- Neighbourhood Working in Chorley
- Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy

The topics were chosen because of their strong links to the Council's priorities and the Corporate Strategy but would also provide added value to the delivery of services.

Corporate Strategy

The Committee was consulted on the amendments that had been made to the Corporate Strategy for the period 2007/08 – 2009/10.

The Corporate Strategy is the key document for the Council in taking forward its agenda for improvement. The Council had 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 political administration. The Committee submitted several responses to the Executive Cabinet on the proposals.

3. **Performance Challenge**

Performance Monitoring 2007/08

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

Overall the performance of key projects was 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.

Business Plan Monitoring Statements – Policy and Performance Directorate

The Committee continued to receive quarterly Business Plan Monitoring Statements relating to the Policy and Performance Directorate which identified the progress made against the key actions and performance indicators relating to the specific quarter.

4. **Financial Challenge**

Revenue Budget/Capital Budget 2007/08 – Monitoring

The Committee continue to receive regular reports on the financial position of the Council compared against the budgets and efficiency saving targets it had set itself for 2007/08, with Members focussing on areas of increased costs and financial risks to the authority.

Reports on the schemes that had been made by the 2007/08 Capital Programme were submitted to the Committee allowing Members to focus on specific schemes.

Budget Scrutiny for 2008/09

In February 2008 the Committee received a report that had been presented to both Scrutiny Panels setting out the spending and performance context for key spending areas of the Council, detailing the rationale between the Executive draft budget proposals and the details of the key budget proposals for 2008/09.

The Committee received from both Scrutiny Panels, a number of recommendations and suggestions which formed part of the year's budget consultation exercise and which were put forward to Council as part of the budget process.

5. **Task Group recommendations and updates**

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

Carried over from an inquiry that had taken place in 2006/07, the Committee received in August 2007 the Executive Cabinet's response on the recommendations of the Equality and Diversity Sub-Group. This followed the review of the Council's approach to the embodiment of equality and diversity in the culture of the Authority.

The recommendation 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.

Chorley Markets Update

In October 2007 the Committee received an update report on the progress made with improvements to Chorley Markets with an Action Plan showing that considerable progress had been made and noting that some of the recommendations from the Scrutiny Inquiry into Chorley Markets had been utilised by the Working Group.

6 Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Structure

In June 2007 all Members received an IDeA training session, which was well received and created greater enthusiasm for the process and put forward suggestions for topics for future reviews. Consideration was given to finding a way forward for scrutiny in the light of a number of concerns expressed at the time around reviews taking too long; not necessarily adding value; and the need to improve Member engagement.

A consultation exercise was carried out during the summer of 2007 on a proposal for an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There was a limited response received to the consultation and on that basis a further proposal was put forward to political groups at the end of 2007 suggesting a structure of one overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a series of task and finish groups to undertake reviews.

Reviews have generally been most successful where they have been smaller in membership and where Members have demonstrated enthusiasm and interest in the subject. The proposal agreed keeps Overview and Scrutiny Committee members to 12 but allows reviews to include other Councillors (except Executive Members). On this basis Overview and Scrutiny Committee will continue to take an overarching lead on scrutinising corporate issues like performance, business planning and budget monitoring as well as hearing any call ins but reviews will be undertaken by task and finish groups. This approach has been supported by groups and was approved by Council on 22 April 2008 with the final Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 2007/08 looking at topics for review in 08/09.

This change in approach should reduce the number of formal scrutiny committees in favour of more informal working. It will be closely monitored to assess how well it is working, how effectively members are engaged and the quality of reviews and recommendations.

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



Chair

Councillor Geoffrey Russell

Members

Councillor Terry Brown
Councillor Henry Caunce
Councillor Michael Davies
Councillor Michael Devaney
Councillor David Dickinson
Councillor Doreen Dickinson
Councillor Daniel Gee
Councillor Patricia Haughton
Councillor Keith Iddon
Councillor Kevin Joyce
Councillor Hasina Khan
Councillor Thomas McGowan
Councillor June Molyneaux
Councillor Michael Muncaster
Councillor Joyce Snape
Councillor 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:

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

The Corporate and Customer Overview and Scrutiny Panel met 7 times during 2007/08.

Scrutiny Inquiry – Efficiency Gains and Absence Management

The start of the Municipal Year saw the Panel commencing its inquiry entitled Efficiency and Absence Management.

