



LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL
Promoting City, Coast & Countryside

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
ANNUAL REPORT
2005/06

April 2006

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Foreword from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Welcome to this the second Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Lancaster City Council.

I would like to record my thanks to the previous Chairman, Councillor Roger Mace, for setting us off in the right direction in the Committee's first year of existence, and to all the Council Members and Officers who have contributed their time and ideas to making Overview and Scrutiny a success.

We have had a successful year in many respects, developing a positive working relationship with the Cabinet and Service Heads, scrutinising a wide range of topics (including several which were suggested by members of the public), and improving the way that we plan and prioritise our work.

Of course there is still plenty of room for improvement, and this report highlights some key areas that we need to address in the coming year.



Councillor Emily Heath
Chairman

Statistics and Overview

This report sets out the work undertaken by Lancaster City Council under the Scrutiny powers (as set out in the Local Government Act 2000) during the municipal year 2005/06. The Act also places a duty on local authorities' Overview and Scrutiny functions to produce an Annual Report which this document represents.

Key Achievements

- Reduction in the number of Call-ins.
- Greater support from Service departments to the Overview and Scrutiny work programme.
- No. of Task Groups in operation increased to 7.
- Work programme developing.
- Task Group reporting time reduced.
- Task Group scoping improved.

Key Areas for Improvement

- Scrutiny of Partnership working.
- Further development of pre-decision Scrutiny.
- Reducing the reporting time for Task Groups.
- Improved Scrutiny of budget and voluntary sector grants.
- Increasing the response times to Overview and Scrutiny requests.
- Further involvement of the public in Overview and Scrutiny, particularly with regard to Task Group working.
- Increased press coverage.

This Annual Report has been produced on behalf of the whole Overview and Scrutiny process and maps the work of Overview and Scrutiny against the Council's objectives and core values, and highlights where work has been carried out to underpin and support each of these elements.

Statistics 2005/06

STATISTIC	TOTAL 2004/5	TOTAL 2005/6
No. of Meetings (incl. Budget and Performance Panel and Task Groups)	31	41
No. of Site Visits	Not collected 2004/5	5
No. of Call-ins	6	2
No. of Issues for Pre-Decision Scrutiny	2	2
No. of Referrals from Cabinet	Not collected 2004/5	4
No. of Referrals to Cabinet/Council	22	15
No. of Cabinet Members held to account	Not collected 2004/5	1
Percentage of Recommendations adopted from Scrutiny Reviews and Task Groups	91%	86%

Pre-Decision Scrutiny

Pre-decision scrutiny is the process where, based primarily on study of the Forward Plan (the Council's published plan of all 'Key Decisions' for the forthcoming three months) and information provided by Cabinet Liaison Councillors, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee selects decisions that it would like to consider before a decision is taken.

There are many benefits to this process, particularly that it can help to add value to decisions at the pre-decision stage, can widen consultation to include Non-Executive Councillors and it can also help to minimise the use of Call-in (a last resort).

“50% of Key Decisions gave little or no opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny... leav [ing] only 24% of Key Decisions which the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had a realistic option of carrying out pre-decision scrutiny on.”

From Functioning of Forward Plan Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (8th June 2005)

In order to assist the development of this process, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has appointed one of its Members as Pre-scrutiny Champion to take a lead. Councillor Langhorn has held this post for two years and has met with Scrutiny Support Officers each time a Forward Plan has been published in order to identify potential issues for pre-decision scrutiny. Following this meeting he has contacted the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Cabinet Liaison Members and requested them to obtain further information regarding the decision. Based on such enquiry, issues have, where possible been built into the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme and brought to Committee for discussion.

Pre-decision scrutiny is a relatively new development at Lancaster City Council and its introduction has not been without difficulties, for example in establishing a clear timetable for pre-decision scrutiny. In order for decisions to be considered by the Committee, it is important that they are identified in plenty of time before they are taken. In theory, this should be simple, as three months' advance notice should be given of decisions to be taken. In reality, this has often not been the case, with notices of Key Decisions being published with less than three months notice. This impinges on the ability of Overview and Scrutiny to contribute to discussion of Key Decisions. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has considered a report from Councillor Stuart Langhorn on the functioning of the Forward Plan process and the effect that this has on Overview and Scrutiny. It is anticipated that pre-decision scrutiny will develop further in the coming year. A further report was endorsed at the March meeting of the Committee and is awaiting consideration by Cabinet and Audit Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomes Officers providing the opportunity for the Committee to submit a response during the consultation phase of a decision, as recently was the case with regard to the Council's Smoking Policy, and would encourage this approach where appropriate.

The other element, which still requires some development, is the role played by Cabinet Liaison Councillors in identifying and obtaining further information on issues. It is intended that this will be assisted through the development of job descriptions for the new scrutiny roles such as Cabinet Liaison Members, Pre-decision Scrutiny Champion and Task Group Link Member, which will be available in the revised Scrutiny Handbook due to be published in May 2006.

