

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

2015/16





**Councillor Amanda Robertson,  
Chair**

### **A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

This Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2015/16 highlights some of the significant activity of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Task and Finish Groups.

This year we reduced the scrutiny structure to have just one overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the usual Task and Finish Groups. This appears to have worked well.

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'.

The work undertaken during 2015/16 has been wide-ranging and members, in examining the issues, have considered best practice and taken evidence from interested parties, highlighting the issues that informed the recommendations as a result of their work.

We have found this year more than any other year, that members of task and finish groups have difficult decisions to make because of the financial situation of local authorities, not just in Rossendale but nationally.

Particular thanks goes to those external to the Council who gave up their time to attend meetings and contribute to the work of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Task and Finish Groups.

As always, I would like to thank all members for the contributions they have made throughout the year. I would also 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 process throughout the year.





**Councillor Sean Serridge, Portfolio Holder for Legal and Democratic Services**

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 Committee has continued to support the Cabinet in providing challenge and

assurance in respect of policy development and review across the Council and its partners, acting as a 'critical friend'.

In relation to partners, the scrutiny process involves itself with external organisations and they recently worked in partnership with North West Ambulance Service to review the service it provides to Rossendale people. This involved task group members spending a day in the Rawtenstall Health Centre to seek the views of patients on their thoughts of the ambulance service.

Both councillors and officers continue to work together in these difficult and challenging times ahead to ensure the best provision of services for the people of Rossendale.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sean Serridge".



## INTRODUCTION

### What is Overview and Scrutiny?

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

All local authorities operating a Cabinet and Scrutiny model have a Cabinet made up of the Leader of the Council and in Rossendale there are four other members who make up the Cabinet.

The Overview and Scrutiny (O & S) role is carried out by non-Cabinet members. In Rossendale we have one committee made up of 10 politically balanced members.

Overview and Scrutiny is not a decision making body, but a body which monitors and influences those that are i.e. Cabinet. They report their work back to Cabinet who would decide if any recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are accepted, and if not, why.

In Rossendale the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a role in performance monitoring, enabling members to scrutinise detailed performance reports on a quarterly basis.

Scrutiny members/non-Cabinet members undertake reviews (called task and finish groups). These are made up of five members who are appointed to look in-depth at particular issues and make recommendations which may suggest a change in policy or service provision. The report would then be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, prior to submission to Cabinet.

#### What we do not do!

Overview and Scrutiny is not a mechanism for the investigation or settling of individual complaints. The Council has a separate process for this. It is also not able to look at individual planning or licensing decisions.

Overview and Scrutiny does welcome suggestions from councillors and the general public as to issues that can be looked at by the overview and scrutiny process.

This can be done by **emailing:**

[democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk) or send in your views to: Committee and Member Services, The Business Centre, Room 213, Futures Park, Bacup, OL13 0BB.



## **Work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the year**

### Performance Reports - Quarterly

During the year the committee received quarterly performance reports and asked a number of questions of officers.

Performance Indicators are set in conjunction with managers and portfolio holders for each service area, who meet to go through all the Actions/PIs/Risks prior to the setting of their Business Plans each year.

If any performance indicators were behind target an action plan for each of these has to be completed by the appropriate officer, with actions being taken to improve performance. If by the following quarter targets had not improved, then the committee would ask the officer in charge to attend the next meeting to explain why the targets were not being achieved.

It has been agreed that Overview and Scrutiny should establish a task and

finish group to look at how Rossendale Council is reacting to setting their own performance targets and whether these are sustainable/workable, and set at the appropriate level.

### Annual Ombudsman Letter/General Complaints

This is another regular item that the Committee receives and during 2014/15 the Ombudsman received 25 enquiries or complaints about the Council and they conducted detailed investigations into just 2 of these, which were both “not upheld”.

In relation to formal complaints, there had been 115 complaints, the majority of which were in relation to customer service, application processing, or an action, response or communication.

The Council also received 170 compliments, which was an increase on the previous year.

### Local Council Tax Scheme 2016/17

The Council was required to have any revisions to the above scheme in place by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2016. Therefore, a report was presented to the committee on the Local Council Scheme 2016/17. There were approximately 3500 people who would be affected by the CTS within Rossendale.

It was noted that it was important that the Council continued to try and protect the most vulnerable.

