

Report from Overview and Scrutiny

Lead Members: Cllr R Salkeld, Mrs Y R T Clarkson, P Connolly,
Mrs W Metherell

Lead officer: T Capper

June to August 2007

Since Overview and Scrutiny last reported:

1. Joint Working Group on the Local Area Agreement

A Joint Working Group organised by Cumbria County Council with representatives from the County Council, Carlisle, South Lakeland and Copeland (Councillor Mrs Y R T Clarkson) met on 3 July.

The Group considered how the Local Area Agreement could be effectively scrutinised and agreed that a practical joint workshop be held on Friday 21 September 2007 which will develop the key issues raised at the 3 July meeting.

2. Energy Review Sub Group

The Energy Review Sub Group that was set up by the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 13 June 2007 has now met four times.

It has heard evidence from:

Alex McKenzie, Cumbria County Council's Sustainability Manager, on the scientific case for climate change and what plans the County Council had for dealing with this issue.

Keith Parker, Head of Leisure and Environmental Services. on the council's fleet procurement contract.

John Hughes, Regeneration Strategy Manager, on the Council's planning policies that dealt with renewable energy and energy conservation and travel to work plans.

Suzanne Burgess, Carlisle and County Energy Efficiency Advice Centre, on the work that it does and could do in Copeland to improve energy efficiency.

The Sub Group also visited St Gregory's and St Patrick's Catholic Infant School in Whitehaven to look at its use of renewable energy.

The Sub Group has two more evidence sessions and a site visit before it reports its recommendations back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October.

3. Community Legal Service

The Community Legal Service Sub Group that was set up by the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 13 June 2007 has now met and completed its work.

It heard evidence from:

Martin Jepson, Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Karen Corby, Revenues and Benefits Service Manager
Debbie Cochrane, Housing Policy Manager (written evidence)
Paul im Thurn, Community Legal Centre
Carol Graham, Copeland Citizens Advice Bureau

The Sub Group also visited the Citizens Advice Bureau Offices in Tangiers Street, Whitehaven.

The Sub Group's recommendations will be considered by the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 15 August 2007. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will then make its recommendations on to the Executive.

4. Customer Service Commitments

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered the results of a Customer Commitments Survey commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Performance and Resources in November 2006. The survey and a mystery shopping exercise measured the Council's performance against the Council's Customer Service Commitments.

The results of the survey showed that the Commitments were important to the Council's customers and therefore should be retained.

The Committee considered options to improve the Council's performance against the targets set out within the Council's customer services commitments. The options included communication to all employees to remind them of the Commitments and the development of an IT system which would automatically record correspondence received and issue reminders when responses were due. It was hoped that this would improve the process for correspondence received by e-mail and letter.

The Committee considered that a survey should be undertaken every six months to ensure that the Council's performance against the Customer Service Commitments was being regularly measured.

The Committee further considered that the survey results did not indicate any geographical distribution and requested the officers to ensure that in future surveys also show the results by postcode area.

The Committee agreed that:

- a) the results of the Commitments Survey are published accordingly,
- b) the options to improve customer services detailed in the conclusion to the report be introduced across the Council,
- c) a survey be undertaken every six months to measure the council's performance against the Customer Services Commitments and the Executive be asked to find ways to fund these,
- d) Further reports be submitted to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee as solutions detailed in the conclusion are being developed, and
- e) in future the results of surveys undertaken by the Council are also shown by postcode.

These recommendations will be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 7 August 2007.

5. Compliments Monitoring

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered summaries of the compliments, comments and complaints received by the Council for October 2006 to March 2007.

The Committee noted that in 2006/07 there had been 106 complaints investigated through the Council's Comments, Compliments and Complaints procedure which was a significant reduction on the 173 recorded in 2005/06.

The Committee further noted that these figures do not include anonymous complaints, complaints about Councillors, complaints about a Policy and initial requests for a service. Neither did they include complaints dealt with by the department which they have not subsequently reported to the Customer Relations Officer for monitoring and recording purposes.

The Committee agreed that all Managers be encouraged/reminded to record and feedback details of complaints received by the Customer Relations Officer for monitoring and reporting purposes.