At an early stage of the inquiry the Panel agreed to split the inquiry into two, Efficiency Gains and Absence Management each chaired by a Member from the Panel. Each inquiry had its own objectives and delivered outcomes for the inquiry.

Several Officers and Members including the Executive Member made contributions to each inquiry which contributed towards the recommendations.

The Efficiency Gains Inquiry and Absence Management Inquiry each produced recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before being forwarded to the Executive Cabinet for approval.

The Absence Management Review involved external input from South Ribble Borough Council, British Nuclear Fuels and Debit Free Direct (a local company with a similar number of employees for age range). Recommendations from the inquiry include:

- Reporting both long term and short term sickness.
- Implementation of a workplace listener scheme.
- Continuing use of anti-bacterial handwash to promote a safer/healthier workplace.

The Efficiency Gains Inquiry also produced a raft of recommendations including recommending that a strategy be drawn up for how the Council intends to meet the challenging target to reduce the operating costs of the Contact Centre by 25% by 2011.

Monitoring of Inquiry Recommendations

Throughout the year the Panel received reports updating Members on the progress made in implementing the Panel's recommendations from the following inquiries that had taken place the previous year on:

- Decriminalised Parking Enforcement
- Contact Centre Efficiencies and Partnership with Lancashire County Council

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 Monitoring Statements drew Members attention both to areas where performance was on track but importantly also to the areas of the service that have not reached the performance targets with Action Plans formulated containing corrective action to be undertaken to improve performance.

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



Chair
Councillor Greg Morgan

Members

Councillor Nora Ball
Councillor Judith Boothman
Councillor Magda Cullens
Councillor Michael Davies
Councillor Doreen Dickinson
Councillor Anthony Gee
Councillor Cath Hoyle
Councillor Keith Iddon
Councillor Margaret Iddon
Councillor Kevin Joyce
Councillor Roy Lees
Councillor Adrian Lowe
Councillor Marion Lowe
Councillor Michael Muncaster
Councillor Rosemary Russell
Councillor Shaun 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
- Streetscene, Neighbourhoods and Environment

The Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel has met 8 times during the 2007/08 Municipal Year.

Neighbourhood Working – Inquiry

In 2006/07 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had identified Neighbourhood Working as a priority for an inquiry by the Environment and Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Over several months progress reports were submitted to the Panel. A consultant had been appointed to complete a number of tasks as well as presenting and supplying the Council with a number of outputs 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 report 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, with each meeting having a main theme with selected witnesses present to give evidence.

A number of inquiry meetings took place with hearings, interviews and questions on a number of interests from partners such as the Police, registered social landlords, community

organisations, Parish Councils, Active Citizens, local sector organisations and private individuals.

The inquiry ran into the 2007/08 Municipal Year and in July 2007 the Panel received a report on the overview of evidence heard, methods of neighbourhood working including three models of Neighbourhood Management which might be appropriate for Chorley, which had been drawn from the evidence.

On 23 August 2007 a Special meeting of the Panel was arranged to consider the final report into Neighbourhood Working inquiry and receive a presentation from the consultant which pulled together all the evidence that had been collated, with members noting the key factors which had been identified for making Neighbourhood Working a success and those to be avoided.

Three options had been identified – 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 and work in the customer facing Directorate.

The Panel agreed that Option One was not achievable for Chorley and 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.

The final report was submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 November 2007 with the Chair of the Panel presenting the report and putting forward recommendations for the adoption and implementation of a system of neighbourhood working in Chorley.

The Committee was asked to finalise a recommendation from the two potential footprints based on the existing eight boundaries of Neighbourhood Policing Areas and the Lancashire County Council seven electoral divisions.

The Committee agreed that there be eight neighbourhood areas based on the Neighbourhood Policing Areas, and requested the Executive Cabinet give consideration to parishing the non parished areas of Chorley and also to the future of Target Area Partnerships.

The recommendations were submitted to the Executive Cabinet and whilst the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had advocated the creation of eight Neighbourhood Areas based on the Neighbourhood Policing Areas, the Task Group that had been established by the Executive Cabinet recommended the establishment of neighbourhood teams operating within seven Neighbourhood Areas.

