

Scrutiny

Making a difference

A magnifying glass with a black handle and a silver-colored frame is positioned over the word 'Scrutiny'. The lens of the magnifying glass is centered over the letters 't' and 'i' in 'Scrutiny', making them appear larger and more prominent. The word 'Scrutiny' is written in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below it, the phrase 'Making a difference' is written in a smaller, bold, black sans-serif font.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15



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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

This Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2014/15 highlights some of the significant activity of the work of the Partner Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Scrutiny Committee, Task and Finish Groups and Response Groups.

It is important for scrutiny members to be involved in decisions at an early stage to ensure they influence the decision making process and play an important role as a 'critical friend'. Whilst there has been a high level of support from the two committees and the group of members participating in the task and finish review programme, we hope that more non-executive members can be encouraged to take part this year.

Scrutiny provides an excellent opportunity for members of the public to see easily what Council functions and activities have been scrutinised over the past year. If anyone has any suggestions for us to review, there is a form at the back of the report which can be used to allow people to raise issues which Scrutiny Committees may wish to investigate in the future.

Thanks to the management within the authority, the budget continues to be managed effectively and Overview and Scrutiny continues to play its part.

As always, I would like to thank all members and our co-opted member for the contributions they have made throughout the year.

I would like to thank Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer and all other members of the Committee and Member Services Team, who have helped support the Scrutiny Support Officer during the year.

Also, thank you to officers within the Council and our partners who have provided us with their knowledge and expertise to assist us with our work throughout the year.

This year saw the resignation of Councillor Liz McInnes, who has been Chair of firstly, the Scrutiny Management Committee and then Partner Scrutiny. I am sure everyone would like to thank her for her hard work, support and dedication she has shown to the scrutiny process over the last few years.



Councillor Jackie Oakes
Chair of Corporate Scrutiny





Comments from Councillor Sean Serridge, Portfolio Holder for Customers, Legal and Licensing

Rossendale Borough Council aims to provide the best possible services for our residents. Overview and Scrutiny is a crucial process in ensuring we are delivering those services, and are giving best value to local people.

The relationship between executive and non-executive members continues - we are all working together to ensure every effort is made to protect frontline services, yet achieve the required savings.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny continues to support the Cabinet in providing challenge and assurance in respect of policy development and review across the Council and its partners. One example being that due to concerns raised by a member of the public regarding the Council's land transaction process, Cabinet asked that Scrutiny undertake a review and produce a process. This was undertaken by a cross-party group of councillors.

I hope that the relationship that we have with scrutiny members continue and that we work together in these difficult and challenging times ahead.

Regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Sean Serridge".

Councillor Sean Serridge
Cabinet Member for Customers, Legal and Licensing





MEET THE MEMBERS OF SCRUTINY

Partner Scrutiny

Councillor McInnes (Chair until Oct 2014)
Councillor Fletcher
Councillor Kenyon
Councillor Knowles
Councillor Kempson
Councillor McMahon
Councillor Shipley
Councillor Roberts (until Feb 2015)

Corporate Scrutiny

Councillor Oakes (Chair)
Councillor Bleakley
Councillor Creaser
Councillor Hughes
Councillor Kempson
Councillor Procter

Councillor Sandiford

Keith Pilkington (Co-opted member until February 2015)

The co-opted member was appointed following interview and does not have voting rights.

WHAT IS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY?

Overview and Scrutiny is a legal requirement which was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000; it was extended in later legislation, and was consolidated in the Localism Act of 2011.

The Overview and Scrutiny process is a principal way of achieving open, democratic accountability for the provision of public services. The aim of Overview and Scrutiny is to improve public services for local residents.

All councillors, other than Cabinet members, are able to be involved in scrutiny work.

Its main value is in holding the Cabinet, its partners and other service providers to account, monitoring performance and to inform and influence the actions of the Council and its partners.

The process allows councillors to examine, question and evaluate various functions of the Council and other providers of public services on behalf of the public in an open and effective way. Scrutiny is key to ensuring local people, communities and organisations engage more effectively in the democratic process.

What we do not do

Overview and Scrutiny is not a mechanism for the investigation or settling of individual complaints for which the Council has separate processes. Nor is it able to look at individual planning or licensing decisions. However, suggestions from residents as to wider issues that could be looked at by Overview and Scrutiny are welcome.





