

SCRUTINY

Rossendale Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Annual Report 2007/08

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INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR



Welcome to Rossendale Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/08.

The last 12 months have been both challenging and exciting for the Council. The non-political function of overview and scrutiny has continued to develop in its role to challenge decisions, inform Council policy and react to issues of public concern by bringing controversial matters into an open forum.

Overview and Scrutiny is sometimes described as a 'critical friend' but like any other friendships there can be 'ups and downs' and it is therefore vital to develop and maintain a positive relationship with everyone within the Council, as well as external organisations. Overview and Scrutiny makes every effort to strengthen its relationships internally within the Council and externally with stakeholders and the public.

At our Neighbourhood Forums in March we asked the public to tell us of any issues they would like Overview and Scrutiny to look at over the next 12 months and from this we will formulate our Work Plan for 2008/09.

In November 2007, Rossendale

Borough Council hosted the Lancashire Scrutiny Partners Forum. More information is included later in this report.

Thanks

I would like to thank all members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees for the contributions they have made, together with support from the co-opted members.

I would also like to give special thanks to the chairs of the Audit Scrutiny and the Policy Scrutiny Committees, Councillors Darryl Smith and Anne Cheetham for their support.

I would like to thank Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer and Heather Moore, Committee and Member Services Manager who have provided tremendous support to all Members over the last 12 months and Carolyn Law, Committee Services Officer who joined the team in October 2007.

My thanks are also extended to Portfolio Holders and the 'critical friend' relationship that has developed and will continue to do so over the next year.

Councillor Gladys Sandiford
(Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Performance Scrutiny Committee)

Membership of the Committees

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Membership

Gladys Sandiford (Chair)
Lynda Barnes
Colin Crawforth
June Forshaw
Christine Lamb
Granville Morris
Duncan Ruddick
Bernard Divine (Co-opted Member)

The Committee received reports on the Council's Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs). Following the report, the Portfolio Holder together with the Head of Service for any underachieving service area were invited to meet with the Committee to provide an explanation for their underachieving targets and to seek information on how they intended to improve their service. The Performance Scrutiny Committee received reports on the following.

- Performance of Rossendale Leisure Trust
- Performance of the Local Strategic Partnership
- Equalities
- Sickness Absence
- Green Vale Homes
- Housing Strategy Action Plan
- Housing Benefit and Council Tax Services
- Community Leadership Action Plan
- Environment Strategy and Action Plan
- Ombudsman Report

Comments from the Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council, Councillor Brian Essex



"It is without question that the scrutiny function at Rossendale Borough Council is recognised as both robust and successful. The recognition is not just at a local level but has spread and now others come to Rossendale to see how a good local authority works. Word has got around!

In 2007 the Council underwent the most thorough examination of its services to date and was judged by inspectors to have undergone a radical transformation. The accolade 'good council' was awarded and the Overview and Scrutiny function contributed to this transformation.

Members of the Cabinet have undergone tough questioning throughout the year and the Council's performance has been closely monitored. Most policies are referred to Overview and Scrutiny before decisions are made. The process is both robust and transparent with meetings being held in public, to ensure that the best decisions are made in order to continually improve public confidence in the Council."

AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Membership

Darryl Smith (Chair)

Tom Aldred

Jimmy Eaton

David Hancock

Stuart Pawson

Joyce Thorne

Trevor Unsworth

Bernadette O'Connor (Co-opted Member)

The following reports were presented to the Committee over the last 12 months.

- External Audit Plan
- Audit Commission Annual Audit and Inspection Letter
- Internal Audit Annual Report
- Internal Audit Plan
- Code of Conduct for Members
- Corporate Governance
- Risk Management
- Quarterly Progress Reports

The number of hours forecast by the Auditors has run according to plan and several areas within the Council have benefited from improved procedures following review from the Audit team, all of which have been reported back to the Committee.

Comments from the Chair of the Audit Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Darryl Smith



“Audit Scrutiny has undergone a steep learning curve during the last municipal year, with an all new committee

membership and with myself as the new Chair of the Committee.

It has been an interesting time with some informative training sessions provided by our internal Audit team from Lancashire County Council.

We have worked closely with the Standards Committee during this last municipal year and have looked at issues such as managing risk.

Audit Scrutiny has developed well over the year and has contributed to the overall Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.”

