

Report from Overview and Scrutiny

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

Lead Officer: T Capper

September to October 2007

Since Overview and Scrutiny last reported:

1. Cumbria Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

The latest update from the Cumbria Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee for September 2007 is an appendix to this report. This Update contains the latest news of the Cumbria Health and Well-being Scrutiny Committee's activities and work programme, plus Joint Scrutiny that involves Committee members. The Committee met most recently on 19 September.

Councillor G Garrity is the Council's representative on this Committee.

2. Mental Health Day Care – West Cumbria

A scrutiny task group set up by the Cumbria Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to look at mental health issues including those in West Cumbria met the Cumbria Partnership Trust on 2 October 2007.

Councillor G Garrity was a member of this task group and following this council's request that representatives from Copeland Borough Council attend the meeting Councillors Mrs A Faichney and C Whiteside attended and were allowed to ask questions.

The representatives from the Cumbria Partnership Trust were asked to provide further information in response to some of the questions and this Council's representatives have asked that a further meeting of the Task Group be set up before the end of this year to look into this information and associated questions.

3. Cumbria County Joint Scrutiny Overview Group

The Cumbria County Joint Scrutiny Overview Group met on 11 October in Copeland and was chaired by Councillor Peter Connolly and also attended by Councillor Yvonne Clarkson. The meeting considered three key issues:

(i) The Cumbria Local Area Agreement

The Joint Group considered a report on the effective scrutiny and the Local Area Agreement (LAA) Joint member Workshop on 21 September 2007.

The Joint Group noted that the event had been generally well received and had explored how scrutiny of the LAA could be best developed. The recommendation from the workshop had been for the Scrutiny Practitioners Network to consider the feedback and suggestions from the joint member workshop at their next full meeting and come up with a proposed structure/mechanism for developing this scrutiny work.

The Group agreed with this recommendation but considered that there was further work needed to be done at member and officer level to develop a suitable structure. This would be particularly needed around the level of resources that would be available and the capacity of individual authorities to engage in the process.

The Group further agreed that it would need an additional meeting to be held in January 2008 to consider the proposals from the practitioners group so that any proposals for change could be considered and implemented by the constituent councils at the start of the new civic year.

(ii) Scrutiny of the Cumbria Strategic Waste Management Partnership

The Joint Group noted that the task and finish group looking into the Cumbria Strategic Waste Management Partnership had met on four occasions and made several recommendations to the Cumbria Strategic Waste Management Partnership.

The Group were reminded that at the meeting in April it had agreed that the task and finish group should hold a further meeting in December 2007. However, the May election had seen a significant change to the Membership of the Task and Finish group. Furthermore, as the December meeting was the last meeting it was suggested that the County Council's Environment Panel might be in a better position to carry out the monitoring exercise that the Task and Finish Group would complete.

The Group agreed that the County Council's Environment Scrutiny Panel fulfils the monitoring role and reports back to the Group as appropriate.

(iii) Review of Parking Policies

The Joint Group considered a report on the task and finish Group that had been established to consider a review of parking policies for the County.

The Joint Group noted that the task and finish group had now met and agreed that all the Borough/Districts Councils and key stakeholders be written to for their views on the wording of the draft policies and a questionnaire on those policies.

The Joint Group further noted that it was hoped that the responses from the Borough/District Councils and key stakeholders would highlight which were the main issues that would need to be examined in more depth. The Task and Finish Group could then determine what further evidence it required and which witnesses they should call as well as a timetable for the review.

The Joint Group was informed that the County Council was required by the 2004 Traffic Management Act to implement and publish changes to its parking management arrangements by April 2008. A solution to this timetable problem would be to have the task and finish group deal with the policies as “draft policies” and the key issues. These policies could then be recommended to the County Council’s cabinet who after agreeing or amending them as appropriate would send them out to the District/Borough Councils for final consultation.

The Joint Group considered that this Scrutiny would be a limited review and may not allow enough time to deal with all the issues that could arise as the review develops and were not readily apparent at the start. It may also leave some authorities or stakeholders feeling left out if they were not called as witnesses.

4. Joint Authority Scrutiny Working Group West Cumbria Strategic Partnership

The Joint Authority Scrutiny Working Group West Cumbria Strategic Partnership met on 28 September 2007.

The Joint Scrutiny Working Group noted that it had been set up in April 2006 to provide a scrutiny function of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership. At that time there was a pressing need for scrutiny into the input into the Annual Review of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership. However due to the impending deadline for the submission of the Annual Review to the Government Office for the North West (GONW) the group had set the following terms of reference:

“To review the processes of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership including those to be used in creating an effective Community Strategy and to challenge performance through the Annual Review (in effect GONW’s assessment) and any action plans arising from the Annual Review.”

