

Report from Overview and Scrutiny

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

Lead Officer: T Capper

October to November 2007

Since Overview and Scrutiny last reported:

1. Review of Car Parking Policies

The Joint Car Parking Task and Finish Group held its second meeting on 30 October 2007 that was chaired by Councillor Henry Wormstrup.

The Group considered the draft parking policies and were pleased to note the responses from each of the District Authorities, the Police and the Lake District National Park Authority to their 'pre-consultation' questionnaire and agreed to consider a revision of the suggested wording for the draft parking policies in the light of these responses.

The Group agreed to the wording of a number of the policies but felt that in respect of policies L6 (charging for on-street parking); 04 (Resident parking schemes) and 05 (exemptions from parking restrictions) these should be subject to further consideration by means of an evidence-session with representatives from Lancashire County Council and two representatives of the Cumbrian Authorities Parking Forum.

The Group further agreed that a evidence session be held to look at the tourism effects and needs for car parking across Cumbria with representatives from Cumbria Tourism, and a evidence session be held to look at the disability aspects of car parking with one of the local authorities access officer as a witness.

These evidence sessions would be held on 4th December 2007 and following this meeting the joint scrutiny task and finish group would report their input to the Scrutiny Member Network and thereafter Cumbria County Council's Cabinet, before the consultation draft would be issued for wide-spread consultation to interested parties and stakeholders.

2. Concessionary Travel

The Concessionary Travel Task and Finish Group has had its initial meeting and has asked for some further evidence to be presented to it from the officers to help it weigh up its recommendations.

It is intended that its recommendations will be presented to the Children, Young People and Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 6 December 2007. The Committee will then recommend on to the Executive at its meeting on 18 December 2007.

3. Joint Authority Scrutiny Working Group West Cumbria Strategic Partnership

The Joint Authority Scrutiny Working Group West Cumbria Strategic Partnership met on 15 November 2007.

The Joint Scrutiny Working Group considered the Cumbria Community Strategy and the comments that had been made on it from those organisations that had been consulted upon it.

The Joint Scrutiny Group looked at the strategy and made a number of detailed points on it which were to be formulated into a response to be sent to the next meeting of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership Board.

4. Joint Authority Scrutiny Working Group West Cumbria Strategic Partnership Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group

The Joint Authority Scrutiny Working Group West Cumbria Strategic Partnership Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group met on 13 November 2007.

The Group noted that the part of the action plan from the Cumbrian Housing Strategy that dealt with Affordable Housing had now been updated and it would be appropriate at this stage for the progress on the action plan to be monitored.

The Group felt that Copeland did not currently have the resources to provide enough information on affordable housing which would mean that any further work would not properly cover the whole of West Cumbria. It was crucial for work on affordable housing to be backed up with sufficient evidence before policy decisions could be taken.

In light of this the Group considered that it should not meet again for six months whilst progress on the action plan and the Regional Spatial Strategy was monitored. The opportunity, at that time, could be taken to reassess the resources of the councils and whether it would be appropriate for the group to do further work.

The Group further considered that it would be useful to share information between the authorities on rural Section 106 agreements particularly whether it had been possible to achieve housing affordable to local people through this process.

5. Special Children, Young People and Healthy Communities

A special meeting of the Children, Young People and Healthy Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee was held on 21 November 2007 to consider three items.

Firstly, the Committee considered the application by the North Cumbria Acute Hospitals NHS Trust to become an NHS Foundation Trust and the recommendation from the meeting is dealt with in another item on the council agenda.

Secondly, the Committee considered the NHS “Closer to Home” public consultation across North Cumbria regarding the future of health services and the future role of its hospitals.

The Committee considered recommending to Council a formal response to the consultation by the Cumbria Primary Care Trust and questioned Peter Clarke, Associate Director for Public Engagement, Cumbria PCT on the proposals.

The noted that the Committee Chair had submitted a number of questions to the PCT and Councillor Whiteside indicated that he was soon to send some questions on the financial viability and other aspects of the proposed model and Mr Clarke agreed to provide responses to these.

The Committee also noted that the PCT intended to extend the period of public consultation on these proposals until 1 February 2008 to allow a series of public consultation meetings to be held. The meeting in Whitehaven would be held some time in January 2008.

It was agreed that the PCT be thanked for attending the meeting and in light of the expected response from the PCT to the submitted questions a special meeting of the Committee should be held on 7 January 2008. This would enable further consideration of the proposals in sufficient time for the Committee to recommend onto full Council before the close of the public consultation.

Thirdly, the Committee considered the Government consultation with all local authorities on the distribution of special grant funding to Travel Concession Authorities and London authorities to meet the costs of the new national bus concession in England, commencing on 1 April 2008.

The Government was making available £212 million in 2008/9 to cover the additional costs of this new concession funding which was to be allocated on a formula basis by special grant and there were four possible options. These were based on data that was likely to closely correlate with the key drivers of the extra cost of the concession. The Government was seeking views on how this funding should be distributed.

The Committee noted that the Cumbria and Lancashire Officer Concessionary Travel Group has replied on behalf of Cumbria with option 4 as its preferred formula but had left the opportunity for the Council to respond on its own behalf.

The Committee agreed that of the four options option 1 was the council's preferred distribution formula and option 3 was the second preference formula. As the consultation period was due to expire two days after the meeting it was agreed that this decision should be sent to the Government as part of the consultation along with an explanation of why Copeland should be treated separately.

6. Special Meeting of all the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

A special meeting of all the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees was held on 22 November 2007 to receive a presentation from Fergus McMorrow, Corporate Director Economic Prosperity and Sustainability on the future of the Council's Regeneration Service.

The Committee addressed a number of questions to the Corporate Director on the Economic Development priorities for the Council. It noted that the Council had a key strategic role which was to:

- lead the Regeneration of West Cumbria'
- ensure Delivery through partners for key projects
- give a clear view of what we want
- be a strong strategic client voice
- drive and influence partnerships to meet Copeland Agenda
- recognise issues competing for our strategic time

The key document was the Energy Coast Master Plan which was still being developed including the 31 major projects that were to be delivered.

It was noted that there were a number of recruitment and retention issues that the Council needed to be addressed and it was the intention of the Director to reshape the directorate which would be considered by the Personnel Panel.

7. Training/Self Evaluation Framework

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee recently held a half day joint training session with the Executive and a similar half day joint training session with the Council's senior officers.

The purpose of the training was to get a better understanding of each other roles as well as improving the working relationship and efficiency of the Council.

All members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees were recently requested to attend a joint meeting to consider the Centre for Public Scrutiny's "self-evaluation framework". The purpose of the framework is to examine the

effectiveness of the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements and to identify areas for improvement.

It is intended that the results of the training and the comments from the self-evaluation framework will be considered at a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.