The Committee would like to thank the Audit Commission and the Internal Audit Service for their contributions over the past year.

We are also looking forward to building on the good relationship we have with the Standards Committee.

Councillor Darryl Smith

POLICY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Membership

A Cheetham (Chair)
Pat Dickinson
Tina Durkin
Amanda Hewlett
Fred Lynskey
Catherine Pilling
Peter Steen

The Committee has given its views on 11 key documents over the last 12 months which are as follows.

- Sports & Physical Activity Alliance Strategy
- Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy
- Supported Housing Strategy
- Area Plan Update
- Homelessness Strategy
- Interim Housing Policy Statement
- Environment Policy
- Planning Scheme of Delegation
- Locality Plan
- Open Spaces and Play Equipment Contributions
- Alteration and Extensions to Residential Properties

Comments from the Chair of the Policy Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Anne Cheetham



"I have thoroughly enjoyed my first few months as Chair of the Committee and found Overview and Scrutiny to be inspiring and rewarding.

Members of the Policy Scrutiny Committee have started to grow in confidence and have made a real difference to the development of the new policies through its 'critical friend' approach.

I would like to thank Officers for their contributions and hope that the Policy Scrutiny Committee will continue to help develop Council policies.

Councillor Anne Cheetham

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee comprised every Member of the three Scrutiny Committees and met bi-monthly to receive updates from the Policy, Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees. This Committee also received reports from the Task and Finish Groups and made recommendations to be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration.

At these meetings external organisations were invited to come along to talk about their work. Over the last 12 months we have received presentations from the following.

- Accrington and Rossendale College
- East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust
- Rossendale Climate Change Group
- Discussion with Patient and Public Involvement Representatives on the Making it Better consultation.

RESPONDING TO CONSULTATIONS

Over the last 12 months innovative response groups have been set up to look at specific consultation documents as follows. These have been recognised as an area of good practice by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the County Council have visited the Authority to find out more.

- Independent Reconfiguration Panel Reviews
- Changes to Social Care for Adults
- Post Office Network
- East Lancs Hospital Foundation Trust Status
- Councillor Call for Action and Petitions
- Local Involvement Networks (LINKs)
- Improving Health Care and Community Services in the Rossendale Valley

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TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

Task and Finish Groups are groups that undertake a specific piece of work for a short period of time, produce a report and then end.

All Members have been very busy taking part in various Task and Finish Groups over the last twelve months, with some very positive outcomes.

Car Parking in the Borough

The Task and Finish Group were asked by the Cabinet to continue to look at other aspects of car parking throughout the Borough, including additional disabled spaces.

The Group identified which car parks should be long stay or short stay.

At its meeting in December the Traffic and Parking Manager updated the meeting on the current position in relation to Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO). There was a 28-day objection period for the TRO with implementation anticipated for the end of January/beginning of February 2008.

It was agreed that the work of scrutiny was now complete and the meeting would be re-designated as the 'Car Parking Group' to look at longer term projects.

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Litter Bins Task and Finish Group

In last year's annual report it was noted that the work of this group had completed and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group was to discuss with Neighbourhood Environment Action Team Managers how to progress implementation of the recommendations.

It was agreed that there was a need for uniformity of bins throughout the Borough and any bins in need of replacement would be replaced, where possible with free standing bins. The style and type of bin was agreed and would be used throughout the Borough.

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Review of Polling Stations Task and Finish Group

As every Council in England and Wales had to undertake a complete review of all the polling station districts and polling places in its area by 31 December 2007, it was agreed to continue this piece of work and look at the initial findings of the review.

The Elections Manager presented the findings indicating that some changes to Polling Stations were being proposed as part of the review and she highlighted that the decision relating to Polling Stations was with the Returning Officer.

The Task and Finish Group met to consider the proposals and all elected members were asked to feed their comments through to members of the Task and Finish Group.

The final report which outlined the proposed changes to Polling Districts and Polling Places in order to comply with the Electoral Administration Act 2006, which was first presented to Council in November, was discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. Their findings were sent to the Returning Officer for consideration.

The Returning Officer met with elected Members to discuss the proposals in more detail.

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Enforcement Task and Finish Group

The Task and Finish Group met only once during the year, due to various influences on the enforcement policy arising from developments in Government policy, which impacted on the Council's Enforcement Policy. A further meeting is planned for 2008/09.