SCRUTINY ACTIVITY DURING THE YEAR

The table below highlights the number of scrutiny meetings held during 2014/15. Whilst there were 14 Task and Finish Group meetings, these equate to 3 topic reviews – Rogue Landlords, Green Vale Homes, which were full reviews and the Council’s Land/Property Transaction Process, which was a ‘light touch’ review.

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PARTNER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee met four times during the year and received presentations as detailed below:

June 2014

Coastal Health Care (new Provider of the Minor Injuries Unit at Rawtenstall Primary Health Care Centre)

Coastal Health Care was successful in its bid to take over the local Minor Injuries Unit in Rawtenstall and received a presentation from their Director of Operations on its future plans.

It was agreed to invite them back in June 2015 to provide an update on their patient activity during the first year of them taking over the Minor Injuries Unit.

Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) – five year plan

The Chair of the local CCG gave an overview of the CCG’s five year plan. The plan focuses on improving outcomes for those suffering from health inequalities, people with long term conditions such as cancer or diabetes, supporting people with mental health and learning difficulties and avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions by providing a joined-up care service as close to home as possible.

Dementia Friendly Rossendale

The Chair of the Dementia Friendly Rossendale explained the new initiative to the Committee. The aim was to create a fully integrated and awareness dementia friendly community in Rossendale, where people living with dementia and their carers would be at the heart of everything they plan and deliver within the programme. To do this they need to bring together all areas of the community, to think about how they can work closely with people with dementia.





September 2014

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS)

The committee heard about the LFRS 2014 Performance Report and Action Plan and information was provided on the number of significant savings the service had to make and changes to shift patterns at a number of stations to reduce costs without impacting on the speed of response or community safety activity.

Lancashire Constabulary

The committee has continued to monitor the Council's 'Crime and Disorder Committee requirements within the Police and Justice Act, and the related statutory guidance from the Home Office on the Overview and Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder. We continue to monitor all types of crime and disorder issues, including the performance reports on progress against crime indicators. The principal issues discussed were the 2013/14 annual crime figures, together with clarification for members on the new 'signing on' for police officers at Burnley before returning to duty in Rossendale, which had been a concern to Members for some time.

November 2014

North West Ambulance Service



The committee received a presentation on the ambulance service 5 year business plan, which had been presented to MPs, local authorities and other organisations.

In the past 10 years calls to ambulance services nationally have risen from 4.9m to over 9m, with emergency hospital admissions rising by 31%.

Locally response times for R1 (response within 8 minutes) was 60.7%, which was well below the target of 75%. Category A (response within 19 minutes) was only slightly below the 95% target at 94.9%.

Due to the failure to achieve these targets, a business case was being produced to increase resources to include looking at increasing first responders to the Borough.

Scrutiny will be undertaking a review of the ambulance service during 2015/16.

March 2015

Leisure Trust

The General Manager of both the Rossendale Leisure Trust and Community Leisure Association Whitworth provided an annual overview of their performance and highlighted some of their work during 2014/15.



ROSSO (Rossendale Transport)

The committee received an annual update on the future plans for the bus company and answered members questions.

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee looks at both policies and performance of the Council.

Quarterly Performance Reports

Performance monitoring remains an integral part of the work of this committee who make an important contribution to the Council's very effective performance management arrangements. Our on-going monitoring of the Quarterly Integrated Performance enables the committee to hold Cabinet members and officers to account for the performance against service plan objectives and performance targets. We again, as last year, saw that target levels have increased.

Of the very few target levels that had not achieved their target, then a detailed action plan of what they propose to do is prepared to enable members to gain a better understanding of the issues involved and actions being undertaken to improve performance.

In February the committee examined the Council's revenue and capital budget proposals for 2015/2016, along with the proposed fees and charges for Council Services.

The committee scrutinised various Council policies/updates during the year prior to consideration by the Cabinet or Council, as follows.

- STAN update
- Quarterly Integrated Performance Reports
- Area Based Working
- Refuse Collection Vehicle Replacement
- Vacant Homes Strategy
- Increase in empty properties update
- Hot Food Takeaway update
- Capita Performance update
- Ombudsman Annual Letter/General Complaints Report
- Annual Equality Report
- Review of the 2014/15 Corporate Risk Register
- Council Tax Bills
- Progress update on Grounds Maintenance Schedule
- 2015/16 Council Priorities/Council Tax and Council Budget 2015/16
- Leisure Invest to Save





KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2014-15 - Overview and Scrutiny Review Activity

The following reviews have been completed and have been/or will be reported to Cabinet

Task and Finish Group Review work remains a key area of scrutiny activity where councillors can really get to understand an issue in detail and provide recommendations for improvement.