Consultation Procedure

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, (working with the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ian Barker) have played an active part in determining how any consultations the Council receives are dealt with and responded to. They have dealt with approximately two requests a week and decided between a variety of options for each consultation, including whether a response should be made and, if so, whether the response should be agreed by Council, Cabinet, Officers or by some bespoke arrangement.

In the coming year this function will cease as responsibility transfers to the Council Business Committee.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee



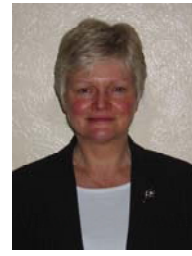
Cllr Emily Heath
(Chairman)



Cllr Evelyn Archer



Cllr Susan Bray



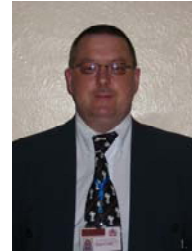
Cllr Sarah Fishwick
(until December 2005)



Cllr David Kerr
(Vice-Chairman)



Cllr Stuart
Langhorn



Cllr Robert Redfern



Cllr Peter Robinson



Cllr Rebekah
Gerrard



Cllr Sylvia Rogerson
(from January 2006)

Introduction

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has overall responsibility for the performance of all Overview and Scrutiny functions (under Local Government Act 2000) on behalf of the Council. The Committee has the power to scrutinise all Council functions and decisions that would not be dealt with by the Budget and Performance Panel. They also have the power to call-in any decisions that members feel have not been made in accordance with the Council's decision-making principles.

Other major functions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee include:

- Consideration of Cabinet decisions after they have been put into effect.
- Consideration of the Forward Plan and commenting on Key Decisions.
- Conduct of reviews of policies, services and aspects of services where there is an identifiable need, by itself or through setting a Task Group.
- Working with other local authorities and organisations to carry out joint scrutiny.
- Assisting the Cabinet in the development of the Budget and Policy Framework.
- Creating Task Groups and setting their Terms of Reference.
- Reviewing and scrutinising the performance of the Cabinet, Cabinet Committees and appropriate Officers and receiving reports and updates.

“The Committee has worked well together to address issues of concern to the Council and public, such as Carnforth Skatepark, as well as developing the role of monitoring the work of Cabinet Members. In order to be successful it is important that the Committee continues to maintain its separate identity and support from the Cabinet ”

**Councillor Sarah Fishwick
Committee Member to
December 2005**

During 2005/06 the Committee has called-in 2 decisions, scrutinised a number of Council decisions and issues, and has established 6 Task Groups. More information on a number of these items can be found under the section ‘Scrutiny and the Council’s Objectives’ on page 31, which examines how the Scrutiny function in Lancaster has contributed to the Council’s Corporate Objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan 2005/06. The 2 Call-ins by the Committee are listed in the ‘Call-in’ section of the report on page 12. An indication of the Committee’s Work Programme in 2005/06 is set out below and further information can be found in the Overview and Scrutiny minutes available on the Council’s website.

Climate Change

The Committee considered the issue of Climate Change but agreed this was too broad a piece of work for a Task Group to undertake. It was thought that this matter could best be addressed by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Energy Forum with a view as to whether a Task Group should be established at a later date, with a tighter remit.

The Committee maintained an interest in this issue and has heard presentations from the Head of Planning and Building Control Services on the Local Development Framework Sustainability Appraisal, and a presentation from Gill Fenna, Chairman of the LSP Energy Forum on ‘How and Why Lancaster City Council should develop a Climate Change Strategy.’

Among the recommendations made to Cabinet were that two days a week officer time be committed to develop a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, and that the City Council applies to the Carbon Trust to be included in the next round of consultancy support.

Playgrounds and the Disability Discrimination Act

As part of the Pre-decision scrutiny function the Committee requested information on this issue before Cabinet considered it. The Committee were dismayed by the results of a survey that had been undertaken with regard to the district's playgrounds and compliance with legislation relating to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Recommendations were made to Cabinet on this issue.

Cabinet took into consideration the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when making their decision on proposals to improve playground provision in the district in light of the survey. Overview and Scrutiny considered the criteria that should be applied in selecting the playgrounds for improvement prior to consultation with Ward Members.

The Committee are pleased with the way that this has progressed and the positive way in which this work has been undertaken in partnership with Cabinet.

Consultation on Access to Services Accommodation Review

At its meeting on 7th December 2005 Council referred the consideration of the methods of consultation on the Access to Services Accommodation Review to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee discussed in detail the options for the consultation and made recommendations back to Council. Council subsequently agreed to undertake the survey of residents as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Flower Bed and Urban Meadows

In May 2005 Cabinet referred the consideration of cheaper maintenance methods of flowerbeds and the development of open spaces for wildlife and flora including urban meadows to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee have monitored this work and will receive a progress report in the summer.