The Joint Scrutiny Group were reminded of the 11 recommendations that it had agreed that focused on the most part on clarifying roles and responsibilities, and on the constitution and profile of the Partnership.

The Joint Scrutiny Group considered the progress that had been made by the Strategic Partnership on the recommendations from the scrutiny review and felt that there were a number of areas that should be scrutinised.

These were:

- Monitor the progress on the recommendations made by the group from the Joint Scrutiny Work in 2006-2007

- Monitor the local delivery of the partnership and identify possible area for review
- The Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Communities Strategy
- The review of the Cumbria Community Strategy and the consultation responses to the review
- Any appropriate plans or strategies

The Joint Group further considered that one of the areas that should be looked at immediately is the lack of affordable housing. It was noted that South Lakeland had made progress in this area with the National Park Authority and the Sub Group agreed that a task and finish group should be established to look into this. The membership of the task and finish group would be made up of Councillors Cole, Connolly, Hitchen, Munby with Councillors Mrs Clarkson and Wood as substitutes.

5. Community Policing

The Children, Young People and Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from Sergeant Gary Armstrong, Supervisor of Cumbria Constabulary Whitehaven Community Policing Team on the work of the Community Support Officers.

The Committee was informed that the Whitehaven team consisted of 6 Police and 8 Community Policing Support Officers that covered Whitehaven and some of the outlying areas.

The Committee noted that in the last three months significant reductions had been made in the overall crime figures and in specific areas through the work of the community policing officers. The Committee requested that those figures be made available to the committee along with the previous year's figures to show a comparison.

The Committee was further informed that the telephone number to contact the community policing team for non urgent matters was 0845 3300247 and felt that this number was not widely known and it should be promoted more to the general public.

6. Concessionary Travel

The Children, Young People and Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the council's concessionary travel scheme. .

The Committee noted that the final budgetary outturn for the concessionary travel schemes for 2006/07 showed a saving against budget of £25,700 of which £25,000 was approved to be carried forward to assist in supporting the introduction of the county wide statutory scheme.

The Committee further noted that based on current usage, the projected out-turn for 2007/08 showed a potential overspend of £142,000 against the approved budget, including the £25,700 that was brought forward. The reason for this potential overspend was due to an increase in the usage of the statutory NoWcard scheme.

The Committee considered three scenarios for usage on the concessionary travel schemes in 2008/09. These scenarios measured against the 2007/08 approved base budget showed that the budget could be overspent between £180,000 and £400,000 with the most likely overspend being in the region of £240k.

The Committee agreed that a task and finish group should be established to consider:

1. how the budgetary overspend for concessionary travel can be reduced in this financial year; and
2. what lessons can be learned from this review for future years.

The Committee further agreed that the membership of the group should consist of Councillors Mrs Yvonne Clarkson, Peter Connolly, John Kane, Chris Whiteside with Councillors Alan Jacob and Michael McVeigh as substitutes. Councillor Elaine Woodburn should be invited to the meetings of the group as a co-opted non voting member.

7. Equality and Diversity

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered a report on Equality and Diversity.

The Committee noted the progress that been made by the council on Equality and Diversity as set against the Equality Standard for Local Government. There were five levels in this standard with five being the highest. In March 2006 the Council had self-assessed itself at level one and was currently working towards achieving level two by next year.

The Committee considered that the main requirements for achieving level 2 were to carry out Equality Impact Assessments and community engagement. An Assessment Toolkit had been produced to help complete the assessments and an officer sub-group was currently working on planning for community engagement.

The Committee noted that when these were completed action plans would be drawn up to help the council reach level three of the standard. The Committee agreed that it should look at the action plans as they were being developed.

The Committee also considered the current job evaluation process that was being carried out by the council. It expressed its concern on how the process was

being undertaken and agreed that a report be submitted to it and the Personnel Panel on the process.

8. Dignity at Work and Compassionate Leave

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered a report on the Council's Dignity at Work and Compassionate Leave Policies.

The Committee noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Performance and Resources Committee had set up a small sub group to look into the Council's Dignity at Work policy but this work had been put into abeyance during the council's restructure. Furthermore that Committee at its meeting on 6 November 2006 had asked that a review of the Council's Compassionate Leave Policy should be added to its work plan.

