

Report from Overview and Scrutiny

Lead Members: Councillors B Dixon, Mrs Y R T Clarkson, J Kane, Mrs W Metherell

Since Overview and Scrutiny last reported

1. Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

(A) Workshop 14.12.10 Hensingham Stadium

Key Objectives:

- (i) To make recommendations on the new proposals for Overview and Scrutiny to committee on 21 December 2009
- (ii) To reach an understanding of the primary role and function of overview and scrutiny committee member within those new proposals
- (iii) To make recommendations on the future training and development needs of members and officers to committee on 21 December 2009 as informed by the days debate
- (iv) Underlying theme – engagement of members in the overview and scrutiny function

Objectives achieved:

- (i) Recommendation to committee on 21 December 2009 to consider the following options:
 - 1. Stay as we are until Choosing to Change has set out the way forward
 - 2. Agree current proposals as agreed by Management Committee previously
 - 3. Revise the structure to align more with Cumbrian Districts -
 - a. Overview & Scrutiny Board - 7 lead members plus chair and deputy
 - b. O&S Committee - 4 lead members picking up environment/housing/employment & skills/nuclear
 - c. O&S Committee – 3 lead members picking up safer stronger communities/young people/health

The programme was ambitious and challenging. Members undertook a review of their current structure and terms of reference and were divided on the reasons for and timing for change particularly given the Choosing to Change programme. They considered in the light of the arrangements of their Cumbrian colleagues and new legislation that proposals previously agreed by Management Committee may need to be revised, hence the recommendation set out above under objectives achieved. The day was shortened by agreement to enable Member to attend the Nuclear New Build presentation in the afternoon, and Members agreed to pick up the discussion on the way forward at their meeting on 21 December 2009.

(B) Committee Meeting 21.12.09

- (i) The Committee received a progress report on the present position in relation to the nuclear industry in the Borough from the Acting Chief Executive including new build, decommissioning and waste disposal.
- (ii) The committee received a presentation from the Acting Chief Executive regarding the future of the West Cumbria Strategic Partnership. Committee agreed that it would hold a special meeting on 14 January 2010, to which all members would be invited, to enable Committee to express a view on the proposals going to the Executive and Council also in January.
- (iii) The Committee also received a presentation from the Acting Director Quality of Life on the Comprehensive Area Assessment and the Audit Commission's summary findings.
- (iv) Members also considered the recommendations from its workshop on 14.12.09 and agreed a proposed timetable of events to consider change, essentially as follows:

That its programme and recommendations be considered further at a workshop to which all non-executive members should be invited, to be held on 11 January 2009. Further workshops would be arranged on that day to allow members to consider and develop in consultation with key internal and external stakeholders a suite of potential governance arrangements for the operation, delivery and strategic direction of the overview and scrutiny function in Copeland, taking into account the wider Cumbrian context and shifting national priorities. The aim would be to develop a framework designed to allow for flexibility and innovation in the modern scrutiny function.

A development programme was therefore timetabled into the work schedule for overview and scrutiny which would culminate in a report to full Council on 13 April 2010 setting out proposals for future governance arrangements for the function, consulting along the way with the Executive, Choosing to Change Board, the Public and key Cumbrian and Strategic Partners.

(C) Cumbrian Joint Scrutiny Committee 17.12.09

The Chair and Deputy of OSC Management attended a meeting of the above committee held at Summergrove Hall, Hensingham, Whitehaven. The previous meeting had been held on 24 September 2009 at the Civic Centre in Carlisle. It considered the Comprehensive Area assessment for Cumbria, a performance monitoring report on the Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement, the Place Survey Scrutiny Review, and received a Joint Scrutiny Briefing from the Joint Scrutiny Manager detailing issues of significance to the role and remit of the Committee. The Agenda and accompanying documents can be found on the Council's website under Committee meetings and Overview and Scrutiny.