Non Voluntary Organisations Service Level Agreements and Funding for 2005/06 and beyond

Councillors David Kerr and Stuart Langhorn have worked closely with Officers in Administration Services to examine the Council's role in funding voluntary organisations with a view to clearer guidelines and rationale for their continued support. This work has proved to be more complex than was initially envisaged and has therefore taken longer than expected. A full report is anticipated in the spring. Emerging issues include:

- Whether a 'tendering style' criteria/process for inviting new Service Level Agreements could be introduced so that the Council could allocate funding based on the services/functions it wants providing in line with its corporate priorities.
- The need for clearer Service Level Agreements.
- Monitoring arrangements so that monitoring is in proportion to the level of funding each organisation receives and therefore makes the organisation accountable for receiving public money.
- The role of the councillors appointed to these organisations.

Neighbourhood Policing

The Committee heard a presentation from Acting Chief Inspector Phil Coope on the introduction of Neighbourhood Policing. Members were advised that the Police adopted a three-pronged approach to Neighbourhood Policing focusing on access, influence and answers being delivered to all citizens. It was anticipated that the whole initiative would be implemented by 2008.

The Committee has invited the Acting Chief Inspector to attend a meeting later in the year to update Members on progress and for the Committee to consider how they might wish to further contribute to this agenda.

Lancashire Locals

The Committee invited the County Council to present their proposals for Lancashire Locals. The Leader of the County Council, Councillor Hazel Harding attended the meeting with the District Partnership Officer.

The Committee expressed concern at the loss of expertise with the disbanding of the Liaison Committees and a number of concerns with regard to the proposed operation of the Joint Committee.

The Committee agreed to pass on any concerns with regard to operational issues via the Chief Executive.

Widening participation in Overview and Scrutiny

The summer/autumn 2005 edition of the Council's *Your District Matters* magazine carried an article about the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and invited readers to send in their suggestions for topics that the Committee should investigate. 22 suggestions were received and respondents were thanked individually and invited to attend the next meeting where all the suggestions were considered. Several members of the public took the opportunity to speak to the Committee. The Committee then decided which of the suggestions to incorporate into the work programme, and in what way. All respondents were informed about what had been decided.

Another successful approach to widening participation was to issue a press release before the October 2005 meeting, which was due to consider the Cabinet's draft priorities for 2006/07. The public and all Councillors were invited to attend and participate in themed small-group discussions with Members of the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny. Several people took up this opportunity, and assisted the Committee in scrutinising the Cabinet's plans and putting forward ideas for the future Overview and Scrutiny work programme.

Update on Cycling Strategy

In response to suggestions by members of the public, the Committee invited Councillor Janice Hanson, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Transport, to provide an update on the Council's Cycling Strategy. Councillor Hanson advised Members of a £1.5 million bid that was to be submitted for Cycling Demonstration Town Status, which was subsequently successful and would result in more cycleways in the district.

Councillor Hanson advised the Committee that the Millennium Bridge had won an award as part of a 10,000 mile cycle link around the country and that the Council had produced a leaflet detailing all the cycling and walking networks within the district. It was reported that cycling journeys across the river had increased by 30% since the erection of the Millennium Bridge.



Call-in and Holding Cabinet to Account

Call-in is only one of a number of ways in which Overview and Scrutiny can hold the Executive to account.

The choice to 'Call-in' a Cabinet decision is used sparingly at Lancaster City Council, and with care. The procedure ensures that, if necessary, decisions or proposals made by the Cabinet, a Cabinet Member, a Cabinet Committee, an Officer with delegated authority, or under joint arrangements can be thoroughly examined, amendments proposed, and full debate entered into by all Members.

“The Call-In of the Carnforth Skatepark decision was a good example of effective scrutiny particularly as it allowed so many Members of the Public to hear the decision reviewed, taking into account local opinion ”

**Councillor Stuart Langhorn
Committee Member**

It is the view of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that Call-ins are only used in **exceptional circumstances**. 'Exceptional circumstances' are where Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have evidence which suggests that there is a case to answer that the decision in question has not been made in accordance with the principles set out in Article 13 'Decision Making' of the Council's Constitution.

Call-ins 2005/06

Review of Service Head Posts - July 2005

Members called in the Review of Service Head Posts as it was felt that the decision of Cabinet had not been made in accordance with all the principles set out in Article 13.02 (Decision Making) of the Constitution. In particular, the Committee was concerned over the rationale behind the proposal.

The Committee recommended that the decision be deferred until September to allow Cabinet to present its overall strategic vision for the Service Head re-structure based on evidence from the North West Employers Organisation, Overview and Scrutiny discussion and evidence from the Access to Services Best Value Centre Review.

This recommendation was accepted by Cabinet.

Carnforth Skate Facility – November 2005

This meeting was held at Carnforth Station and many members of the local community (including young people) affected by the proposed skate facility attended the meeting.

Members had called in a Cabinet decision on the grounds that it had not been made in accordance with four of the principles set out in Article 13 (Decision Making), in particular due consultation and the options that were considered and the reasons for arriving at that decision.

The Committee suggested that a need for a skate facility had been identified in Carnforth, yet the Cabinet decision had disregarded this need.