### Dog Fouling Enforcement

In September 2015 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from an officer in relation to the Council’s current level of service and enforcement activities around dog fouling in Rossendale.

In 2009 the Council adopted 4 Dog Control Orders under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, but in October 2014 these were converted to Public Space Protection Orders to give all Councils new powers

if there are activities taking place in a public space which are having (or likely to have) a detrimental effect on the quality of life for those in the locality.

After receiving the report it was agreed to establish a task and finish group.

### Presentation on the ICT System

A member requested that this item be put on a scrutiny agenda and in November the Head of Customer Services and ICT presented members with an overview of the Council's ICT systems, the current arrangements, future arrangements and outlined the security measures that were in place.

Data losses were discussed and it was noted that the biggest threat was manual data loss or user error.

Strict security measures were enforced and it was noted that an auditor had been refused entry to the Data Centre because they did not have their ID.

The Council did not sell customer details.

Extensive security testing was clarified and the Council was regularly audited by LCC, Grant Thornton, DWP, PSN and 'penetration testing' was carried out.

The committee were also informed that steps were taken to keep ahead of ever changing threats.

### **Other Reports**

The following is a list of other reports that the committee received during 2015/16.

- Social Media/Networking Policy for Members
- Annual Equality Report
- Council Tax and Council Tax Support Sanctions and Prosecution Policy
- Combined Authority Report
- Conservation Strategy

### **External Scrutiny**

The committee also received a number of presentations from external organisations as follows:

### **Coastal Health Care**

In July 2014, Coastal Health Care took over the running of the Minor Injuries Unit at Rawtenstall Health Centre, with the aim:

- To provide quality care close to home
- Help relieve pressure on A & E departments through avoidance of unnecessary admissions

The unit opens 8am-8pm seven days per week, 365 days a year, accepting referrals from 111 via signposting and GP Practices.

They were commissioned to receive 10,000 per year and during the first year they have actually seen 10,058, an average of 857 patients per month, with Monday and Tuesday being the 'peak days'.

The Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Health, together with the Scrutiny Support Officer meet bi-monthly with the Clinical Commissioning Group to receive performance activity within the MIU and to keep updated on any health related issues for Rossendale.

### **Healthwatch**

The Acting Director of Operations at Healthwatch presented an update on their work since its commencement in April 2013.

Healthwatch is a not for profit organisation, with a network of over 150 independent Healthwatch organisations in England.

Healthwatch gather evidence based on feedback from the public and look at local trends to identify areas of concern.

They have a database of over 6,000 people throughout Lancashire, with 31 volunteers who carry out visits and talks to the public to ensure their views and experiences are heard by those who commission and provide services.

This enables the people of Lancashire to influence change and improve the quality of health and social care services.

The committee were informed of their plans for 2015/16 and aim to deliver 5 key projects.

The committee raised concerns in relation to:-

- a) Unclear as to how healthwatch feeds in
- b) Concern about the future of Calderstones Hospital NHS Trust
- c) Issue around signposting for complaints and where patients go
- d) Concern about the effectiveness of Healthwatch

### **Accrington and Rossendale College (ACCROSS)**

In November 2015 the committee received a presentation from the Principal, Accrington & Rossendale College who provided an update on the Stubblelee Vocational Centre and Rossendale's provision.

The Stubblelee Vocational Centre had been relocated to the Accrington Campus due to small numbers, declining demand, travel to learn and the withdrawal of funding for adult courses.

The Rossendale provision was currently 400 adult learners and 75 apprentices with 31 Rossendale employers. There were 750 Rossendale residents on programmes at the Accrington Campus.

Future plans included a partnership with Jobcentre+, the Bacup Townscape Heritage Initiative and developing the Stubblelee Centre.

Some learners sent to the Stubblelee Vocational Centre were mandated learners from Jobcentre+ and class numbers had declined.

There were at least 4 excellent colleges in the north west area and the market was very competitive. Higher level students would travel to learn and were more like to take out loans to study.

A joined up approach with other colleges was being undertaken with regards to some courses.

The college was continuing to lobby the government and the local MPs and remained optimistic regarding the challenges it was facing.

### **Cosy Homes in Lancashire**

James Sommerville, Cosy Homes in Lancashire (CHiL) Development Manager gave a presentation and updated members on the CHiL project.