2. Children, Young People and Healthy Communities

This Committee met on 3 December 2009 and along with its work plan which it considered in depth in order to re-prioritise its programme for the rest of the year considered the following:

Concessionary Fares – Members received a very composite report from the Head of Finance and Management Information Systems in relation to the emerging concerns around concessionary fares and the consultation exercise currently underway by the Department of Transport in relation to the redistribution of the special grant allocated for this purpose in 2010/11. If their proposals are implemented Copeland's special grant is likely to be reduced. While key stakeholders are making their dissatisfaction with this process known to Government, it doesn't change the position that difficult decisions need to be made to ensure prudent financial planning. The Committee was informed that Copeland Borough Council would be responding to the Government consultation, the deadline for which was 31st December 2009, to express our dissatisfaction with the proposed redistribution. Members spent some time absorbing and debating the complex details around the report, and voiced their own grave concerns around the implications for the Borough arising out of this mid-year exercise being carried out at national level. Ultimately they accepted the advice of the Head of Finance and Management Information Systems, noting that the intention was that this would result in a reduced budgetary pressure for the Council to find in funding the 2010/11 budget proposal.. It considered the current scheme and the options summarised in the report and in so doing supported her recommendation to Resources Planning Working Group as they consider the Council's budget proposal for 2010/11

- a) Not to extend the current scheme in the light of budgetary constraints, and
- b) To withdraw the discretionary concession in respect of peak hours bus travel for 2010/11,

Future Training Needs for the Authority – Members noted the forthcoming workshop for Management Committee and the future proposals for them to be involved in the programme of review for overview and scrutiny.

3.Economic Development and Enterprise

This Committee met on 17 December 2009 and, along with its workplan, considered the following:

Whitehaven Town Centre – Members received an update on progress within the Town Centre. Council officers were looking at the issues around the empty Woolworth site. Work was ongoing with owners of derelict properties with a view to taking possible legal action and other empty properties were improving their image by placing displays in their windows. The traffic system was showing signs of improvement.

Highway Infrastructure-Whitehaven Town Centre Scheme – Representatives from Cumbria County Council attended to update committee on the consultations for the Highway infrastructure in Whitehaven Town Centre. This included the local transport objectives and improvements to the public realm. Key outcomes from the consultation were: the retention of the one way system; junction improvements around the edge of the town centre; no additional regulation of traffic; on Tangier Street and Strand Street; a lower speed limit; removal of on street parking; and more pedestrian areas on Lowther Street. Also on Lowther Street details of the provision of drop off and pick up points for local retailers were to be considered this year. It was intended that a focus group including the town's retailers be established. Members highlighted the need for adequate car parking to be established, and raised concerns over access for the disabled, drop-off /pick up points for shoppers and the removal of on-street bus parking.

The Energy Coast Master Plan in relation to the Nuclear industry – Members received a presentation from Mr Barry Watkinson, from Sellafield, on his view of the UK's Energy Challenge with particular relevance to how he saw the opportunities for West Cumbria for nuclear new build. Members were of the view that consideration should be given for the presentation to be made available to all members.

4.Safer Stronger Communities

This Committee met on 7 January 2009 to which Members of the Children Young Persons and Healthy Communities OSC were invited given the relevance of agenda items, and along with its work plan considered the following:

Underage Drinking in West Cumbria – a presentation was received from Inspector Joe Murray Cumbrian Police Community Safety Inspector for West Cumbria. According to national statistics Copeland Borough Council has the highest incidence of admission to hospital caused by underage drinking in the country, (Allerdale is 8th), and as such there are some serious causes for concern in West Cumbria. There are several initiatives running through the Crime and Disorder Partnership which it is intended to mainstream if funding permits in due course. These include 'Its Your Choice', a pilot project in West Cumbria which began in May 2009 and targets referrals from Police and Accident and Emergency at West Cumberland Hospital, for which there are early success signs for those young people coming through the system, 'Not in my family' a West Cumbrian initiative now on the national agenda which provides an on-line opportunity for victims of home abuse to seek support, and 'Pubwatch', where licensed premises work with the police to prevent underage drinking on licensed premises. Current initiatives such as POWW – Positive Opportunities for Whitehaven and Workington), the Harbour Project, Shackles Off, Aspatria Dream Scheme, Young Persons Guide to ASB and Health were listed as being positive contributors to tackling the issues around underage drinking. The bottom line is that this needs to be a priority area for increased partnership working together with the police and health authorities if the issues facing West Cumbria and Copeland in particular are to continue to be properly addressed in the future. Members acknowledged that initiatives were being undertaken but that more needed to be done if Copeland's specific problems were to be brought under control and suggested that a working group be set up to look at this..