The Committee expressed concern over a letter that had been produced at the Cabinet meeting for consideration. Members of the Committee also questioned the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member with Special Responsibility for Rural Affairs over the loss of external funding due to delays in making the decision and the lack of detail in the proposals that had been presented to Cabinet.

The Committee unanimously agreed a number of recommendations to Cabinet, including their criticism of the process which Cabinet had used to reach the decision on the Carnforth skate facility, and the following recommendations:

- 1) Action to be taken to provide a 'wheeled users park' in Carnforth and the upgrading of existing playgrounds.
- 2) An 'in principle' decision to be made on the siting of a skate park at the earliest opportunity and before funding is pursued.
- 3) The age groups of consultees to be reported to Cabinet.
- 4) The introduction of a formal system to deal with last minute written communication to Cabinet which are considered in the course of a decision being made.



Holding Cabinet Members to Account

Over the past year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee continued to have a rolling programme of holding Cabinet Members to account. This has taken place both in the course of Call-in and considering items of business at Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Budget and Performance Panel and Task Groups, but also through arranging for Cabinet Members to come to a meeting to discuss issues and developments within their portfolios. It is proposed to continue this procedure in the new Municipal Year.

Additionally each Member of Overview and Scrutiny Committee has taken on a role of Cabinet Liaison Member to help keep the Committee informed of issues within individual Cabinet portfolios as set out below:

Cabinet Member

Councillor Ian Barker
Councillor Jon Barry
Councillor Eileen Blamire
Councillor Abbott Bryning
Councillor Gina Dowding
Councillor Janice Hanson
Councillor Joyce Pritchard
Councillor Pat Quinton
Councillor Ron Sands
Councillor Alex Stone

Cabinet Liaison Member

Councillor Susan Bray
Councillor Peter Robinson
Councillor Robert Redfern
Councillor Emily Heath
Councillor Stuart Langhorn
Councillor Robert Redfern
Councillor Peter Robinson
Councillor Sarah Fishwick
Councillor Evelyn Archer
Councillor Susan Bray
Councillor Rebekah Gerrard

Urgent Business

Under the Council's Constitution, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had responsibility for considering requests from Cabinet Members and the Chief Executive to waive the right to Call-in decisions in the case of urgency. This was an important and weighty responsibility and it was often difficult to find a balance between ensuring that urgent decisions are made as quickly as possible, whilst preventing adverse impact on the right of Councillors to Call-in a decision. During the year this issue has been addressed by the Council's Audit Committee and in future this decision will be made by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Statistics

Between the 9th March 2005 and the writing of this report, the procedure of waiving the right to Call-in decisions as a matter of Urgent Business by the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny has been utilised on 8 occasions. Urgent Business has been used with regard to Community Safety (2), Corporate Plan (1), Sustainable Development Fund (1), Star Chamber and Gershon Efficiencies (1), Amendments to the Scheme of Delegation (1), Repairs to the Clock Tower at Lancaster Town Hall (1) and Disposal of land at Port of Heysham Industrial Park (1).

Budget and Performance Panel



Cllr Keith Budden
(Chairman)



Cllr Maggie Chadwick



Cllr Day
(Vice-Chairman)



Cllr John Gilbert



Cllr Mike Greenall



Cllr Tony Johnson



Cllr Peter Robinson



Cllr Roger Sherlock



Cllr John Whitelegg

The Budget and Performance Panel have responsibility for carrying out Overview and Scrutiny in respect of the Council's Budget and Performance at both the Strategic and Service level. In accordance with the Council's objectives and core values, the Panel helps to ensure that the management of financial affairs is efficient, prudent, and works best for the residents of the District and that there is effective monitoring of Council performance that leads to continuous improvement in services. Areas which the Panel has scrutinised and reviewed include Budget and Policy Framework proposals, Procurement Strategy, Sundry Debt Management, Best Value Performance Plan and the Panel has used Comparative Data Performance Indicators to identify areas for further scrutiny. The Panel also reviews the Council's 16 Services, on an exception/ risk basis using information obtained from performance indicators and budget variances to ensure Services are working as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible, and providing a good level of service to customers. This year Services considered include Economic Development and Tourism Service, City Contract Services and Human Resources and Organisational Development.

"We continue to make steady progress but it is apparent that we have been hindered by dated information. I'm pleased to report that systems are being introduced to address this."

**Councillor Keith Budden
Chairman of Panel**

Other major functions of the Budget and Performance Panel include:

- Monitoring and reviewing Services in achieving their Business Plans.
- Scrutinising the Council's performance in budgetary management and targets, treasury management, property and asset acquisition and disposal, capital programme and evaluating the effectiveness of its financial and operational policies and procedures.
- Reviewing the Council's strategic performance and monitoring Performance Indicators and benchmarking.
- Monitoring external Service Level Agreements and other contracts that the Council has entered into.
- Performing the Overview and Scrutiny function in relation to all of the Council's Corporate Performance and Best Value activity.

