

**Report from Overview and Scrutiny**

Lead Members: Councillors P Connolly, Mrs Y R T Clarkson, J Kane, Mrs W Metherell

Lead Officer: T Capper, Head of Democratic Services

April and May 2008

Since Overview and Scrutiny last reported:

**1. Haverigg Prison**

The Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report from Councillor Pitt that highlighted the benefits of housing prisoners closer to their home environments.

Councillor Pitt further highlighted that:

- HM Prison Haverigg, is the only prison in Cumbria and is currently housing up to 623 adult male prisoners classified at Category C.
- as at January 2008, there were 400 sentenced men and 200 sentenced women from Cumbria within the prison system.
- HM Prison Haverigg's current population contained only one sixth of its prisoners from within Cumbria.
- The vast majority of prisoners from Cumbria are imprisoned outside of fifty miles from home, thus making visiting for family members difficult.
- Prisoners who maintain contact with their families are six times less likely to re-offend.

The Committee agreed that the County Council and the other District/Borough Councils across Cumbria be asked for their support for the principle of making HM Prison Haverigg a community prison.

Following this support would also be sought from the Inspector General of Prisons, the Director of the International Centre for Prison Studies and the Director of the Prison Reform Trust before petitioning the Home Secretary.

**2. Youth Facilities in Whitehaven**

The Children, Young People and Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from Mr M Mills, Project Manager, Whitehaven Youth Project.

The Committee were provided with an overview of the work of the Whitehaven Youth Project who were shortly to move from Pears House to new premises at the Lonsdale Centre.

The Whitehaven Youth project worked in partnership with many agencies including Connexions, Fast Forward, Cumbria Youth Alliance and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme for the benefit of young people mainly between the ages of 11 and 18 years.

The Committee was also advised that the activities run by the project included outdoor activities (eg Camping Trips), Charitable Works, projects within the Community and having fun in safety.

Following a question and answer session, Members were further advised of the project's plans for the future; that schools put forward individuals and groups for activities; and that 720 young people from all parts of Copeland and Allerdale had participated in the project's activities so far this year.

Mr Mills was thanked for his presentation and the Committee agreed to take up his invitation to visit the Lonsdale Centre after the Whitehaven Youth Project had settled in, to see their work in action.

### **3. Big Lottery Play Initiative Programme**

The Children, Young People and Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report from the Open Spaces Manager on the Big Lottery Play Initiative Programme.

Members were advised why some schemes did not proceed and of the Big Lottery criteria which had to be used when assessing the bids. Members were also advised that the work undertaken in this programme had identified areas to be looked at should further funding or funding from other sources become available.

Broader issues relating to the youth in Copeland were raised and it was suggested that this issue be further considered at a future meeting, in particular, how the Youth Council could be a way of providing a stronger voice for this purpose.

### **4. Green Space Strategy**

The Children, Young People and Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an overview of the draft Green Space Strategy from the Open Spaces Manager.

Members commented that the Parks department provides a good service in the North of Copeland and they were thanked for their hard work.

It was also suggested that the Green Space Strategy be added as part of the Local Development Framework.

The Committee agreed that the draft Green Space Strategy be forwarded to the Executive with a recommendation to adopt and implement and it be added as part of the Local Development Framework.

## **5. Concessionary Fares**

The Children, Young People and Healthy Communities Committee were updated by the Council's Interim Accountancy Services Manager on the Government's new Concessionary Travel Scheme which came into force on 1 April 2008 and guarantees free off-peak local bus travel anywhere in England for people resident in England, aged 60 and over, and eligible disabled people.

As the Council's representative on the Cumbria and Lancashire Concessionary Travel Group, the Interim Accountancy Services Manager advised Members of the Council's discretionary scheme and of the application and processing deadlines – that have all been met.

Members thanked the Finance department's staff for their hard work and for being one of only two areas nationally to have met the implementation deadlines.

It was requested that monthly charging reports from the local bus operator, Stagecoach, be bought to the Committee in order to monitor the projected spend against actual spend.

## **6. Nuclear Opportunities Group**

The Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from Rosie Mathisen, Nuclear Opportunities Director, West Lakes Renaissance, on the current position on Nuclear Investment Issues within Copeland, the effect this has on local employment and what progress has, and is, expected to be made on the nuclear issues within the Master Plan.

The Committee were advised that since the initial meeting of the cross government and West Cumbria Partnership Group on 16 January 2008:

- a) the Group's Terms of Reference had been agreed;
- b) the Cumbria Economic Summit was due to be held on 9 April 2008, for public and private sector;
- c) the Prime Minister had been invited to launch "Britain's Energy Coast";
- d) branding and website for "Britain's Energy Coast" was being developed;
- e) good progress has been made on the University; and
- f) National Skills Academy for Nuclear and the Nuclear Skills Academy North West.

Cumbria partners have been considering what would be the most appropriate regeneration delivery arrangements for the area with 30 key projects necessary for the delivery of the "Britain's Energy Coast" agenda having been identified and agreed by the West Cumbria Partners.

The Committee thanked the Nuclear Opportunities Director for the presentation and invited them to return to a future meeting of this Committee to further update.

## **7. Cumbria Tourism Strategy**

The Economic Development and Enterprise Committee received a presentation from Cumbria Tourism on their draft '10 year Tourism Strategy for Cumbria – The Lake District'.

