

Report of:	Meeting	Date	Item No.
The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Director of Resources	Council	26 July 2012	16

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2011/12
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees during 2011/12 to the Full Council.

2. Outcomes

- 2.1 An effective overview and scrutiny function that adds value to the council's decision-making process.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the positive contribution of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and task groups to the work of the Council during 2011/12 be acknowledged.
- 3.2 That the report be noted.

4. Background

- 4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has completed an agreed Work Programme over the past year.

5. Key Issues and Proposals

- 5.1 In addition to the work of the Committees, a number of Task Groups have carried out focused reviews, which have resulted in recommendations being made to Cabinet. Consultations on proposed police station closures and the proposed closure of a household waste recycling centre near Garstang have also been completed and submitted, on behalf of the Council, to the appropriate authorities.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	None arising from this report.
Legal	None arising from this report.
Community Safety	None arising from this report.
Equality and Diversity	None arising from this report.
Sustainability	None arising from this report.
Health and Safety	None arising from this report.
Risk Management	None arising from this report.
Asset Management	None arising from this report.
Climate Change	None arising from this report.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2011/2012

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Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2011/12

1. Chairman's Foreword

"I am pleased to present this Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report to Council for their consideration.

We had a definite vision when the Committee started in May 2011. It was to be inclusive of all members and all the issues we considered at our meetings should add value to the Council's performance and should be within the Business Plan.

You will see from the report that we have covered many topics, some of which are statutory, and some of which were requested and suggested by councillors.

The Committee has worked well together and there has been great consensus between us. I feel that we have come a long way in fulfilling our objectives.

I should like to thank not only the Committee but also Peter Foulsham and Philippa Davies and other officers and members who have attended our meetings and contributed to discussions."

Cllr May Gandhi, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2. Introduction

- 2.1** Whilst Wyre Council had previously operated an Overview and Scrutiny structure with three Overview and Scrutiny Watchdog Committees, the decision was taken at the Annual Meeting on 20 May 2011 that with immediate effect there would be just one Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee with a remit to manage the O&S Work Programme and, in particular, to commission task groups on agreed topics.

The committee would be made up of fourteen elected members and the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings was reduced from fifteen to eleven per annum.

- 2.2 In accordance with the decision to reduce the number of O&S Committees and recognising the need to achieve significant efficiency savings, the number of Scrutiny Officers was reduced in September 2011 from two to one.

3. Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 3.1 Revised Terms of Reference and O&S Procedure Rules were agreed at Council on 9 June 2011, reflecting the structural change. Within the revised Terms of Reference it was clearly stated that scrutiny should “make a positive contribution to the improvement of services” and that has become a guiding statement for scrutiny in Wyre.

- 3.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2011-12 comprised the following councillors:

<i>May Gandhi (Chairman)</i>	<i>Lesley McKay</i>
<i>Vivien Taylor (Vice Chairman)</i>	<i>Penny Martin</i>
<i>Julia Anderson</i>	<i>Sue Pimbley</i>
<i>Graeme Cocker</i>	<i>Ron Shewan</i>
<i>John Hodgkinson</i>	<i>Ann Turner</i>
<i>Terry Lees</i>	<i>David Walmsley</i>
<i>Don MacNaughton</i>	<i>David Williams</i>

- 3.3 The committee has placed emphasis on the following during the year:

1. Holding the Executive to account
 - all members of the Cabinet have appeared at O&S meetings regarding their portfolios
 - the one Call In received was unanimously supported by the Committee
2. Performance – receiving the Quarterly Performance Statement
3. Managing the O&S Work Programme

4. Task Groups

4.1 Police Station Closures – Consultation

This task group considered the likely impact of proposed police station closures on the residents of Wyre. It considered the financial implications of the proposed closures and weighed these up against the impact that the closures would have on things like policing methods, response times and public perceptions.

Ten recommendations were made to the Lancashire Police Authority, which had been supported by Full Council at their meeting on 8 September 2011. Included in the recommendations were proposals that the police should consider sharing premises with other organisations and using volunteers in limited circumstances, in order to maintain a high quality service despite the planned closures.

4.2 Household Waste Recycling Centre – Consultation

Lancashire County Council consulted on their proposed closures of Household Waste Recycling Centres, including one near Garstang.

A group of councillors met to consider the impact of the proposed closure on local residents.

There had been a very strong reaction from residents, local town and parish councils and Ward Councillors against the proposed closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) near Garstang.

The Scrutiny Working Group identified many issues of concern including the extra waste Wyre Council will be expected to gather and the waste that it cannot gather such as wood, rubble, hard plastic and hazardous waste. There was concern about the impact this may have on fly tipping and increased tonnage of waste for the council to collect and dispose of.

In many instances residents were being asked to more than double their journey to take waste to the nearest HWRC.

The Council, at its meeting on 8 September 2011, supported the response to the consultation, which was summarised in the statement:

“Wyre Council strongly supports its residents in opposing the proposed closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centre near Garstang”.

4.3 Budget Task Group

Scrutiny members contributed to the council’s budget-setting process by considering proposals for fees and charges 2012/13 and for two capital growth bids.

For fees and charges the task group proposed that the CPI for September 2011 be used when considering the increase to be applied on this occasion and for each successive year hereafter. The CPI for September 2011 was 5.2%.

The task group expressed broad support for both capital growth bids received.

