

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Summary 2021-22

Foreword

Councillor Michael Heaslip

Co-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In last years Report to Council, we said “it could be an interesting year ahead”. It was, and 2022-23 looks to no be less eventful. The prospect of imminent demise is supposed to concentrate the mind. Whilst the Executive side of the house is not meant to embark on new ventures with only months to go, Overview & Scrutiny is free to think differently about the way a Council could be run and pass on those thoughts to the new Cumberland Council. Whether they take up those ideas is up to them, but if you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you always got. There has never been a better opportunity in 20 years to think and do differently.

One of the things they could think about is the role of Overview & Scrutiny and its crucial cross-relationship with Audit. Thats something we were just beginning to develop here in Allerdale Council. Although its now over twenty years since Overview & Scrutiny Committees were first introduced by Local Government Act 2000, its fair to say that their role is still not widely understood. Used constructively, the overview and scrutiny process can enhance the ability of non-executive members to influence the development of Council policy and ensure that the Council is “doing the right things” while the Audit Committee ensure we are “doing things right”.

It was with one eye on the future governance of the area that we set the Task & Finish Groups for this past year:

Local communities and places and how they can relate to and be served in a much bigger local Council area;

Culture Leisure Recreation and Sport and its place in any new Council structures and provision.

Our Task & Finish Group studies for 2022-23 have been set with the same aim in mind. So these topics are as much or more aimed at producing reports for Cumberland Council as for Allerdale. Its important that we are clear what legacy we wish to leave to our successors, although ultimately, its for them to decide:

- 1 – Access to Primary Health Services – especially GPs and Dentistry
- 2 – Citizen services
- 3 – Democratic Participation in Voting.

It could be another interesting year ahead.

Committee membership 2021-2022

The Committee consists of twelve members. During the year the following councillors were on the membership:

Councillor Antony Annison (until Dec 2021)	Councillor Michael Heaslip - Co-Chair
Councillor Markus Campbell-Savours	Councillor Daniel Horsley
Councillor Allan Daniels	Councillor Sally Lansbury (from Dec 2021)
Councillor Paddy Gorrill	Councillor Carni McCarron-Holmes - Co-Chair
Councillor Malcolm Grainger	Councillor Ron Munby (from July 2021)
Councillor Iain Greaney	Councillor Paul Scott
Councillor Hilary Harrington	Councillor Stephen Stoddart (until July 2021)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met eight times during 2021/22. The Committee considered a wide variety of subjects over the course of those meetings as indicated below;

At the meeting on 18 June 2021, the new Committee members considered the work programme for the year. They also considered the quarterly update performance report and feedback from Outside Body representatives,

At the meeting on 16 July, the Committee received a presentation on the Allerdale Local Focus Hub, they considered the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny guidance on the relationship between Scrutiny and Audit and the third report of the Response to the Pandemic Task and Finish Group. They also received information in relation to the closure of Keswick Spa and appointment of a strategic delivery partner,

At the meeting on 2 September, the Committee noted the Revenue and Capital Outturn reports for 2020-21, considered a Motion referred from Council relating to social and private housing and received the final report of the Response to the Pandemic Task and Finish Group,

At the meeting on 8 October, the Committee considered the quarter one performance and finance update reports,

At the meeting on 19 November, the Committee considered the quarter two performance and finance update reports, received a presentation on household waste minimisation from Allerdale Waste Ltd and an update on discussions on the Geological Disposal Facility,

At the meeting on 4 February 2022, the Committee received update presentations on both the Maryport and Workington Regeneration programmes and on Private Sector Housing Enforcement and considered the final report of the Scrutiny Budget TFG,

At the meeting on 18 March, the Committee considered the quarter three performance and finance update reports, received a presentation on a review of the Councils Affordable Housing Scheme Policy documents and considered feedback from Scrutiny Outside Body representatives,

At the meeting on 22 April, the Committee considered its annual review of the Community Safety Partnership and an update report from the Climate Change Group. The Committee also approved a draft work programme for 2022-23.

Task and Finish Group activity

The Committee had agreed in previous years that each task and finish group will include at least one person from the Committee as a member and the Chair of the group, however the aim is always to involve the wider membership with all members encouraged to take part in task and finish groups according to their interests and/or knowledge.

The groups which met during the year are summarised below:

- Scrutiny Budget
- Leisure and Culture Provision
- Community Leadership and Engagement

Scrutiny Budget TFG

The group consisted of Councillor Markus Campbell-Savours, Councillor Patrick Gorrill, Councillor Hilary Harrington (Chair), Councillor Michael Heaslip, Councillor Elaine Lynch, Councillor Carni McCarron-Holmes, Councillor Paul Scott and Councillor Alan Tyson.

Over the course of two meetings, members were given comprehensive presentations from members of the Finance Team and Policy leads setting out in the first instance the business planning and budget setting process that had been adopted for the 2022/23 budget and then leading on to consideration of funding bids (both growth

and savings) for 2022/23. The group were given the opportunity to review the draft budget proposals as they stood at 13/1/22.