The aim of the project was to reduce energy bills, create warm homes, reduce carbon emissions, but with a focus on health and wellbeing.

All local authorities in Lancashire had signed an agreement to participate in the one year pilot.

In Rossendale 3069 homes were classified as being in fuel poverty, with Rossendale being 124<sup>th</sup> worst in England.



There was a definite need to advertise this scheme, as whilst this commenced on 1st September, installing only began in December and only 4 Rossendale people had enquired about the scheme.

### **Police Presentation**

Under the Police and Justice Act and the related statutory guidance from the Home Office on the overview and scrutiny of Crime and Disorder, the committee continues to monitor all types of crime and disorder issues, including the performance reports on progress against crime indicators.

Inspector Steve Rides presented the 2015/16 annual crime figures, which highlighted that all crime was up by 233, totalling 2974 crimes for Rossendale.

It was suggested that a task and finish group be established later in the year to look closely at crime statistics.

### **Leisure Update**

#### Rossendale Leisure Trust (RLT)

The committee annually receive presentations from both Rossendale Leisure Trust (RLT) and Community Leisure Association Whitworth (CLAW).

In February 2016 the Senior Manager of RLT presented at update on some of the key achievements as follows:

- a)** Their best financial performance in the past five years with a turnover of £1.89m and a forecast year end position with the budget allocation
- b)** Continued growth of membership including the on-going success of the Passport to Leisure scheme for Rossendale's low income families and increasingly successful GP referral programme
- c)** Key events such as the Rossendale Sports Awards, Rossendale Triathlon

and Haslingden Football Tournament being a success and collectively engaged all parts of the community

The huge success of the opening of the Grip and Go, both in terms of engagement and in terms of financial performance (picture below)



The committee also heard of some of the key challenges for RLT as follows:

**a)** An ongoing risk of new entrants to the market including new budget gyms

which could have a significant impact on the Leisure Trust

**b)** The need to carefully monitor the quality of services provided to local residents to ensure standards are as high as possible

**c)** The upcoming re-opening of the Haslingden Pool would need to be carefully monitored

### **Community Leisure Association Whitworth (CLAW)**

As with the RLT, the committee receives an annual update from The Community Leisure Association Whitworth who provided a report which highlighted their key achievements during 2015/16, which included:

**a)** Increase in wedding bookings and more people taking up the wedding packages on offer

**b)** Increase in swimming lessons

**c)** Introduction of social media at both facilities, which has led to an increase in customer network

**d)** The Café Gallery at the Leisure Centre was well used

A number of actions were identified to reduce operational costs at both the Riverside and at the Leisure Centre as follows:

**a)** reduce overheads such as utility costs

**b)** Introduce a paperless system

**c)** review of financial management processes

**d)** new domestic hot water system including showers at the Leisure Centre

### **Rossendale Transport**

The Managing Director of ROSSO (Rossendale Transport) provided members with an update on the progress of the bus company.



ROSSO has a fleet of 100 buses, with 225 staff and an annual

turnover of £9.3m and an annual wage bill of £3.5m.

Members were pleased to be informed that they have 3 painted buses which connect to the local community, one being Britannia Coconutters, this has evolved into a sponsorship arrangement whereby the vehicle takes the dancers to local events where they perform in the summer months.

The whole bus fleet was now DDA compliant, well ahead of the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017 deadline.

New ticket machines were introduced in 2014 which enabled managers to have a clearer view of the business and its passengers purchasing trends.

The Managing Director explained the opportunities and challenges for the bus company indicating that the key issue was Lancashire County Council's decision to withdraw contracted bus services, which had cost ROSSO over £250k per annum in revenue.

## **CONSULTATION RESPONSE GROUPS**

There is a small group of members who are invited to respond to consultations as we receive them in the office. Below is the list of those that the Council has responded to:

- Post Office Crawshawbooth
- LCC Polling District and Polling Places Review
- Lancashire Fire and Rescue Budget consultation
- Local Government Boundary Commission Electoral – Polling District and Places Review for Lancashire

## **TASK AND FINISH GROUPS**

Task and Finish groups may be established by a Scrutiny Committee for the purpose of conducting an in-depth review of any service, policy or issue that affects the Borough, which falls under the remit of that committee.

Usually there are five politically balanced members on a task and finish group (non-Cabinet members) who at the first meeting agree a Chair and also the Terms of Reference for the group.