ROGUE LANDLORDS TASK AND FINISH GROUP



This piece of work commenced in March 2014, following the Council's successful bid (£79k) for funding to tackle rogue landlords. This funding was part of a package of measures to ensure that millions of working and vulnerable tenants get a better deal when they rent a home.

Following the bid, it was suggested that scrutiny would be an ideal way of reviewing how the Council was going to tackle rogue landlords around the Borough. The group were assisted throughout by the Health, Housing and Regeneration Manager and the Rogue Landlords Co-ordinator.

Members of the task and finish group shadowed Environmental Health Officers on site visits and also visited Hyndburn Borough Council to look at how they manage Selective Licensing.

The task group also received presentations from the Lancashire Fire Safety Enforcement Team, the CAB, Trading Standards and the Police.

The final report went to Cabinet in October 2014 with their response to the recommendations reported back to scrutiny in December 2014.

It was agreed when we first established this group that it would be undertaken in two phases with Phase 1 looking at how the Council would find out who the rogue landlords are, as locally the Council is already aware of 10 rogue landlords who have around 300 properties between them.

The task group were informed that the Council would be writing to those landlords who own more than 3 properties to give them fair warning/notification of the proposals being put forward, as well as writing to all tenants to inform them of what they are entitled to.

What came out of this task and finish group was that it was important for the Council to work with local partners to address the serious problems that rogue landlords can impose on local communities and the hardship that can be suffered by tenants.





Five recommendations were presented within the report to Cabinet and all were accepted and work would continue during 2015 to address these.

Phase 2 of the review is looking at what the Council has done so far and what information is now available on both the Council's website and in leaflet form for both landlords and tenants.

The new legislation has been brought into force by Government to drive standards in the Private Rented Sector.

Enforcing this legislation will give the Council the opportunity to improve standards, drive out rogue landlords and improve the reputation of the Private Rented Sector in Rossendale.

From October 2014, all businesses involved in letting or property management work are required to join one of the three Government approved property ombudsman schemes (Redress Schemes), failure of which will lead to a fine. The Council intends to send out letters to known letting/property management businesses informing them that they have to be part of the redress scheme and tell them which one they have to be registered with.

The Council had also secured funding for a pilot Counter Fraud Scheme, to identify the number of properties deleted from the Valuation Office Agency database. The £150k money would support a Pilot Assessment of Non Domestic Rates and Council Tax.

The funding would go towards intelligence gathering and challenging the decisions of the Tribunal Office. This funding could help extend the work of the rogue landlord work, which compliments the work to be undertaken with the pilot scheme.

A further meeting is due to be held in July 2015, to review the outcome of the Council sending out letters to all letting/property management businesses and to receive an update on the pilot Counter Fraud scheme.

GREEN VALE HOMES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

At the request of the former Chief Executive, a task and finish group was established to review the proposed changes to the Governance at Green Vale Homes and what this could mean to the Council and Rossendale residents.

Meetings were held between 11th September 2014 and 16th February 2015, during which time the task and finish group heard from the two Council representatives on the Green Vale Homes Board, a representative from the CAB, numerous Officers from both GVH and the Together Housing Group, including their Chief Executive, Steve Close.

Following a presentation with the CAB it was obvious that there appears to be a lack of communication between them and GVH and it was accepted that dialogue with the CAB needed to be improved in the future.





Another concern raised was the B-with-Us system which was the agreed method of letting social and affordable housing offered by Housing Associations as a transparent way of allowing applicants to bid for preferred properties, whilst ensuring those with greatest need get quicker access through a system of priority banding. Feedback from the CAB, Council officers and users felt that B-with-Us was a very complex website and this was reflected by GVH's own review of customer experience of using the website.

The task and finish group were informed that action is being taken and they are looking to upgrade the system in early 2015.

On 12th March the report and its findings were presented to the Chief Executive and Group Director of Strategy and Communications within the Together Housing Group. Whilst most recommendations were accepted, they provided additional information which was included in the final report which would be presented to Cabinet in the new municipal year.