The group considered summaries of bids for recurring growth, non-recurring growth, recurring savings, non-recurring savings, and other financial proposals and changes, all of which had been considered at a series of budget review meetings.

Members had queries relating to some specific savings bids and asked for further details to be assured that budget reductions were not likely to lead to a fall in service quality, create future budgetary problems or limit the ability of the Council to support its communities. Further information was provided by officers to provide these assurances.

The Group were satisfied that the process to develop the draft budget proposals for 2022/23 had been robust and that many budget pressures and risks were being adequately identified and managed.

However, the group did make the point that some aspects of the budget setting process for 2022/23 were unique. As the last budget that Allerdale Borough Council would set members suggested that this would in effect become a baseline for service provision as we move into the new Cumberland Council in 2023. The group therefore asked Executive to reflect very carefully on any budgetary decisions taken in setting the 2022/23 budget that may get carried through to future budgets and impact on communities in Allerdale beyond 2023.

Leisure and Culture Provision TFG

The group consisted of Councillor Michael Heaslip (Chair), Councillor Janet Farebrother, Councillor Ron Munby, Councillor Paul Scott and Councillor Andy Semple.

The review was intended to follow different aspects of leisure and culture provision including:

- To consider the review of leisure services provision and how this work will transfer to the new unitary authority
- To monitor engagement in and the effectiveness of the sports village proposals in Workington (including how this work will transfer to the new unitary authority)
- To consider the development of the cultural strategy for West Cumbria in terms of content, engagement of stakeholders and relevance to the new unitary authority
- To consider how culture and leisure provision might be supported or delivered in future.

The review considered strategic approaches to leisure and culture provision rather than looking in detail at operational issues and questions.

The group concluded by producing a report with the below recommendations:

Recommendations

1. Corporate and community planning for the new Cumberland Council should recognise the centrality of sport leisure and culture in the life of the communities it serves and accord it a high policy priority,
2. The future pattern of sports, leisure and cultural provision across Cumberland should be based on deeper analysis of legitimate expectations of our communities as to what can be provided locally by whichever provider (with or without council support). Council support should not always be read as financial support but may be a range of other things
3. It should be recognised that Allerdale is made up of a number of different places and the new Cumberland Council will be made up of an even larger number of different places and any policy arrangements should reflect the different character, nature and circumstances of those different places
4. Cumberland Council Shadow Authority need to make an early decision to adopt a single contract for sports and leisure provision across Allerdale and Copeland areas and consider whether the contract management system adopted by the new Cumberland Council could integrate the Carlisle contract,
5. The West Cumbria Cultural Strategy needs to be completed and its recommendations considered by the Council. The final draft version should be presented to all councillors,
6. We urge the new Shadow Authority for Cumberland to acknowledge the recent closures of the Netherhall School Pool and the Keswick Leisure Pool, which leaves Allerdale Borough Council's leisure centre provision in a state of flux. We therefore urge the authority to consider the provision of new facilities in Maryport and Keswick a high priority.

Community Leadership and Engagement TFG

The group consisted of Councillor Allan Daniels, Councillor Hilary Harrington, Councillor Michael Heaslip (Chair) and Councillor Elaine Lynch.

This group was created to consider the different aspects of community leadership, including the role of councillors as community leaders, the role of officers in area / community engagement and the different approaches for engaging with localities and communities.

The intention is that the review will identify recommendations that can either be implemented by Allerdale Borough Council in the short term or carried forward as principles for the new unitary authority to consider.

Recommendations

The Group made the following recommendations –

1. The Council and its successor authority should make use of standing local forums in community areas to bring town / parish councils, police, street scene, NHS / GP / Primary Care / Unitary Council etc. etc. together with members and representatives in the community leadership role to bring a renewed community focus and engagement to public services. The Council and its successor authority should ensure mechanisms and resources are in place to deliver the Resilient Communities Strategy and other strategies and plans which can impact on communities,
2. The Council should review how it engages with Town and Parish councils and ensure it has mechanisms to support and involve this tier of representation. Parish and Town Councils should be encouraged to work together in clusters. This would enable a consistent policy of devolution to be applied by the new Unitary Council. Services that might be suited to being delivered through joint working with Parish and Town Council clusters include street scene, enforcement, horticulture, parking etc
3. The Council and its successor authority should conduct regular resident surveys across the Council area and communities and ensure that these meet the standards set out by the Local Government Association to assist with benchmarking. This will help to inform decision making and ensure the Council is focused on the needs and views of a) the whole population and b) the local views of its communities.

Future work programme

The work programme is reviewed by the Committee at each business meeting to ensure that it remains up to date and any changing circumstances or additional emerging topics are considered.

For 2022-23 the following Task and Finish Groups were established:

1 – Access to Health Services – GPs and Dentistry

2 – Customer Services

3 – Democratic Participation in Voting

It was suggested that TFG 1 and 2 be carried out in the first half of the municipal year and TFG 3 in the second half of the municipal year.

More information on the scrutiny function, including agendas, minutes, ongoing review work, and Councillor details can be found on the Council's website at www.allerdale.gov.uk