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Ring and Ride Task and Finish Group

This group had been convened in response to a number of complaints received from members of the public

about the ring and ride service provided by Lancashire County Council.

A report had been produced by Lancashire County Council for Lancashire Local Rossendale, which addressed new measures to resolve the issues with the current County Rider Service and this report identified how the new proposed service would be addressed.

The Task and Finish Group met with Officers from Lancashire County Council who gave a brief overview of the service.

The County Rider is funded by Lancashire County Council and the Countryside Agency, and is operated by Rossendale Transport. There is also an additional set of services funded by Lancashire County Council and operated by Rossendale Transport. These additional services are to areas which are off the main bus route, but that may be difficult to reach.

The new proposals were presented to Lancashire Local in April and it was proposed that the Task and Finish Group review the service in six months.

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Road Safety Task and Finish Group

This Group first met in February to establish what was happening throughout the Borough in relation to Road Safety and what the long terms plans were for Rossendale.

Officers had been invited to present information on a number of areas of work which were going ahead in the Borough, including School Travel Plans and zig-zag lines outside Schools.

The Group were also given information on the process used by Lancashire County Council for prioritising issues, ie traffic calming.

This Task and Finish Group are continuing their work into the 2008/09 work plan and will present their final report to Lancashire Local Rossendale.

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Public Conveniences Task and Finish Group

This Task and Finish Group completed its work and presented its final report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2008.

To ascertain the views of the public a press release was published and a questionnaire was produced which was circulated at the Neighbourhood Forums and also by Elected Members. The questionnaire was also available to download on the Council's website as well as being available in local libraries. There was also consultation with specific groups including Age Concern, Help the Aged and toddler groups within the Borough

Site visits were also undertaken to the facilities.

The recommendations of the Task and Finish Group are to be considered by the Cabinet in June. Their decision will be published in the September Scrutiny Bulletin.

A SUMMARY OF HOW SCRUTINY HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE

- Identified car parks to be designated as short stay and long stay.

- A litter bin replacement programme throughout the Borough is being implemented and new bins are now starting to be rolled out throughout the Borough
- Continued monitoring of the County Rider Service to ensure continued improvements for the people of Rossendale.
- Worked with the Chief Executive and Elections Manager to look at siting of polling stations throughout the Borough

We are keeping our fingers crossed in hope of the Cabinet accepting at least some, if not all, of our recommendations of the Public Conveniences Task and Finish Group.

JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEWS

Lancashire County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee invited district councils in Lancashire to participate in two joint scrutiny reviews.

Councillor Anne Cheetham was the Council's representative on the Extra Care Housing in Lancashire review which was asked

- To consider why the level of provision of Extra Care Housing in Lancashire is falling behind need and why there are issues with the planning process and a lack of support from the Housing Corporation with a view to making recommendations to the Communities and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee and, if appropriate, to the Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services.

Councillor Lynda Barnes was the Council's representative on the Council Tax on Second Homes Scrutiny Review Group, which was

- To review the existing protocol between the County and Districts on the spending of Council Tax on Second Homes
- To review the extent to which spending is contributing to sustainable community strategy objectives
- To consider the impact of alternative models for the governance of spending Council Tax on Second Homes proceeds.

These joint scrutiny reviews will continue to meet and further information will be available in a future Scrutiny bulletin.

LANCASHIRE SCRUTINY PARTNERS FORUM

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, along with the Scrutiny Support Officer regularly attend the Lancashire Scrutiny Partners Forum which provides the opportunity to:

- share examples of good practice
- consider issues affecting scrutiny regionally and nationally
- promote the role of scrutiny in the council and beyond.

In November 2007, Rossendale Borough Council hosted the Lancashire Scrutiny Partners Forum at Haslingden Community Link. The topic chosen was 'Community Engagement'.

This was attended by nearly 30

Councillors and Officers from across Lancashire.

The Committee and Member Services Manager and the Scrutiny Support Officer gave a presentation on the role of Scrutiny within Rossendale as well as an outline of the Council's Community Engagement Strategy and how this was implemented in Rossendale.

Councillor Essex, Portfolio Holder for a Well Managed Council came along to the meeting to answer questions.

Feedback received from this event was very positive and some of the Council's ideas were taken forward by other authorities.