Below is information on the task and finish groups that have been established over the last twelve months.

### **North West Ambulance Service (NWAS)**

Whilst Lancashire County Council has a statutory duty to scrutinise health services we are aware that because of the size of county it cannot always look at detailed local issues.

In November 2014 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from NWAS and concerns were expressed at the response times for Rossendale which at the time were well below target.

A task and finish group was established in April 2015 and completed its work in October 2015, having held six meetings, visited the two local ambulance stations and also the A & E at the Royal Blackburn Hospital. Site visits were also undertaken to the 111 service in Bolton and the 999 Control Centre in Broughton.

We invited the Community First Responders (CFR) to explain their role.

Community First Responders are volunteers who give their time freely to help care for people and save lives in their community.

First Responders provide support to the regular Ambulance Service by attending 999 calls in and around the community to provide the earliest possible intervention for patients in the

first few minutes until the arrival of an ambulance.

The ambulance service dispatcher is able to send Community First Responders to a range of incidents; they are dispatched at the same time as the ambulance crews but because they are often in more rural areas can often arrive before the ambulance.

Rossendale currently has 26 qualified CFRs, with 6 additional CFRs trained and awaiting completion of the vetting process. Rossendale has the highest in East Lancashire (Burnley 12, Padiham 2, Colne 4, Blackburn with Darwen 12 and Accrington 6).

The final report with recommendations was sent to the North West Ambulance Service, Clinical Commissioning Group and East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust for comments which were received in February 2016.

## Counter Fraud Scheme

This group was established following on from the Rogue Landlords Task and Finish Group which was held in 2014/15.

The group were informed that the Council had identified a number of properties that had been 'deleted' or rated zero exempt from the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) database, which would have a direct financial impact on revenue to the Council.

Rossendale was one of a number of authorities that was successful in a funding bid and received £150k to look at the Valuation Office Agency Fraud-Pilot Assessment of Non Domestic Rates and Council Tax. This enabled the Council to explore and challenge the deletion and exemptions of both residential and non-domestic properties from the VOA's Rating List, where owners have knowingly submitted proposals to avoid paying relevant property taxes.

Members were informed of available funding from the Department of

Communities and Local Government's Counter Fraud Fund, which provided local authorities with the opportunity to boost capability and capacity in tackling non-benefit fraud and make real financial savings from reducing the cost of fraud.

The task group wanted to understand how the Council intended to identify how fraud/avoidance has been committed and measures the Council were putting in place to recoup these costs.

A new post dedicated to the Counter Fraud Scheme was identified for this project and the initial number of exemptions from March 2015 was 181.

From the 181 exemptions mentioned above, 46 letters were sent out. Eight of these were conflicting letters where the Council knew the owner/liable party was incorrect and 38 were general letters where the Council had no land registry documentation to confirm the up-to-date owner.

Of the 46 general letters, only 6 hadn't replied and 2 of those had been amended by the billing team following separate information being provided. Therefore, in real terms only 4 had not replied.

At the completion of the work of the task and finish group 16 accounts had been amended which resulted in £27,077.19 being written on in Council Tax debt, of which £20,832.02 was down to the exemption exercise highlighted above, with a further £4,245.17p due following miscellaneous investigations still relating to exemptions/discounts.

The new post had proved a success as the project had generated more money than the costs of the post and any other expenses, and as such this had been a worthwhile project.

The various exercises being undertaken by the officer as part of the project was financially beneficial to the Council in reducing fraud and recouping costs.

Cabinet responded to the recommendations of the group in

March 2016 and accepted all the recommendations. A further progress update on whether the recommendations have been implemented will be requested in November 2016.

## **Dog Fouling**

This task and finish group commenced its work in October 2015.

The group met four times and took into account the report presented to the committee in September. The report highlighted that one of the highest sources of complaints by the public to local councillors concerned dog fouling, but these complaints were not taken into account in the formal complaints the Council receives. Between April 2014 and March 2015, 22 complaints about dog fouling were made to the Operations Team directly.

When looking at other local authority websites, it was clear that our website needed to be improved and ensure the information provided was clear and up

to date with current legislation and contact details included.

When making our recommendations it was agreed that we would need to revisit this piece of work in four months when the new manager was in place within the Operations Team, as he may have a different opinion on how to progress with dog fouling within the Borough.