THE COUNCIL'S LAND TRANSACTION PROCESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

This piece of work was requested by the Leader of the Council following a question raised by a member of the public at a full Council meeting regarding the Council's Land/Property Transaction process.

The task and finish group met with the Director of Business and the Property Service Manager to agree a process that the Council could consider using when they intend to sell/lease land or property owned by the Council.

The group looked at the procedures used by two other local authorities before a decision was made on what procedure was felt to be appropriate for Rossendale.

The task and finish group indicated that the Council should be more transparent with a clear and precise procedure needed.

The group also suggested that the Council should charge a non-refundable fee of £100 for administration of the disposal of land/property, with other fees to be payable in the event that the transaction is agreed in principle and proceeds to completion.

The response to the recommendations of the task and finish group are still awaited from Cabinet.





RECOMMENDATIONS FROM LAST YEAR'S REVIEW

In last year's Annual Report we reported that scrutiny had undertaken a review of the Public Rights of Way in Rossendale.

The Cabinet and LCC's response to the recommendation of the report was presented to Partner Scrutiny in November 2014, who commented that the report was very worthwhile and valuable and had attracted a very good response from the public. Work was still ongoing to address some of the recommendations, which were in the main, accepted by Cabinet.

HEALTH SCRUTINY

Meetings are held bi-monthly between the Council and the Rossendale Clinical Commissioning Lead GP, Dr Tom McKenzie and Andy Laverty, Locality Commissioning Manager for Rossendale.

These are very constructive meetings and help the Council understand what is going on with the 'health agenda' for Rossendale.

Any concerns raised at these meetings can, if necessary, lead to a scrutiny review and the CCG have already offered to assist the scrutiny task and finish group when they commence the work on local ambulance service response times.





WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

The scrutiny work programme is starting to develop for 2015-16 and key issues are already being identified.

We are beginning to ask people what they want us to review during the next 12 months. This will be done via the Council's website. Scrutiny forms are also available at the One Stop Shop, by completing the form at the end of this Annual Report or by emailing democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk

Detailed Scrutiny Reviews

As indicated earlier in this report, one piece of work which we commenced in April was a review of the Borough's response times by North West Ambulance Service and this will be reported in next year's Annual Report. Other reviews will be decided once we have received ideas from members of the public, our partners, councillors and officers within the Council.

We have already agreed the dates for both our Partner Scrutiny and Corporate Scrutiny meetings and these are detailed below. All commence at 6.30pm in the Council Chambers at Futures Park.

Corporate Scrutiny

22nd June 2015
20th July 2015
21st September 2015
16th November 2015
1st February 2016
14th March 2016

Partner Scrutiny

29th June 2015
7th September 2015
2nd November 2015
29th February 2016

All meetings are open to the public to attend and are held in the evening to encourage wider participation. Members of the public have the right to ask questions on general matters relating to Overview and Scrutiny and on specific agenda items. Copies of agendas and minutes relating to Overview and Scrutiny can be accessed on-line at

http://www.rossendale.gov.uk/meetings/committee/47/corporate_overview_and_scrutiny or

http://www.rossendale.gov.uk/meetings/committee/48/partner_overview_and_scrutiny or they are available at the One Stop Shop, Futures Park, Bacup, OL13 0BB.





HAVE YOUR SAY!

Getting Involved

One of the key roles of overview and scrutiny is to involve communities in the decision making process. Whatever your role, whether it be as a councillor, officer, partner, community representative or an individual who lives or works in the borough, you are encouraged to have your say, either by suggesting an issue for investigation, or by getting involved with an area of work already underway.

If there are any other themes relating to improving council services which you believe could benefit from a scrutiny review or if you have concerns or feel strongly about an issue or service where you think overview and scrutiny could make a difference by influencing decision-makers please let us know.

Any suggestions will be evaluated to assess whether an overview and scrutiny investigation is likely to have a positive impact and councillors will decide whether to proceed. Please bear in mind however that overview and scrutiny cannot investigate individual complaints. The Council has a separate complaints procedure to deal with these.

Email: democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk or send in your views to: Committee and Member Services, The Business Centre, Room 213, Futures Park, Bacup, OL13



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There is also a scrutiny form available to complete on the Council's website (rossendale.gov.uk) if you have an ideas that you would like scrutiny to investigate.

YOUR VIEWS ARE IMPORTANT TO US