The Executive Cabinet approved additional recommendations with the aim of enabling people to feel and be involved in their communities and that services be improved by local influence and delivery.

Chorley Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy

In reviewing an aspect of the Town Centre Strategy members of the Panel were conscious of the need to focus their attention on an area, which would add value in terms of Council priorities but would not duplicate work that may already be carried out by other groups. As a consequence, it was agreed that an inquiry be made into the Chorley Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy which was being carried out by the consultant. This gave Members a good opportunity to work with the consultants and to input into the process, utilising their considerable knowledge of the town.

Presentations took place at the start of the inquiry and on the initial findings of the audit Members visited the St George's area of St Helens town centre where there had been a regeneration of the area resulting in a centre which had utilised European best practice. The site visit enabled those attending to see for themselves the improvements that had been made and how a multi-disciplinary team including environmental professionals and Members can improve the area.

The inquiry is continuing into the 2008/09 Municipal Year with the second stage covering the Town Centre Development Strategy.

Business Plan and Performance Monitoring Reports

The Panel continues to receive the Business Plan Monitoring Statements 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 performance targets.

As for other services Members indicated that the performance target for the processing of invoices within 30 working days had not been reached and that immediate action was required to improve performance as it was considered to be an important indicator reflecting the Council's payments to suppliers etc. The Panel had requested a report to provide an analysis of where and the reasons for the delays, which had caused the fall in the performance targets and whether the system was working across the authority.

Following changes to the process and staff training for key members of staff to be acquainted with the new system there had been a marked improvement in performance.

The Panel over the year also made reference to a continuing problem with Housing Allocation and the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Strategic Housing team had been working hard with Chorley Community Housing to put procedures in place to reduce this, with the Council considering whether it would be advisable to bring the service back in house.

More recently it has been agreed to bring the service back in house which has resulting in a marked fall in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

The Panel continued to examine the performance indicators for the Neighbourhoods Directorate in particular those areas of the service relating to household waste collection services, removal of graffiti and sickness absence.

5. 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 through scrutiny of the Corporate Strategy and a range of challenges to the Executive.
- (b) ensuring that the Council's targets and outturns are achieved and that ensuring performance issues are identified and challenged through regular performance and business plan monitoring.
- (c) the scrutiny of the revenue and capital budgets and the budget proposals for 2008/09.
- (d) the improved delivery of services by a series of recommendations set out in scrutiny reports eg neighbourhood working, sickness absence management.
- (e) ensuring a greater emphasis on member training through the IDeA review of scrutiny.

6. Developing and Improving – taking scrutiny forward in 2008/09

As referred to elsewhere in this report the structure of Overview and Scrutiny in Chorley has changed. It will comprise of an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with the two current scrutiny panels being disbanded. The membership will have 12 Councillors. Task and finish groups will be established to conduct reviews and will comprise four or five Members from the membership of the main Committee but will also include other Council Members (other than Executive Members) who are interested in the topics under scrutiny. Practice has shown that smaller groups tend to work more effectively and this is supported by Members comments. Once the scrutiny work plan has been set for the year all Councillors will be asked to volunteer for any review in which they are particularly interested or keen to participate in.

Task and finish groups undertaking reviews or inquiries will meet fairly frequently with a view to completing reviews and reporting it to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 3 or 4 months depending on the size of the subject under review. Dates have been scheduled in the meetings calendar for the Task and Finish Groups. The first joint scrutiny with South Ribble and Preston has concentrated on one of the Council's key priorities, affordable housing and the other reviews agreed to date are closely aligned to the Council's priorities and the corporate strategy.

Early in the 2008/09 Council year the Scrutiny Toolkit, in with the new structure will be updated and refreshed and submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for approval.

The work programme continues to be based on:

- Issue relating to the Council's priorities.
- Issues of concern to elected members and members of the public.
- Issues not under review by any other body.
- Issues where action can be taken and where 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.

Support for scrutiny comes from all levels including from the Chief Executive and both Assistant Chief Executives on corporate performance and budgetary matters with each review having a lead officer at either director or senior manager level. Research, reporting and meetings support is provided by the Head of Democratic Services and the Democratic Services Officers. All Members can seek advice and guidance including research and analysis on scrutiny inquiries from the Democratic Services team.

Information regarding each Inquiry report and their recommendations as well as Agendas and reports 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 Banks).