

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

July 2008

Since Overview and Scrutiny last reported:

1. Multi Storey Car Park, Whitehaven

The Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee expressed their concerns with the Whitehaven Multi Storey Car Park. The Chief Executive of the Whitehaven Harbour Commission had offered her apology for being unable to attend this meeting and made a written submission regarding the Lift, Lighting and Signage issues. Members stated that not all the issues had been covered and felt they would benefit from a site visit.

It was agreed that a site visit for the Chair, Vice Chair and Harbour Ward Member of the panel, accompanied by the Open Spaces Manager and Member Services Technical Support Officer be arranged.

2. Work Plan 2008/2009

The Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered items for inclusion in the 2008/09 Work Plan.

During discussion of this item, it was suggested that in addition to the items shown on the draft Work Plan, Housing issues should be given greater priority in the coming year and that Copeland Homes be invited to a future meeting to update members on the Decent Homes standard.

It was also suggested that Locality Working would be an important issue this year and Members would benefit from inviting the Chief Executive to update this Overview and Scrutiny Committee on where it is going to be asked to get involved.

With regard to the items on the draft Work Plan, Members requested that the Waste Services Manager be invited to update the Committee and also to arrange a site visit to Shanks Mechanical & Biological Treatment Plant.

In respect of Substance Abuse, the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services advised the Committee that he was currently developing the Council's policy in consultation with the Primary Care Trust.

Members requested the Open Spaces Manager be invited to report on the Quality Coast Award.

In respect of the Highway issues, Members requested that Cumbria County Council invited to attend a future meeting.

Members discussed crime issues and the perception of crime. It was suggested that the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership be invited to attend a future meeting.

3. CCTV Monitoring Centre

The Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (with an invitation to other members of the council) visited and received a presentation on the CCTV Monitoring Centre that is used by both Allerdale and Copeland Councils on Friday 4 July 2008.

4. Planning Enforcement

The Planning Enforcement Task and Finish Group has now completed its investigations and also undertook a six month review of the recommendations regarding Planning Appeals.

These recommendations will be considered by the Special meeting of the Economic Development and Enterprise Management Committee on 2 September 2008.

5. Modern Councillor

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee received a presentation from the Member Services Technical support Officer and Scrutiny Officer on the Modern Councillor Website (an on-line training tool for Members).

Following the presentation, the Committee agreed that the Modern Councillor presentation be made to the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

6. Compliments, Comments and Complaints

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered the report on the number of complaints for the second half of 2007/08 and for the whole of 2007/08.

The Committee noted that 43 complaints have been received in the second half of the year and 121 for the whole year which was an increase from the 106 recorded in 2006/7.

It was queried whether the three stages to the complaints procedure were applicable for Homelessness complaints as the council had not set a Homelessness standard.

The Committee agreed that managers be encouraged / reminded to record and feedback details of complaints and compliments received to the Customer Relations Officer for monitoring and reporting purposes, and the Housing Improvement Plan be checked to ensure that a Homelessness standard will be set.

7. Commitments Survey

The Committee received the results of the Customer Commitments Survey exercise completed in April 2008.

During discussion of this item Members were advised that face to face contact had reduced from 36% last year to 18% this year and that overall, Customer Service was improving.

It was also noted that funding for this survey was made available from the Customer First budget and a request was made for a similar amount to fund the next survey.

It was agreed that funding from the Customer First budget for regular surveys be supported, and that the results be publicised and made available to all Members.

8. Protocol on Relations Between Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered the protocol on relations between Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive.

During discussion of this item, the protocol was welcomed and it was suggested that one change was required to state that the Portfolio Holder was to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings when invited.

9. Executive Decisions

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered the decisions made by the Executive at its meeting on 15 July 2008.

During consideration of this item, Members questioned the funding allocated for the replacement Cremators at Distington Crematorium and sought confirmation that the 2007/2008 budget had included this.

With regard to the Copeland Community Initiative Fund, Members requested clarification on how the Community Fund could be used and

expressed concern on the make up of the Board, there being only two Copeland Borough Council members of the total of seven.

With regard to the Interim Resource Measures, members expressed concerns and a recommendation to Call-In this item was made and seconded.

10. Executive Decisions

In the confidential part of the meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee received an overview from the Chief Executive in respect of the Closure of Accounts 2006-2008.

During discussion of this item, Members requested that the Audit Committee and Overview and Scrutiny look at reviewing the finance process to prevent the current situation from recurring.

With regard to Whitehaven Rugby League Club, Members discussed the recommendation for the Council to underwrite a further overdraft facility to the Club. Councillor Connolly declared a personal interest in this item due to being a member of the Whitehaven Rugby League club.

11. ITV Border News

In the confidential part of the meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee received an update on the future proposals for ITV Border News.

12. British Telecom Payphone Closures

The Economic Development and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a special meeting on 22 July 2008 were provided with an overview of the planned BT Payphone closure programme and a list of 25 public payphones identified for closure in the Copeland area.

During discussion of this item Members raised concerns regarding the removal of a vital link from some of the most remote sites in the Borough where mobile phone coverage is either poor or non existent. Some of the sites also being close to accident 'black spots'.

It was stated that not everyone has access to a mobile phone or home phone and asked for the distances from the closing box to the nearest alternative.

Members of the Committee questioned if the phone boxes listed for closure were serviceable.

Members also questioned the volume of call figures provided by BT and sought clarification on whether the numbers included Emergency (999 or 112) Calls, Reverse Charge calls and calls to Freephone numbers. If the figures did not include these types of call, Members requested that these numbers be supplied by BT.

The Committee agreed that a) the process for responding to the proposal by British Telecom (BT) to close 25 public payphones in Copeland should be as set out in the report.

b) The first draft notification as set out in Appendix A of the Agenda be approved for publication.

c) A survey of the pay phones proposed for closure be undertaken.

d) Parish and Town Councils be advised of the proposed payphone closures and their assistance requested in compiling full details on each site.