4.4 Treasury Management Task Group

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA's) Treasury Management Code of Practice 2009 requires councils to nominate a body to undertake scrutiny of its treasury management policy, strategy and practices. In Wyre it was agreed that this would be undertaken by a task group of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which was convened in November 2011.

The Code also recommends that members taking part in treasury management scrutiny are appropriately trained in what is a very complex and technical subject. In addition to two Cabinet members, four back bench councillors attended a training event, three of whom were part of the task group.

It was noted by the task group that treasury management scrutiny had not been carried out in Wyre before. There were also very few other councils that had addressed the issue, so the opportunity to learn from others was not available. Members took the view that they would use this review as a learning exercise, which was likely to identify areas for improvement in subsequent years.

Two recommendations were made by the task group and agreed at Cabinet on 18 January 2012 :

- 1 That the potential to participate in the Sector Treasury Services benchmarking group be explored
- 2 That the findings following the Treasury Management audit be provided as supporting information in advance of the next scrutiny review

4.5 Street Cleansing Task Group

This task group was set up in July 2011 in the knowledge that street cleaning would be brought back in-house on 1 April 2012. The group had the following objectives:

- To consider existing locations and frequency of street cleansing.
- To identify specific areas within Wards requiring street cleansing.
- To identify how frequently areas require street cleansing.
- To aid the development of the new service specification by feeding in the findings of the task group.
- To consider the costs involved in the proposals.

The task group reported to Cabinet on 14 March 2012, making eight recommendations, all of which were agreed, about how the service will operate.

The implementation of the new arrangements will be reviewed by one further meeting of the task group in October 2012.

4.6 Transport Infrastructure Task Group

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned this task group, which began its work in September 2012, to

“Review the way in which key partners work with the Council, to identify the obstacles that prevent effective engagement/partnership working and identify opportunities for improvements.”

The task group invited a wide range of key partners to meet with members, including Lancashire County Council, the Highways Agency, Network Rail, bus and tram companies and the Poulton and Wyre railway Society.

Fifteen wide-ranging recommendations were made to Cabinet in April 2012. Further work was requested to be carried out in regard to several of the recommendations, which will be re-submitted to Cabinet in due course.

4.7 Other task groups

Two task groups are currently on-going, one looking at attitudes towards affordable housing and the other carrying out a ‘value for money’ review of the tourism service. Both task groups are likely to report their findings during the summer.

5. Reflections

5.1 The New Structure

The single-committee structure has operated for one year now. There is general support for the structure as it now is.

The committee meets monthly (with the exception of August) and this has proved to be appropriate in terms of the business that it has had to deal with. There was a view taken very early on that monthly meetings might be appropriate to begin with but they might become less frequent in time. However, this has not been the case to date, and monthly meetings are also planned for 2012-13.

5.2 O&S Work Programme

Task Groups have been agreed and commissioned by the O&S Committee. However, there remains a degree of uncertainty, with some associated tensions, about the input of the Corporate Management Team and the Executive in the commissioning of task group work. Scrutiny councillors recognise that their work should contribute

positively to the council's Business Plan, and should make a positive contribution to the improvement of services, and for that reason consultation with the Corporate Management Team and the Executive is appropriate, indeed essential. Ultimately however, scrutiny members are of the opinion that, whilst seeking and taking advice from others, the final decision about whether to undertake a review is theirs.

Related to this is the method by which the annual O&S Work Programme is compiled, which requires constant review. Bearing in mind the increasing emphasis on localism and neighbourhood engagement it is hoped that this new 'agenda' will play an active part in identifying and prioritising topics for scrutiny review in the future.

Proposals for task groups and for work to be included in the O&S Work programme have not been particularly numerous over the past twelve months and this is an area that scrutiny members, in the widest sense, could seek to improve during 2012-13.

5.3 Task Groups in Public

Following previous debate about whether or not task groups should be held in public, revised Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules were agreed at Council in June 2011. They included, at paragraph 3.5,

"Each Task and Finish Group will decide whether its meetings will be held in public or in private."

Since June 2011 a number of task groups have taken the decision to hold their meetings in public, including Street Cleansing, Budget, Tourism and Affordable Housing. During that period a number of members of the public have attended meetings and have made valuable contributions.

5.4 Involving Non-Executive Members

Comparative statistics relating to member involvement in task groups show a significant difference in performance in 2011/12 from 2010/11, as detailed in the table below.

One year ago it was reported that the number of non-Executive members involved in scrutiny was quite low. That number has increased in 2011/12 by 45%, and now represents two-thirds of the non-executive councillors. The 32 non-executive members involved include 25 Conservative and 7 Labour Group members.

Over the past year, possibly as a result of there being only one committee in the new structure, task groups have been bigger, on the whole. Six task groups/consultations have had ten or more members, which is larger than might usually be the case.

	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012
Number of task groups	7	8
Total number of councillors involved in task groups	22	32
Average number of councillors on a task group	10	11
Total number of task group meetings held	32	34
Councillor attendance rate	70.2%	70.6%

Table showing councillor involvement in task groups in 2011/12

5.5 Final comment

With the government's increased emphasis on localism there is a growing role for scrutiny in ensuring that councils are delivering the services that local residents require. High public expectations of accountability and transparency mean that the role of scrutiny remains crucial in ensuring that the council takes the best decisions in the interests of its council tax payers – that scrutiny makes a positive contribution to the improvement of services.

6. Contact information

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6.2 Website

You can access information about overview and scrutiny in Wyre [HERE](#).

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