6. Work Plan

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered the work plans of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Committee agreed that as the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees followed the terms of reference of the thematic groups of the Local Area

Agreement it would be appropriate for the Council's representatives on these groups to be the respective Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee noted that the IT Sub Group had recently met and agreed that it would like an additional member from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to be on the sub group. The Committee agreed that this should be Councillor Mrs W Metherell and that Councillor D Wilson should replace Councillor A Bradshaw on the sub group.

The Committee further noted that the Planning Appeals task and finish Group was now short of one member and agreed that Councillor P Connolly should replace Councillor A Bradshaw on the group.

7. Urgent Actions – Scoping

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered a scoping report into the council's urgent actions procedure.

The report included the Council's current procedures for Urgent Actions, the procedures of other authorities and urgent actions taken in 2006/07. The Committee agreed that the terms of reference for the review should be to:

- 1) ensure that the process used is prompt, transparent and accountable and is understood by Members and Officers alike; and
- 2) ensure that the process is running correctly and achieves its aims.

The Committee further agreed that the Management Committee itself should undertake this review at its next meeting on 10 August 2007.

8. Call In

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee met on 13 July and 16 July to consider a call-in of the Executive's decision of 11 July 2007 on the Funding for New Post – PA to Leader and Deputies.

It heard evidence from:

Liam Murphy, Chief Executive
Tim Capper, Democratic Services Manager
Councillor Elaine Woodburn, Leader of the Council
Sue Bamforth, Head of Finance and Business Development
Len Glead, Human Resources Manager

The recommendations of the Management Committee were that:

1. The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses for their helpful evidence and for their time at short notice. The Committee gained a much better understanding of the amount of work that is done by the Leader on behalf of the Council.

2. The Committee unanimously agreed that, on the evidence before them, there was a definite need for a post of Personal Assistant to the Leader and the Deputy Leaders. The Committee would like the post to be advertised immediately.
3. The Committee found the information on the proposed roles of the Deputy Leaders very useful and would like this information to be sent to all members of the council for their information.
4. The Committee, whilst noting that there was no funds available at the time, were however concerned by the use of contingencies to fund the post and would have preferred that the post had been funded through the Council's normal budgetary process.
5. The Committee would like officers to explore the possibility of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority funding some of the work the Leader of the Council does on the closure of Sellafield.
6. The Committee would like to see in future the Human Resources Department being fully involved in all job reviews and that when reported to the Personnel Panel that the job review include the job description and a full analysis of the need for the post.
7. The Committee would also like to see a report submitted to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the use of contingencies.

These recommendations will be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 7 August 2007.

9. Planning Appeals Task and Finish Group

The Planning Appeals Task and Finish Group that was set up by the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 11 June 2007 has now met and completed its work.

It heard evidence from:

Tony Pomfret, Development Services Manager
Martin Jepson, Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Councillor Mike McVeigh, Chairman of the Planning Panel

The Task and Finish Group also observed the Planning Panel meeting on 25 July and attended a site visit for a planning permission at Cross House Farm, Millom.

The Task and Finish Group's recommendations will be considered by the Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its

meeting on 13 August 2007. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will then make its recommendations on to the Planning Panel.

10. Enforcement Services Performance Sub Group

The Enforcement Services Performance Sub Group that was set up by the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 13 June 2007 has now met twice.

This Sub Group is scheduled to meet monthly to ensure that regular monitoring of performance against the projected targets for the enforcement unit is achieved.

The notes of the first two meetings of the Sub Group will be considered by the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 15 August 2007.

11. Training

A number of dates are currently being explored in October and November for a half day joint training session with the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee. The purpose of the training would be to get a better understanding of each other roles as well as improving the working relationship and efficiency of both bodies. One outcome from the training could be the production of a working protocol between the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

A similar half day joint training session with the Council's senior officers is also being arranged with the aim of achieving a better understanding and relationship between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Council's senior officers.

The Children, Young People and Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Communities have requested a training session on the Community Call for Action. A date in early October is being sought for this training.