Effective Performance Management has continued to be hampered by the Council's Performance Management System. The Panel have been frustrated at having to work with dated indicators. However, steady progress is now being made including the introduction of Escendency Performance Management software, which it is anticipated, should be rolled out to include all Services within 18 months. The Panel have witnessed a 'live' demonstration of this sophisticated system which will provide real time data, which is necessary to make significant advances in the area of performance scrutiny. This is part of the new corporate Performance Management Framework.

The Panel's work will be further advanced and supported by Cabinet's establishment of Performance Review Teams. This will be particularly noticeable with regard to Service Business Plan performance and financial monitoring. The Performance Review Teams will provide quarterly monitoring with commentary to the Panel, thereby reducing the amount of paperwork that Panel Members need to wade through and reduce the likelihood of requesting the attendance of Service Heads to Budget and Performance Panel meetings.

The Panel received a presentation from the Leader of the Council on the proposed budget in addition to regular presentations on emerging issues from the Council's Star Chamber process (the Cabinet's rolling efficiency programme) and have contributed additional savings suggestions, where appropriate.

A number of Service Heads and Officers have attended Budget and Performance Panel meetings throughout the year and provided reports or presentations for consideration. These discussions have led to further work being undertaken in the following areas:-

- Performance Indicators including consideration of Best Value Performance Indicator 17a, 11a and 16a.
- Best Value Performance Plan - Services who had not performed as anticipated were invited to future meetings to outline the reasons for this and measures taken to address it.
- Corporate Financial Monitoring including debt collecting procedures and Irrevocable Benefit costs with regard to Homelessness.
- Value for Money /Efficiency Strategy - a workshop was arranged to provide the necessary training and guidance to enable Members to effectively carry out this function.

- Service Business Plans 9 month update - the Head of Health and Strategic Housing has been invited to the March meeting and Financial Services have been requested to provide an update on the percentage of invoices paid within 30 days).
- Service Level Agreement Monitoring - the Panel have requested a report following the review of the grants process by Overview and Scrutiny on the proposals for future grants allocation and monitoring.

It was reported in the Annual Report 2005 that the Panel had commissioned a piece of work in partnership with the University of Lancaster to consider the reasons for the high number of applicants presenting as homeless in the district. This had been scheduled to take place in October 2005 but has been delayed due to the deferment of the student who had agreed to undertake this research. Consideration has been given to finding an alternative means to promote this work and the establishment of a Task Group to carry out this work has now been agreed.

The Panel's intention to implement the effective scrutiny of partnership monitoring during the year has been delayed by the decision of the LSP Conference in June to defer discussion of the Building Blocks self-assessment of their performance in delivering the Community Strategy. The Panel has now received a presentation on 'The Future of Local Strategic Partnerships', which outlined developments in this area over the last year, and has clearly identified a role for scrutiny. The Panel recognise that in view of the significant amount of local authority resources being allocated to LSP's, effective monitoring of performance is essential. The Panel has been informed that Government guidance proposing a duty for LSP's to co-operate with local authorities and ultimate accountability through scrutiny will be forthcoming and this should provide greater clarity. In the meantime the Panel have requested reports from the Councillors allocated to the Building Blocks on how they have achieved their objectives in the last two years.

It was reported in the last Annual Report that the Panel had carried out a scoping report into Open Source Software to ascertain whether it would be appropriate for Lancaster City Council and that the matter had been referred to Cabinet. The process has been advanced with the production of a Project Initiation document and the Panel received a report from the Head of Information Services at its March meeting outlining progress to date,

Task Groups

Task Groups are established to undertake specific project work, policy development, a specific task, consultation, review, investigation or similar activity.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee decides whether a Task Group should be formal and report directly to the Cabinet or Council such as the Cemeteries Task Group or informal and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee such as the Civic Task Group. Task Groups normally consist of nine Councillors on a Proportional Representation basis.

It was intended that the majority of the Task Groups would operate for three months and produce one Final Report during their lifetime. However, due to the complexity of some of the tasks that have been taken on, this time-scale has had to be extended and, on two occasions interim reports have been produced in order to meet other external factors such as the budget process.

Poulton Area Renewal Task Group

Members: Councillors Roger Mace (Chairman), Susan Bray, John Gilbert and Peter Robinson.

The Task Group was established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 14 July 2004. At this meeting, a number of residents of the Poulton Area expressed concerns that there had been changes to the Area Renewal, which had affected the boundary of the scheme. Additionally, Councillors present expressed concern over their own lack of information regarding the scheme and concerns over the property purchasing elements of the scheme. The purpose of the Task Group was to investigate these concerns in order to reassure the public and put Councillors' minds at rest through giving them a full understanding of the Renewal.

The Task Group produced an Interim Report in May 2005 and a Final Report in September 2005.

The Task Group's Final Report made a number of recommendations including:

- Integrating future housing work with the Council's economic development plans and strategies in order to deliver a holistic solution to sustainability.
- Making resources available for an evaluative review to take place of the Poulton Area Renewal and that establishing a policy for periodic reviews or reality checks in order to improve public accountability.
- Keeping Members better informed of changes to boundaries of renewal areas and funding streams.
- The widening of the Council's sustainability principles, in particular to include in reports and projects measurable indicators and targets relating to social, economic and environmental sustainability.