Members were advised that it had been 10 years since the last Cumbria Tourism Strategy document was compiled and today tourism was worth approximately £1.1 billion to the County, with approximately 8% going to Copeland.

It was noted that the area had recovered well after the foot and mouth outbreaks and the National Park had received approximately 15 million visitors per year. Market research has found scope for further growth, particularly outside of the National Park.

It was felt that new, good quality accommodation, including 4 star hotels which would attract coaches, was required, and improved rail services on the underused West Cumbria Coast line were highlighted as examples where work was needed.

The Lake District's proposal for World Heritage Site status could help the area and hill farmers in particular.

Cumbria Tourism stressed they were here to help and work with the Council.

During the debate, Members agreed that lack of transport was a major problem in West Cumbria. With the roads not being of a high standard, poor bus services and railway and it was felt that these were likely to get worse if there were further cuts in services.

Members were keen to establish a sea link to the Isle of Man on a regular basis, and the prospect of a link to Ireland should be investigated.

It was felt that to create a vibrant community it was important not to be over dependant on any one means of employment.

The West Cumbria Tourism Partnership needed to be re-invigorated with Copeland Borough Council, Allerdale Borough Council and Cumbria Tourism working to create a way forward.

The Committee agreed that the West Coast Tourism Partnership be invited to attend a future meeting of the committee.

## **8. Staff Recruitment and Retention Task and Finish Group**

The Staff Recruitment and Retention Task and Finish Group has now met twice and is due to hold a final meeting to draw up its recommendations. It is intended that its recommendations will be presented to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

**9. Planning Enforcement Task and Finish Group**

The Planning Enforcement Task and Finish Group has now met twice and is due to hold a final meeting to draw up its recommendations. It is intended that its recommendations will be presented to a future meeting of the Economic Development and Enterprise Management Committee.

**10. Joint Authority Scrutiny Working Group: West Cumbria Strategic Partnership**

The Joint Authority Scrutiny Working Group met on 12 May 2008 and had expected following their September meeting to consider an implementation plan for the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

They were told that a series of models had been considered with the conclusion being reached that this would duplicate many of the existing strategies and plans.

The Strategic Co-ordination Unit was developing a process-driven approach to the implementation of the Strategy, involving the monitoring of existing strategies:

West Cumbria Master Plan,

Climate Change Strategy,

Biodiversity strategy,

Sub-regional spatial strategy,

Local Development Framework Core Strategies,

Council's corporate plans,

Local transport strategy.

and influencing their action plans.

It would also involve filling the gaps by developing strategies for:

Section 6.5 of the Sustainable Communities Strategy - Communities that Work; Section 6.6 Networks and Leadership and Section 6.7 Respect for Rights and Responsibilities.

Members acknowledged the challenges in implementation.

Members continued to be particularly concerned that the localities identified in the Sustainable Communities Strategy should be fully involved in the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership, and were disappointed to note that only 3 of the 10 places made available for locality representatives on the Partnership Forum had been filled.

They noted that while some neighbourhood forums were working well, others were poorly attended and that many Parish and Town Councils were

not engaged. It was also observed that the Community Boards had not been as successful as had been hoped.

In recognising these concerns, Members further noted a recent report to the Joint Leadership Committee with respect to developing locality working, and the corresponding undertaking in 6.6 of the sustainable communities strategy to put in place structures for elected members to make decisions about their localities and to better engage with communities.

The Group agreed that:

- 1) locality working was an essential part of the delivery of the Sustainable Communities Strategy and a priority for this joint working group.
- 2) the Strategic Co-ordination Unit provide a list of challenges in their view to setting up structures for locality working.
- 3) the next meetings of the joint working group should focus on locality working, and that it would be likely that the following the working group would like to take evidence from:
  - The leadership of the Councils
  - County Area Team Leaders with respect to neighbourhood forums and evaluation of community boards
  - Parish/Town Council representatives
  - The Voluntary Sector.

#### **11. Post Office Closures**

The Economic Development and Enterprise Committee held three special meetings on 16, 17 and 23 May 2008 to look at the proposals by Post Office Ltd to close 8 Post offices in Copeland.

The results of the Committee's deliberations are the subject of a separate report on this agenda.

#### **12. Joint Scrutiny – The Proposed Way Forward**

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered the way forward for Joint Scrutiny in Cumbria in the light of proposed changes in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

The Committee agreed that the proposals to take Joint Scrutiny forward across Cumbria be supported and are the subject of a separate report on this agenda.

#### **13. Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan 2008/2009**

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered the consultation responses of items for inclusion to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees Work Plans 2008/2009.

During consideration of this item it was recommended that each of the Committee Chairs meet with their respective Portfolio Holders to discuss any issues they want included in the Work Plan. The Portfolio Holder should then be invited to attend the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee made a number of amendments to the Work Plan and agreed that each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees should consider these amendments in making its own Work Plan.

#### **14. Urgent Actions**

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee were updated on the use of Urgent Actions since the procedural changes recommended by the committee had been made in September 2007.

The Committee noted that there had been a significant improvement as a result of these changes and it was believed that the high figures for March and April 2008 could be a 'blip'.

To ensure that this was just a "blip" the Committee agreed that the Council's Urgent Actions continue to be monitored and enforced vigorously with a further review in 6 months.