The Committee agreed that a new task and finish group should be established to review the Council's current Dignity at Work and Compassionate Leave policies and to develop new policies so that:

(1) the Dignity at work policy entitles all the council's employees to conduct their work without harassment, bullying or victimisation in their workplace and generally to be treated with dignity and respect, and

(2) the Compassionate Leave policy reflects an effective work life balance which benefits employees, the organisation and the community it serves.

The Committee further agreed that the membership of the group should consist of Councillors Mrs Yvonne Clarkson, Peter Connolly, John Kane, and Keith Hitchen.

9. Overview and Scrutiny Structure

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered a report on the structure of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the recommendation from the committee is detailed within the separate report to council.

10. Energy Review

The recommendations of the Energy Review Task and Finish Group were agreed by the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The recommendations were that:

(A) the Council examine the feasibility of Cumbrian authorities working together on Climate Change to ensure possible savings and efficiencies of service and that opportunities for joint working on sustainable development be explored with neighbouring authorities,

- (B) Officers ensure that the Council makes an appropriate input into the Cumbrian Climate Change Strategy,
- (C) external training on Climate Change and other sustainable development issues be given to the Council and be commenced by the end of the Municipal year at the latest,
- (D) the work done by the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services to reduce the carbon footprint of the Council's fleet be welcomed and supported,
- (E) Cumbria County Council be requested to consider St Gregory's and St Patrick's Catholic Infant School in Whitehaven as a best practice example to help other schools in Cumbria on how to acquire and use renewable energy and to reduce their carbon footprint,
- (F) from now on a greater emphasis be put on developers to use renewable energy in new developments and to improve energy efficiency,
- (G) the Council should place greater priority and resources into dealing with energy efficiency, affordable warmth and fuel poverty,
- (H) in light of recommendation (G) above, the Council fills the current vacant sustainability officer post as soon as possible to deal with climate change, energy efficiency, affordable warmth and fuel poverty targets and priority is given to these issues within the post,
- (I) the Car Parking Officer Task Group is requested to investigate the feasibility of the Council introducing a Travel to Work Plan,
- (J) Sellafield Ltd be asked when their travel to work plan will be completed and this issue be placed on the agenda for the next quarterly update meeting with the British Nuclear Group,
- (K) the Council provide a scheme for the installation of energy efficiency measures for people on benefits and provide £100,000 per annum until 2010 as grants to enable those people who live in private dwellings and are not on benefits to apply for help in installing energy efficiency measures within Copeland,
- (L) the Council's plans to introduce additional recycling facilities for the collection of glass, cans and plastic bottles in its major offices be implemented,
- (M) a budget of £15,000 be created for the implementation of green issues to raise awareness of energy efficiency and climate change,
- (N) the Council consider energy efficiency when implementing any future refurbishment work to Council owned property,

- (O) the Council consider the installation of renewable energy features into a Council building as a pilot project in a building when it is due to be refurbished in the near future as an example of energy efficiency,
- (P) the Council implement a programme of public awareness of energy efficiency and climate change across the Borough,
- (Q) the Council implement an internal programme of staff and member awareness of energy efficiency issues,
- (R) Copeland Homes consider the possibility of installing 'smart meters' in a pilot scheme to help encourage better energy use,
- (S) Copeland Homes plan to produce a booklet and information pack containing energy efficiency advice for new and existing tenants be welcomed and implemented,
- (T) the work undertaken by the Eskdale Biomass Project should be promoted as an excellent example of a community led renewable energy scheme and the Council should promote it to other organisations both private and public across the borough,
- (U) the Sustainability (LA21) Forum be reintroduced with a view to sharing resources and costs with Allerdale Borough Council,
- (V) the Energy Saving Trust be requested to help in the development and implementation of a green policy for the Council,
- (W) a target date of 2009 be set for the action in the Council's Corporate Plan to influence home energy conservation plans and tackle fuel poverty,
- (X) the Council explore options for the use of small scale hydropower and other aspects of micro generation, and
- (Y) a report be submitted to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee in six months time on the progress made on these recommendations.

These recommendations are to be considered by the Executive at a future meeting.

13. Community Call for Action Training

A number of overview and scrutiny members attended a training event on 2 October on the new powers for Councillors to instigate a Community Call for Action by asking an overview and scrutiny committee to examine issues which are of concern to local communities. Detailed provisions on how CCfA will work will be contained in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill when it receives Royal Assent in early 2008 and further advice and training will

be provided at that time to Members and officers on how CCfA will affect the way the Council works.

12. Work Plan

The Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered its work plan.

The Committee considered that it would like to get a better understanding of how drug abuse is dealt with across Cumbria and agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting on this subject.