West End Area Activities Task Group

Members: Councillors Peter Robinson (Chairman), Evelyn Archer, Susan Bray, Ken Brown, Anne Chapman, Tina Clifford, John Day, Mike Greenall and David Whitaker.

The Task Group was established as a result of concerns of possible duplication of effort by different agencies operating in the West End. The Group questioned whether such funding could be focused to save the same agencies chasing the same funding, thereby reducing overheads, focusing efforts and maximising outcomes. The Task Group produced a final report in April 2005.

The Task Group's Final Report made a number of recommendations which included:

- That the Council ensures that any requests for funding (SLA and grant funding), support or patronage of voluntary organisations and agencies is taken forward in discussion with the West End Partnership and that they are consulted to ensure that through providing this assistance the activity will take the West End closer to the overall vision for the West End and closer to being a sustainable community.
- That the Council should encourage the West End Partnership to seek as broad an involvement in community ventures as possible and include Schools.
- That the City Council should consolidate Officer and Member involvement in the West End and should focus its involvement through the West End Partnership.
- That the Council working through the West End Partnership encourage the production of a newsletter for the West End, to provide an information source for residents and community groups of facilities and services which are available to help minimise the chances of duplication and maximise communication.



Young People and Lancaster City Council Task Group

Members: Councillors Keith Budden (Chairman), Evelyn Archer, Sarah Fishwick, Paul Gardner, Stuart Langhorn, Robert Redfern, Catriona Stamp and David Whitaker.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee established the Task Group in April 2005 following a suggestion by a Member that investigations should be made into the current situation regarding the engagement of children and young people by the Council and to determine how this could be improved upon. The Task Group discovered early on that the engagement and consultation of children and young people could be vastly improved.

“The Task Group worked diligently over the summer of 2005, visiting hard to reach groups at the Y.M.C.A., hearing evidence from officers and young people and considering how to include children and young people in decision making.

I was pleased that Cabinet took on board the recommendations that were made by the Task Group and hope that the Council will listen to the voice of children and young people in the district.”

**Councillor Keith Budden
Task Group Chairman**

The Task Group's Final Report in December 2005 made a number of recommendations which included:

- That the Council reviews its Consultation Strategy to ensure it complies with the principles of Every Child Matters and that this offers a practical tool for consulting and involving children and young people.
- That School Councils in the District be encouraged and given the opportunity to be involved in the Council's decision-making process on appropriate issues.
- That Council is requested to consider the appointment of a Champion for Children and Young People from the non-executive Members of Council.
- That the Local Strategic Partnership be encouraged to progress a method of providing multi-agency information on activities and resources for children and young people provided by its partners in the locality.

Cemeteries Task Group

Members: Councillors David Kerr (Chairman), Evelyn Archer, Susan Bray, Sheila Denwood, John Harrison, Helen Helme, Janie Kirkman, Robert Redfern and Catriona Stamp.

The Task Group was established as a result of a presentation by the Public Health and Safety Manager to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2005 at the request of the Committee. This had emanated from guidelines established by the Health and Safety Executive concerning memorial safety following a number of reported fatalities and serious accidents caused by falling memorials across the country. In addition to outlining the memorial safety programme the presentation highlighted enforcement issues, repair and maintenance issues and problems with anti-social behaviour which Members considered warranted further investigation and

research. An Interim Report was presented to Cabinet in January 2006 and the Final Report is expected soon.

The Task Group's Interim Report has made a number of recommendations which include:-

- That Health and Strategic Housing assumes management responsibility and budgetary control of both income and expenditure for cemeteries.
- That consideration be given to the digitisation and computerisation of Cemetery Records and Cemetery Management Systems.
- That consideration be given to reviewing and improving the signage at the Council's Cemeteries.
- That Lancaster set standards for its cemeteries (to include the Charter for the Bereaved).

“We recognise that through the Cemeteries Service the Council provides a sensitive, statutory function. The Cemeteries Service has not been reviewed for a number of years. This task is now being carried out by our Task Group.”

**Councillor David Kerr
Task Group Chairman**



Civic Task Group

Members: Councillors Susan Bray (Chairman), Evelyn Archer, Shirley Burns, Sheila Denwood, John Gilbert, John Harrison, Janet Horner, Janie Kirkman and Catriona Stamp.

The Task Group was established in order to review the current civic programme, establish a vision for the future and to create a Civic Programme based on this vision. Concern had been expressed that the Council was not using its civic events and related budgets as effectively as it might. This is supported by the low attendance at Civic events and perceived lack of community involvement in civic life.

The Task Group has assessed the current situation and gathered evidence from past Mayors as to how the Civic Programme has changed and what has been lost over the years.

The Task Group will continue its work and create a forward looking, rejuvenated Civic Programme that is relevant to today's community, enhancing public understanding and continuity of the past.

“The Civic Task Group is looking to create a programme of civic functions and events appropriate to the 21st century using the best of past and present. The group comprises Members with experience of undertaking Mayoral functions as well as newly elected Councillors with little or no experience of Council and civic roles. Former Mayors have been invited to participate in an informal meeting so the group could hear their views and experiences and a ‘visioning’ exercise has been undertaken and many of these ideas will surface as recommendations in the final report.”

Councillor Susan Bray Task Group Chairman

Emerging Issues:

- Combining the Civic Programme with the Festivals and Events Programme.
- The possibility of a complete change to Mayor Making and Mayor's Sunday.
- The need to include more members of the local community.
- Engaging the local media with the Civic Programme.
- A Citizen of the Year competition.
- The inclusion of a link on the Council's website to Mayoral events.
- A Town Crier competition.

Media and Public Relations

Over the year, over £3,490.00 worth of free publicity has been generated through the use of 8 Press Releases circulated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. 18 enquiries have been received and answered as a result of these press releases.

The Press Releases were issued to the *Visitor*, *Lancaster Guardian*, *Lancaster and Morecambe Citizen*, *Bay Radio*, *Radio Lancashire* and a local news website, *Virtual Lancaster*. However, the value does not take into account the cost of air time given by the two local radio stations and the space taken up by the website.

The figures have been generated by 'Newsflash' which is a new media monitoring software used by Council's Communications Services.

Date	Title	Take up	Equivalent Advertising Value
08.02.05	Overview and Scrutiny Endorses decision to temporary closure of South Road, Morecambe	3	£ 736.00
17.03.05	Cabinet to consider Poulton recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee	0	-
18.03.05	Cabinet to consider West End Masterplan recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee	1 (Virtual Net)	-
09.05.05	Overview and Scrutiny at Lancaster City Council : Making a Difference	1	£ 176.00
16.05.05	New Chairman for Overview and Scrutiny	2	£ 288.00
18.10.05	Cemeteries Task Group's Quest for Improvement	3	£ 586.00
19.10.05	New look for Overview and Scrutiny	1	£ 120.00
31.10.05	Call-in of 'No Skate Park in Carnforth'	6	£1,584.00
TOTAL EAV (Estimated Advertising Value)			£3,490.00

Public Relations

Effectively engaging the public remains a challenge for Overview and Scrutiny. Over the last year this has improved, with significant public involvement being generated through press coverage. This has been particularly noticeable with regard to Call-in decisions of the Carnforth Skate Park Facility. Other areas of work, including cemeteries, fly tipping, and Poulton Area Renewal, have also attracted public contributions.

Training and Development

There has been a shift away from formal training days provided by external providers to a more targeted and Lancaster specific approach. This is illustrated by an in-house training session presented by the Corporate Director (Central Services) concerning Value for Money/Efficiency Strategy to help Members understand the cycle of Value for Money and what the Budget and Performance Panel could add to the process. Over 20 Council Members attended this training session.

Additionally Members have attended training provided by the Institute of Local Government in Birmingham.

An Overview and Scrutiny Development Day is planned for Spring 2006 with a keynote speaker.

One to One Support

Many Councillors have taken up the offer of meeting with Scrutiny Support Officers to discuss Overview and Scrutiny and their role within it. These discussions have included successful Call-ins, questioning approaches, how to scrutinise different issues, setting up Task Groups, Pre-decision Scrutiny, Performance and Financial Scrutiny and one-to-one support for Councillors in carrying out various Scrutiny activities. This approach continues to be effective and has been used for the Forward Plan, Call-in preparation and Task Group development.

Health Scrutiny

Councillor David Kerr – as a representative of Lancaster’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee – has sat on both the Joint Cumbria and Lancashire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Lancashire County Council Health Equalities Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Potentially, health is the area of Overview and Scrutiny that has the most influential role, with statutory powers under the Health and Social Care Act 2001, to veto service configurations through referring them to the Secretary of State for Health. The specific functions of the Joint Committee include to critically examine the proposals of the Morecambe Bay Primary Care Trust and their evidence base, and to take account of the evidence and views of user, carer and public interest.

Areas scrutinised by Lancashire Health Equalities Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year include:

- Working with Cumbria County Council in scrutinising and responding to proposals to change mental health services and drug and alcohol detoxification services for patients from the Morecambe Bay PCT and other parts of Lancashire.
- Consideration and response to consultations regarding boundary changes to Primary Care Trusts, Strategic Health Authority and the Ambulance Trust.
- Provision of comments to the Healthcare Commission on the performance of individual Trusts in Lancashire.
- Monitoring the plans for the implementation of the Local Area Agreement in Lancashire in terms of reducing health inequalities and public health improvement.
- Consideration and response to the Smoke free Elements of the Health Protection Bill.

- The appointment of a Task Group to examine the level of childhood obesity in Lancashire and how this is being tackled.
- The appointment of a Task Group to investigate the issue of transport accessibility to healthcare services in Lancashire.
- Consideration and response to NHS consultations affecting different parts of Lancashire relating to: Equality in access to Fertility Services, Children's' and Maternity Services, Hospital Services and Ward Closures, Development of new Health Services, Cleft lip and Palate Specialist Services and the Creation of Centres of Excellence for Services and Urgent Care Services.