Copeland Community Safety 2009 Progress Report – Committee received a report from the Council's Community Safety Officer Amanda Crane appointed under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 2004 (as amended by the Police and Justice act 2006), a post which is currently jointly shared until 31 March 2010 with Allerdale Borough Council. This section requires the Council to consider crime and disorder, including anti-social behaviour and other behaviour adversely affecting the environment and the misuse of drugs alcohol and other substances in the exercise of all their duties activities and decision-making. This means that in all policies, strategies and service delivery there is a need to consider the likely impact on crime and disorder. The report highlighted the importance for every member, officer and contractor of the Council to be aware of the act and their responsibilities under it, and how they can contribute towards reducing crime and disorder on every level. The Council is a statutory partner within the Crime and Reduction Partnership, which means they are part of the decision-making process for crime reduction, with a role to play in the allocation of resources and the identification of local priorities. On-going training is provided through the Community Safety Officer and anyone who feels they need further awareness of these key issues should make the necessary enquiries.

Copeland Draft Fuel Poverty Strategy 2009 – 11 – Members received the draft Fuel Poverty Strategy for the Borough, the purpose of which is to promote the delivery of affordable warmth to all Copeland's households that are, or may find themselves, victims of fuel poverty, irrespective of vulnerability, tenure or occupancy. The draft strategy is set in the context of the national, regional and local scene, policy and standards, and covers the background, extent of the problem, together with identified solutions, actions, future challenges, consultees. It defines fuel poverty as if a household needs to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel to maintain an adequate level of warmth (usually defined as 21 degrees for the main living area and 18 degrees for other occupied rooms) and comments that fuel poor households are forced to take difficult decisions about other household essentials where keeping warm means sacrificing spending on other priorities such as food, clothing and home improvements. Many useful issues were raised during the debate which will be picked up in the final document.

Draft Gender Equality Scheme – Members received the draft Gender Equality Scheme which will ultimately replace the current scheme now out for review and revision. The Council is under a duty to have due regard to the elimination of unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender, and to the promotion of equality of opportunity between men and women. This means that the Council should give due weight to the need to promote gender equality in proportion to its relevance. In addition the Council's Corporate Plan says at paragraph 2,4 'We will promote equal opportunity throughout Copeland'. The draft Scheme sets out a very helpful profile of the Borough, including age and population, together with the Council's policy, strategy and actions already taken in relation to gender equality. It also covers the requirement to carry out equality impact assessments on all new Council policies and strategies, and sets out an action plan for the future. Again many useful issues were raised during the debate which will be picked up in the final document.

Joint Scrutiny Manager's Briefing to the Cumbria Joint Scrutiny Committee on 17 December 2009 – Members received this briefing paper to bring to their attention the work of the Joint Scrutiny Committee particularly in relation to

- (i) the future proposals for scrutiny of the Carlisle and Eden Crime and Disorder Partnership following Home Office guidance on the requirement for joint scrutiny arrangements where a Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership is joint or merged, or a topic has a county wide resonance
- (ii) The formation of a task and finish group with members from Carlisle, Eden, South Lakes and Cumbria County to look at the implications for individual Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships should the current funding arrangements change
- (iii) CCTV in Cumbria, and a request for a member from all 7 Cumbrian Authorities to join a joint task and finish group to look at this area. Councillor Geoff Garrity agreed to be Copeland's representative.

Whitehaven Multi-Storey Car park – Members last considered this on 16 July 2009 when Celia McKenzie the Chief Executive of the Harbour Commissioners attended to update them. Arising out that meeting there were some outstanding issues around the signage, and it was agreed that members/officers would revisit the car park with the Car park manager to look at them. Prior to this meeting a small group did so. While there were a few signs which had the potential to confuse some people, which the managers agreed to revisit, the group reported a vastly improved car park from the previous site visit in September 2008, with clear signage, safe and clean vehicle and people passageways and very good lighting. The Car park also holds the Park Mark Safer Parking Award awarded under the ACPO/ACPOS Safer Parking Scheme (Associations of Chief Police Officers for England, Wales and N. Ireland and Scotland). Details of the assessment guidelines for this award were circulated to the meeting. Members asked that a letter from the Chair on behalf of the Committee be sent to Celia McKenzie and the Managers of the car park congratulating them on and thanking them for the improvements made.