Councillors and Officers at the Lancashire Scrutiny Forum meeting in November, hosted by Rossendale Borough Council in November 2007.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY CHAIRS NETWORK MEETING

The Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees attend the Chair's Network Meetings on a quarterly basis supported by North West Employees Organisation.

This is a shared working event which is attended mainly by Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny from the North West, although Officers are invited.

This networking event provides the opportunity to update everyone on new legislation as well as share ideas of good practice.

CALL IN

One Cabinet decision was 'called-in for Scrutiny in 2007/08, which was to consider a Cabinet Decision in relation to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Annual Licence and Fees.

Call-ins have a very important role to play in terms of democratic accountability. As part of the Council's commitment to continually improve the call-in, procedures are currently being reviewed by the Monitoring Officer following feedback received from Members and Officers during the last call-in.

NEW POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS – THE WAY FORWARD

An election in May 2008 will bring new Members to the Council and new structures of working for Overview and Scrutiny will follow. Saying all this, Overview and Scrutiny will continue to build on the work it has already established within the Council.

In March 2008 the Council agreed a new way of working in light of the revised Governance Standards 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government', which was published last Summer..

As a result, the Audit Scrutiny Committee will now be an Audit Committee and independent of the Council's scrutiny arrangements.

The remaining elements of Overview and Scrutiny were reviewed as a result of this change and the Management

Committee has now been disestablished and the work of Overview and Scrutiny will be co-ordinated through meetings of the Chairs and two representatives of those political groups which do not hold Chairs. This will be known as the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and minutes will be published.

The Board will co-ordinate and oversee the work of the two Committees and the Task and Finish Groups.

It was also agreed that no more than two Task and Finish Groups operate at any one time, to enable them to be effectively supported. The Scrutiny Management Board will agree the Terms of Reference and project plan before the work commences.

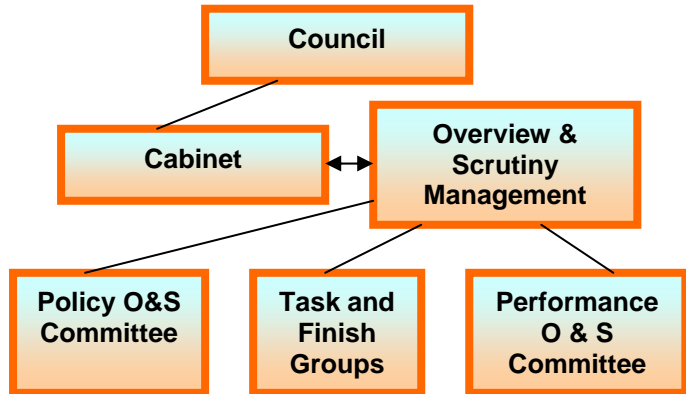
As explained earlier in the report, new legislation was to be introduced - A Councillor Call for Action, whereby any councillor would be able to refer a local matter affecting his or her ward to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. We are currently waiting for further information on this.

In relation to call-ins, a panel of 5 politically balanced members would look at any call-in. Arrangements are being finalised and Full Council will consider a report in June.

The Overview and Scrutiny function remains focussed and committed to developing further and with the increasing role of Scrutiny within the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, this is going to be an incredibly busy year for everyone involved in Overview and Scrutiny within the Council.

THE FUTURE

Below is a table which illustrates how overview and scrutiny will look.



**DATES OF MEETINGS FOR 2008/09
(these could be subject to change)
Please see the Council's website.**

Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8 July 2008
2 September 2008
5 November 2008
13 January 2009
10 March 2009

Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee will this year be designating 4 meetings specifically to look at the Performance Reports.

19 June 2008 - **Performance report**
29 July 2008
4 September 2008 - **Performance report**
16 October 2008
20 November 2008 - **Performance report**
22 January 2009
17 February 2009 - **Performance report**
12 March 2008

Have Your Say!

The Performance and Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are held in public and you are welcome to attend.

At each meeting, there will be a public question time, where you are able to ask a question of the committee.

Scrutiny can't consider

- Individual complaints
- Individual issues about members of staff
- An individual's planning or licensing application

There is also a scrutiny form available on the Council's website to complete if you have an issue or concern that you would like scrutiny to investigate.

For further information or assistance, please contact Heather Moore, Committee and Member Services Manager on 01706 252423 or Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer on 01706 252426 or email democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk