

Scrutiny

Making a difference

A magnifying glass with a black handle and a silver rim is positioned over the word 'Scrutiny'. The lens of the magnifying glass is focused on the letters 'i' and 'n' of the word, 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 2013/14

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRS OF THE PARTNER SCRUTINY AND CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

This Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2013/14 highlights the work of the Partner Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Scrutiny Committee, Task and Finish Groups and Response Groups.

The last year has seen significant change within local government with a reduction in the amount of funding we receive and the introduction of new legislation that will impact on our work.

It has been a very busy year for Overview and Scrutiny with two very in-depth reviews being undertaken on the following issues:-

- Changes to the Welfare Reforms
- Public Rights of Way in Rossendale

Members of both these reviews indicated how much they enjoyed undertaking these pieces of work. The knowledge and expertise of people using public rights of way helped the group immensely.

As Chairs of Scrutiny we are pleased that the public suggestions influenced our Work Programme for 2013/14 and hope that this will continue in 2014/15.

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'.

Scrutiny of partners is just as important and we have heard from a number of our partners over the last 12 months.

As always, we would like to thank all members and co-opted members of the Scrutiny Committees for the contributions they have made throughout the year.

We 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.



Councillor Liz McInnes
Chair of Partner Scrutiny



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.

In the last year, the task and finish groups have been very busy looking at two very topical areas, those being Public Rights of Way in Rossendale and the impact of the Welfare Reforms on the people of Rossendale. Cabinet accepted all the recommendation of the Welfare Reforms Task and Finish Group and are at present looking at the recommendations of the Public Rights of Way report, alongside Lancashire County Council who is the responsible body.

In the last annual report I indicated I would like to see a strengthened Overview and Scrutiny process and closer working between Scrutiny and the Cabinet and I feel that we have succeeded. Cabinet members have been invited to give evidence at task and finish groups and also attend their final meetings to comment on the recommendations. Cabinet members have also been supportive of the scrutiny process and the work they undertake on behalf of the Council.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the councillors, independent members and the general public who have taken part in scrutiny and to our Scrutiny Support Officer, Pat Couch for the support she provides to the scrutiny process.

It is still a very difficult time in local government and difficult decisions are still being made. I hope that by working together we can all be sure we are doing our very best to deliver good local services and value for money for our residents.

Regards

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

Councillor Sean Serridge
Cabinet Member for Customers, Legal and Licensing

MEET THE MEMBERS OF SCRUTINY

Partner Scrutiny

Councillor McInnes (Chair)
Councillor Kenyon (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Fletcher
Councillor Knowles
Councillor Morris
Councillor Roberts
Councillor Shipley

Irene Divine (Co-opted member)

Corporate Scrutiny

Councillor Oakes (Chair)
Councillor Procter (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Bleakley
Councillor Creaser
Councillor Hughes
Councillor Milling
Councillor Pilling

Keith Pilkington (Co-opted member)

The two co-opted members were appointed following interview and do not have voting rights.

Attendance of Members at Overview and Scrutiny

Attendance by Councillors at Overview and Scrutiny Meetings over the last 12 months has been as follows:

Meeting	Number of Meetings	%
Corporate Scrutiny	6	94%
Partner Scrutiny	4	84%

All Corporate Scrutiny and Partner Scrutiny meetings are open to the public and we would like to thank those who have attended to contribute to discussions.

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. 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.

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 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.

The table below highlights the number of scrutiny meetings held during 2013/14. Whilst there were 13 Task and Finish Group meetings, these equate to 4 topic reviews - welfare reforms and public rights of way, which were full reviews and polling station and apprenticeship scheme, which were light touch reviews.

Key Facts	
• Corporate Scrutiny	6
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THE COMMITTEES

PARTNER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Partner Scrutiny Committee is the Council's statutory 'Crime and Disorder Committee and every November the Committee invite the Chief Inspector to attend their meeting to give an overview of statistics in relation to crime and disorder in the Borough.

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

June 2013 – There were presentations from the First Responders who are a team of volunteers who live and work in the local community. They are trained by North West Ambulance NHS Service to attend certain calls where time can make a difference between life and death.

There was also a presentation from 'Healthwatch' which is a new consumer champion for both health and social care and exists in two forms – local Healthwatch, at a local level and Healthwatch England, at a national level.

The aim of Healthwatch is to give citizens and communities a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided within the locality.

September 2013 – We had a presentation from the General Manager of the Patient Transport Service (PTS) for North West Ambulance Service (NWAS).

In 2012 there was a full commercial tender of PTS contracts which required significantly higher standards for patients, this provided an opportunity for the ambulance service to improve their services.

The committee also received a presentation from Accrington and Rossendale College on the Stubblelee Vocational Centre and an overview of Rossendale provision.

Following the closure of the Rossendale College site they were actually delivering more education and training. Stubblelee Vocational Centre opened in October 2012, after identifying a gap in local provision and is a partnership between ACCROSS and Rossendale Borough Council.

Over the last year or two the college has been working with a range of partners in Rossendale to build a vibrant and exciting range of programmes for Rossendale residents.

November 2013 – The committee received a presentation from Lancashire Constabulary with an update on Rossendale's performance figures for November 2012 - October 2013.

Concern was expressed that Waterfoot Police Station would remain open but with reduced capacity and whilst officers would do their paperwork and take their refreshment breaks from Waterfoot, response officers would start and finish their shifts from Burnley Police Station. The Chair of Partner Scrutiny, the Scrutiny Support Officer and the Leader of the Council met to discuss this and it was agreed that the Chief Inspector attends a future meeting to provide an update on the effect of the proposed changes.

The committee also received a presentation from Green Vale Homes (Together Housing) who took over the Housing Stock from the Council in June 2006. An update was provided on the work of the Together Housing Group and its customers. The Managing Director explained the challenges both external and internal. He indicated that the Home and Communities Agency (HCA) regulate all activity and

scrutinise housing associations to ensure they are financially viable and well governed.

March 2014 – The Committee had presentations from Rossendale Leisure Trust (RLT) and Community Leisure Associations Whitworth (CLAW) on their annual performance and budget.

There was also a presentation from Rosso Transport (formerly Rossendale Transport). The directors gave the committee an update on their future plans.

CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee looks at both Policies and Performance of the Council.

Quarterly Performance Reports

Corporate Scrutiny makes an important contribution to the Council's very effective performance management arrangements. Our on-going monitoring of the Quarterly Integrated Performance enabled us to hold Cabinet members and officers to account for the performance against service plan objectives and performance targets.

Over the last few years target levels have increased and this year is the first year no officer has been asked to return to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee to explain how they propose to improve their target levels.

Of the very few target levels that have not achieved, 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.

Budget monitoring is reported to the committee in February, as part of the budget setting process. As always the scrutiny process enabled members to question the Head of Finance on aspects of the budget that needed clarification.

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

- Review of Grants
- Update on Shop Front Design
- Haslingden Pool
- Refuse, Recycling and Street Cleaning
- Glen Valley Project Update from Inspire
- Rossendale Against Domestic Abuse
- Ombudsman Annual Letter/General Complaints Report
- Annual Equality Report
- Community Right to Bid

- CCTV Code of Practice
- Local Land Charges Debt
- Members Mobile Phone Policy
- Development of Allotments in Rossendale
- Environmental Enforcement Policy
- Update on changes to Grounds Maintenance Schedule
- Revised Statement of Licensing Policy
- Revised Policy Statement on Guidelines to Convictions
- Apprenticeship Scheme Policy

Whilst most of the above were accepted, there were a number that asked for changes to be made before going to either Cabinet/Council.

WORK OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

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

Welfare Reforms Task and Finish Group

In last year's report we highlighted the work of Phase 1 of the welfare reforms, when we looked at

- *New Council Tax Support Scheme*
- *Bedroom Tax*
- *Social Fund*

This report highlights the work of Phase 2 of the welfare reforms looking at the following

- Benefit Cap
- Implementation of Universal Credit (which would not affect Rossendale until April 2014)
- Pension Credit

The group heard from a number of people from different organisations including;

- a) Welfare Rights – One Connect
- b) Citizens Advice Bureau
- c) Together Housing
- d) St Vincent's Housing Association
- e) Department of Works and Pensions

The information received and evidence gathered helped the group immensely.

The Task and Finish Group understood how these massive changes have had an effect on the Council, housing associations, tenants and customers and agreed that

closer partnership working was required between the different departments/organisations to ensure a more joined up approach for claimants.

The Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports went to Cabinet and were then presented to Scrutiny Committee in March 2014, when they informed the committee that ALL recommendations had been accepted, some having already been actioned.

The group also asked that the Council continue with its sensitive approach as more customers would get into difficulties when the 20% cut to the council tax support comes in, in 2015.

The main recommendation to come out from the meeting was, that whilst the group could continue its work to monitor the prolonged effect of the welfare reforms on the Council and its residents, Members agreed that this should be passed to the Rossendale Action Partnership (RAP), to fulfil its terms of reference, including working alongside other relevant stakeholders to work to achieve the best possible outcomes for people of Rossendale.

Scrutiny will in six months ask for an update from RAP members, which include Rossendale Councillors/Officers.

Public Rights of Way Task and Finish Group

At the suggestion of a member of the public, scrutiny members agreed to look at Public Rights of Way in Rossendale.

Public Rights of Way are ways over which the public have the right to pass and re-pass. There are a number of different types:-

- Public footpaths are for pedestrians only
- Public bridleways are for pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists
- Byways open to all traffic (BOAT) can be used by pedestrians, horse riders, cyclists and vehicles, including motorized ones (but they must have a tax disc, MOT and licensed driver), although not all byways are suitable or capable of being used by all types of traffic
- Restricted byways are open to pedestrians, horse riders, cyclists and non-motorised vehicles
- Concessionary paths are not a public right of way, but instead a path (which could be for walkers, riders, cyclists or any combination) whose use by the public is allowed by the landowner

Rossendale has the following:

- 596 footpaths
- 45 bridleways
- 7 byways

Lancashire has a network of 3,716 miles of public right of way, including 240 miles of bridleways.

Public Rights of Way in Rossendale are the responsibility of Lancashire Countryside Service, of Lancashire County Council. Rossendale Borough Council is only responsible for the cleanliness of Public Rights of Way.

At the first meeting it was agreed a list of witnesses to invite to future meetings. It was also agreed to produce a questionnaire and this was sent out to the Council's Citizen's Panel and also advertised in the local media and on the Council's website inviting people to complete the questionnaire online or requesting a copy be sent by post. The task and finish group were overwhelmed with the number of response, which was 349.



Footpaths in Rossendale

The questionnaire asked people to confirm if they would like to attend a meeting of the task and finish group and over 80 people indicated they would like to come along to give their views on the current footpaths around Rossendale.

Unfortunately, the task and finish group did not expect such a large response and as they could not hear from everyone they chose a representative number to give their views from different ends of the valley.

One of the main difficulties during this review was the gathering of information on the actual budget spend for rights of way in Rossendale. This was because no budget was ring-fenced or earmarked specifically for public rights of way work in Rossendale or any other local authority. Spending is prioritised on a need-based basis across Lancashire. However, spending in districts such as Rossendale was higher pro-rata because of weather-related incidents.

A number of recommendations were made and the report was sent to both Rossendale Borough Council and Lancashire County Council for a response (some recommendations required a joint response).

A copy of the survey report and task and finish group report is available to anyone on request.

Polling Stations – short review

Overview and Scrutiny were asked to look at, and comment on, the Polling Station and District Review, which formed part of the consultation process.

A one-off meeting was arranged to look at the review process before a final decision was made by full Council.

A polling district is a section of a Ward and a polling place must be allocated for each polling district. A polling place can be a geographical area, or it can be a specific building or premises. If no specific polling place is designated then the polling district will be the polling place by default.

The designation of polling districts and places are a matter for the Council, whereas decisions regarding polling stations are the remit of the Returning Officer. The Returning Officer is responsible for deciding the arrangement and number of polling stations within each Ward.

A group of 3 members looked at the proposals and made a number of recommendations which the Returning Officer would consider as part of the consultation.

The final report including the recommendations made by the group was accepted by full Council in December.

Rogue Landlords Task and Finish Group

Another piece of work that commenced in March was 'Tackling Rogue Landlords Task and Finish Group'. This piece of work will continue over the next 6 months or so.



The Group will be working alongside Officers from Operation Carl (Co-ordination Against Rogue Landlords) to look at how the Council and other agencies can sift out those landlords who flout the law and take enforcement action against them.

Further information will be available in next year's annual report.

RESPONSE GROUPS

At the request of the Chief Executive, Overview and Scrutiny responded to a number of consultations. A response group, made up of three to five members, met to discuss a particular consultation document. Officers from the Council with a specific interest in a topic would also attend to give their support to members. This year we looked at:-

- Rossendale Borough Council Grants Process
- Lancashire Fire and Rescue Budget Consultation
- Lancs Fire and Rescue Service Performance Report and Action Plan

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM LAST YEAR'S TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

How does the scrutiny function in the council contribute to the improvement of services?

Savings Review of Street Cleaning

Last year the Council experienced around a 39% cut in its revenue budget. Over the past two years the Council has saved around £1.5m, but were required to find a further £1.3m savings by 2014. Therefore, it was agreed to use the scrutiny process as part of the savings review to look at potential savings to some service areas, one being street cleansing.

The Task and Finish Group made **13** recommendations and an action plan was presented to Scrutiny in June 2013 on what actions they proposed to take on the recommendations which generated savings in the region of £200k for the Council.

The work of this Task and Finish Group was highlighted in a North West Employers publication – 'Post-Regulation Scrutiny: North West Pioneers'.

One Stop Shop Relocation

A Task and Finish group also looked at the Council's accommodation and the proposals for moving the One Stop Shop based in Rawtenstall to Futures Park, Bacup.

The good news is that waiting times continue to be under the 10 minutes performance target, with waiting times for January and February 2014 being 7 and 6 minutes respectively.

Performance in relation to calls answered within 20 seconds also remains good with performance for January-March 2014 exceeding target.

Since the move to Futures Park in August 2013 the following number of people were seen in the One Stop Shop:

August: 2113
Sept: 2507

Oct: 2319
Nov: 2059

Dec: 1512
Jan: 2226

Feb: 2155
March: 2495

The Council's Service Assurance Team are working with the ICT team to explore the replacement of the current call centre 0845 number to that of 0300 number.

The Committee will continue to monitor the performance through the quarterly performance reports.

HEALTH SCRUTINY

The Chair of Partner Scrutiny who is also the 'Health Lead' within the Council and the Scrutiny Support Officer meet bi-monthly with the Rossendale representatives of the Clinical Commissioning Group. They receive updates on local health information, with particular emphasis on the activity within the Minor Injuries Unit.

WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14

Next Year's Work Programme

We are already planning our work for the next 12 months and asking people what they want us to review during the next 12 months. This we are doing via the Council's website. Scrutiny forms are also available at the One Stop Shop or by completing the form at the end of this annual report or by emailing democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk

HAVE YOUR SAY!

At each formal meeting there will be a public question time where you are able to ask a question of the committee.

Scrutiny can't consider

- Individual complaints
- Individual issues about members of staff
- An individual's planning or licensing application

The overview and scrutiny process at Rossendale is supported by the Committee and Member Services Team which manages the Council's decision-making process and service a wide range of Council decision-making bodies including the Scrutiny Committees, Cabinet, Development Control Committee, Licensing Committee, Audit and Accounts Committee as well as full Council.

If you have any queries about this report or the overview and scrutiny process, or if you are interested in participating, please feel free to:

Email: democracy@rossendalebc.gov.uk or send in your views to:

Democratic Services, The Business Centre, Room 213, Futures Park, Bacup, OL13 0BB.



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