

Annual Report 2005-06



Overview and Scrutiny

Copeland Borough Council

The Copeland Centre, Catherine Street, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 7SJ

Telephone: 01946 598496

e-mail: info@copelandbc.gov.uk

Cartoons courtesy of

Trevor Green, Cartoonist, Whitehaven News



Foreword from The Chairs...

Overview and Scrutiny adopted a rather lower profile this year, but we haven't been idle. We've kept a close eye on a number of issues that we know are important to you, such as leisure, dog fouling, car parking, benefits, travel concessions and the economic well-being of the Borough, and we spent a penny or two... on a review of public toilets.

There has been a lot of change at the Council in the past eighteen months and a good many new faces in a number of hot seats. We look forward to working with them in the coming year, now that their feet are well and truly under the table.

We are also pleased to report emerging joint scrutiny work with partner authorities in Cumbria, on issues bigger than all of us individually. We've been active in a local scrutiny network and have chaired a joint panel on waste management, which will become a big issue for each and every one of us in the next few years as the push is on to stop as much waste going to landfill sites as possible or face fines.

The Overview and Scrutiny process is maturing at Copeland Borough Council, as it is across the country. We're not perfect, but we are not doing too badly either. But we can't do anything without your input. So let us know what you would like us to examine and we'll try our best to include it as part of our work in 2006-07.

Councillor Mrs Anne Bradshaw

Councillor Mrs Yvonne Clarkson

Councillor Peter Connolly

Councillor Mrs Margaret Woodburn

Call-Ins

Make no mistake. After every meeting of the Executive, where key decisions are taken on the delivery of policy and services, the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny (from both the ruling group and the opposition) meet to go through the reports in fine detail and consider the decisions taken.



It is often from this scrutiny that a 'call-in' arises.

This means that the Executive cannot carry out their decision until Overview and Scrutiny has had an opportunity to examine the issue. The result may be to make further recommendations to the Executive or to endorse the decision taken.

Two decisions were called in this year, one on a financial procedure where it was accepted that a misunderstanding had arisen and the matter had been satisfactorily resolved, and the second on an IT security policy, where Overview and Scrutiny made some suggestions which they felt made the policy more practical to implement and which were accepted.

Schools

Conscious of the fact that the quality of schools is an important factor for the well-being of the Borough and that Copeland appeared to be lagging behind, Overview and Scrutiny invited the County's school improvement team to discuss school performance.

The committee received an upbeat message from the County Council. They were advised that improvement was on the cards now that a local office for school improvement had been established and good relations with the schools forged. The emphasis was placed on what 'added-value' a school provided.



The Committee for Social Well-being decided to continue to monitor the statistics for a period of time to evaluate the progress being made locally against the national rate of improvement.

CCTV

Having raised the issue, Overview and Scrutiny joined forces with the Portfolio Holder to establish a joint working group to look at this issue. Members were aware that the current system was nearing the end of its lifespan, that some cameras were now badly positioned and that there were issues surrounding monitoring.

Money has been set aside in the next financial year to provide improvements, however the working group are still trying to resolve monitoring, technical and partnership issues in what is a complex and expensive project. The budget consultation carried out by the Council as part of the budget-setting process would suggest that there is community support for CCTV and the working group will try and put the best deal forward within the available resources.

Enforcement

A new Enforcement Manager presented a business plan to Overview and Scrutiny, which set in motion a more efficient use of existing resources and greater partnership working with communities, and takes account of new legislation to improve liveability issues.

Targets continue to be monitored and progress will be reviewed in June 2005.



Travel Concessions

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members reviewed their recommendation to introduce vouchers last year as an alternative option to the statutory travel concession for senior citizens and people with specific disabilities.

They noted that the introduction of vouchers instead of tokens, limiting fraudulent use, looks like delivering an efficiency saving in the region of £30-35,000 per annum (to be confirmed after the end of the financial year).

There is a willingness to accept a further option of a railcard, provided it can be bought in sufficient quantities with neighbouring authorities to equal the cost of the vouchers. This hasn't proved possible for 2006-07, but is a real option for the following year.

Members were pleased to note that Copeland Borough Council would be offering free county-wide bus travel to eligible people as part of the package, going further than the statutory requirement of free off-peak travel within Copeland itself.

Waste Management

Members are deeply concerned that if all of us continue to produce as much waste as we are continuing to do at the moment, that Cumbria will face huge fines for failing to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill sites.

Members have continued to monitor Copeland's performance on waste management including recycling rates, waste targets and missed bins.



We have been very active at both officer and Member level in initiating and participating in a Cumbria-wide scrutiny panel looking at issues across Cumbria, working in partnership with other local authorities.

Leisure

Members were wholly supportive of a partnership to promote sport to children with disabilities and are pleased to note that a regular sports club for children with disabilities is now running on a weekly basis.



Photo courtesy of the Whitehaven News

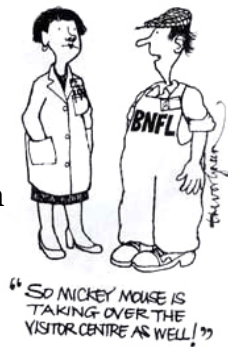
They also reviewed pool opening hours and suggested a pilot initiative to open on a Bank Holiday.

They have closely monitored negotiations to secure a partner organisation to run a Trust to deliver leisure facilities and continue to do so.

Regeneration

Members have regularly welcomed the Nuclear Opportunities Group Manager, Rosie Mathisen, to their meetings to discuss numerous issues, including the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, contracting issues for small local firms, and the future of some locally-important assets including the Sellafield Visitors Centre.

Members from Copeland and Allerdale welcomed Chris Collier, Chief Executive of Cumbria Vision and made representations with respect to Membership of the Board and consultation.



They are set to welcome her back in April.

Members also took a close interest in the final versions of the masterplans of Egremont, Cleator Moor and Millom and in the 'Sea Change' programme for Whitehaven.

Section 106 Agreements

Sometimes known as 'planning gain', Members were concerned as to whether the Council, the County Council and the Lake District National Park Authority were achieving maximum benefit from these agreements.

Members examined reports from each authority and the relevant legislation, and concluded that until there was a change in legislation, that all authorities were using Section 106 agreements in accordance with central government planning policy.

Public Toilets

One of the roles of Overview and Scrutiny is to shed light on the delivery of services. A review of public toilets across the Borough revealed a spend in excess of £100,000 per year, including the significant cost of anti-social behaviour.

The mystery shopping, where an independent person inspects the toilets at an unannounced time of day, showed that while not perfect, the provision was reasonable.

So why the negative publicity?

The Committee considered that it was inconceivable that there should be a return to full-time attended toilets on cost grounds. It did, however, make several recommendations with respect to communication and maintenance which it felt would help alleviate problems, if not to everyone's satisfaction all of the time, at least most of the time.

Councillors and colleagues will continue to periodically mystery shop the facilities on your behalf.



A Look Ahead

What did we miss?

What issues on the horizon are important to you in the coming year?

All comments are warmly received,
see contact information in the inside page of this report.

Scrutiny Chairs