The Phase 1 report would be sent to the Cabinet for comments on the recommendations in June 2016.



One recommendation was to erect new signage in designated areas of the Borough and ask all councillors to

inform the Operations Team of areas within their ward which they feel would benefit from having a sign erected.

These have now been printed and the above photo is of Councillor Lamb, Portfolio Holder for Operational Services and Development Control, along with Councillor Oakes a member of the task and finish group and Councillor Ashworth, showing off the new signs.

The report will be sent to Cabinet in the new municipal year for their comments.

**Phase 2 of this piece of work will commence in July and be reported in next year's Annual Report.**

## **Performance Management Process**

Whilst writing this report, a task and finish group was established to look at the Council's performance management process.

The purpose being was that it appeared unclear to members, particularly those new to scrutiny as to how targets were set; how targets are selected; what benchmarking takes place; what processes are used to monitor targets, and how the process is quality assured.

Further work will be taking place during 2016/17 and will be reported in next year's Annual Report.

## **TASK AND FINISH UPDATES FROM**

In the last report two task and finish groups had completed their work but Cabinet had not enough time to respond to the recommendations until the new municipal year.

Therefore, the Land Transaction Task and Finish Group report went back to Overview and Scrutiny in July 2015, where the Portfolio Holder and Head of Finance and Property Services presented their response to our recommendations.

### **The new process has now been adopted by the Council.**

In September 2015 the Cabinet's response to the Green Vale Homes Task and Finish Group was presented to Overview and Scrutiny and it was agreed that regular meetings be arranged between the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny and the Chair of the Rossendale Action Partnership and Together Housing Group to ensure GVH tenants receive

appropriate levels of support that they require.

**Meetings are now held on a quarterly basis, which enables the Council to speak to Officers from GVH on issues affecting local residents.**

## **UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS**

Over the last 18 months, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has asked for updates from officers/portfolio holders as to whether or not the recommendations of previous task and finish groups had been implemented and if not, why?

### **Rogue Landlords**

The officer and portfolio holder responsible for Rogue Landlords attended the Overview and Scrutiny meeting in September to provide an update on the recommendations suggested in 2014/15 by the task and finish group.

Members were informed that 4 of the 6 recommendations had been implemented and reasons were provided as to why the other two would be given consideration at a later date.

### **Public Rights of Way**

The officer and portfolio holder responsible for Public Rights of Way in Rossendale presented an update to Overview and Scrutiny in February 2015. This was a second update, as not much work had been undertaken when the update report was first presented to scrutiny.

Some of the recommendations had been implemented and reasons were given on why others had not.

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### **UPDATE ON AREA BASED WORKING FROM 2013/14**

In 2013, Overview and Scrutiny established a task and finish group to look at street cleaning as it was anticipated that the Council would experience around a 39% cut in its revenue budget by 2014. Therefore, it was agreed to use the scrutiny process as part of the savings review to look at potential savings to the street cleansing service.

Following completion of this piece of work, the committee asked for an update on whether the recommendations back then had been implemented and the outcomes of these changes.

The changes were introduced in late 2014 and the committee heard about the following improvements which included:

a) Improved communication, due to all collection vehicles working in the same area on the same day, providing a more consistent service

b) 2 Loaders from each vehicle were able to be redeployed on cleansing activities during periods when vehicles were travelling to and from tipping facilities.

c) 2% increase in recycling rates.

## **MEETINGS SCHEDULED FOR 2016/17**

All the following meetings are open to the public and are held on a Monday evening at 6.30pm in the Council Chambers, Futures Park, Bacup.

20<sup>th</sup> June 2016

18<sup>th</sup> July 2016

5<sup>th</sup> September 2016

10<sup>th</sup> October 2016

7<sup>th</sup> November 2016

5<sup>th</sup> December 2016

16<sup>th</sup> January 2017

6<sup>th</sup> February 2017

13<sup>th</sup> March 2017

## **WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17**

Overview and Scrutiny have asked the public for suggestions for the work programme for 2016/17.

At its first meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June the Committee will look at the suggested items and decide which to take forward for 2016/17.

We already have two task and finish groups which began during 2015/16 and are continuing their work over the next few months. These are:-

- Dog Fouling Task and Finish Group
- Review of the Performance Management Task and Finish Group