Lancashire Scrutiny Network

Lancaster representatives have been regular attendees at the Lancashire Scrutiny Network. The network was founded in 2004 to aid the development of Overview and Scrutiny in Lancashire authorities. These meetings provide a networking opportunity and help clarify Councillor and Officer roles. Providing an opportunity to share best practice, the partnership exists to share work programmes and highlight where joint working could take place, the meetings improve links between District and County Council. Unfortunately staff workloads have prevented attendance at every meeting during 2005/06.

Northwest Scrutiny Officer Network

Officers from Lancaster City Council have attended several meetings of the Northwest Scrutiny Officer Network. The group comprises of officers who support the Overview and Scrutiny function (representing all the local authorities in the North West of England). The group exists to share best practice issues to avoid duplication and maximise the resources available to assist in the development of Scrutiny. The membership of the group includes authorities such as Tameside, Stockport, Liverpool, Cumbria and Lancashire and thus has access to significant expertise and knowledge. Recently, the group has been involved in developing best practice notes in terms of Call-in and the role of Scrutiny in performance management, both of which will assist the development of the Scrutiny process at Lancaster. Issues covered by the group this year include the work of the Improvement and Development Agency and how it can help Scrutiny and consideration of a qualification for scrutiny officers. Future meetings will include the role of Scrutiny in relation to partnerships.

Scrutiny Champions Network

As Members of the Scrutiny Champions Network, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Principal Democratic Support Officer have continued to receive updates and guidance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). This year has seen the Council making use of the resources of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, including Councillor David Kerr and Suzanne Trippier (Senior Democratic Support Officer) attending the Annual Scrutiny Conference in London. The conference addressed the issue of Citizens, Scrutiny and Public Governance and the role of non-executives in enhancing accountability and improving public services, which have been used by officers to assist with developing the work programme based on best practice. Lancaster City Council continues to contribute its own reports to the CfPS database.

Appointments to Other Bodies

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (at the request of Council) has made a number of appointments to other bodies. These appointees have attended meetings and kept the Overview and Scrutiny process informed of developments. These appointments are:

Local Strategic Partnership:

- Community Safety Strategy Group – Councillor Peter Robinson
- Regeneration Building Block – Councillor Emily Heath (*appointment made but Regeneration Building Block has not met)
- Health and Well-being Group – Councillor David Kerr
- Children and Young People Group – Councillor Sarah Fishwick
- Sustainability Partnership – Councillor Emily Heath
- Equality & Diversity Building Block (formerly MAPfED) – Councillor Emily Heath
- Life Long Learning – Councillor Evelyn Archer

Other Bodies:

- Homelessness Forum – Councillor Peter Robinson
- Lancashire County Council Health Equalities Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Councillor David Kerr
- Lancaster, Morecambe and District Fairtrade Steering Group – Councillor David Kerr
- Museums Advisory Panel – Councillor Evelyn Archer
- Older People's Partnership Forum of the Local Strategic Partnership – Councillor Peter Robinson



The Town Hall Clock – an example of Urgent Business where Call-in was waived (see Page 14)

Performance Review

A number of key areas for improvement were outlined in last year's Annual Report. Progress in improving these areas is illustrated below:

Task Groups

With the increase in the number of Task Groups established a greater number of topics are now being scrutinised in detail, which is a positive move. In addition, this increase has enabled a greater number of non-executive Councillors to have the opportunity to be directly involved with Overview and Scrutiny.

The reporting time for Task Groups has continued to be affected by the time required in obtaining information, availability of Officers and indeed Members. This is illustrated by the implementation of the Licensing Act during the summer, which had a detrimental effect on the Cemeteries Task Group, since both Members and Officers were heavily involved in the numerous licensing hearings.

Further involvement of the public in Overview and Scrutiny, particularly with regard to Task Groups

Whilst members of the public have attended some Task Group meetings and the Call-in with regard to Carnforth Skate Park, further effort is required in this area. The Committee continues to develop further ways in which public involvement can be increased in the scrutiny process. It is hoped that by issuing further press releases to generate public interest and encourage public participation, improvements will be forthcoming.

Increasing the support to the Overview and Scrutiny work programme from Service departments

Services have been required to allocate 52 days per year for support to Overview and Scrutiny. Since the publication of the last Annual Report, significant progress has been made in this area.

Whilst there have been some positive developments, a number of the areas have not been developed as anticipated. This is in part attributable to staff resources within Administration Services. In the last year Administration Services has been working to full capacity and unable to fully undertake additional tasks whilst continuing to provide its core functions. This problem will be alleviated by the creation of an additional post of Principal Democratic Support Officer. It is essential that the Work Programme is further developed to ensure that the Scrutiny process continues to contribute to the Council's Corporate Objectives.

Conclusion

The Overview and Scrutiny system continues to make steady progress and this report has highlighted many of these achievements. Members of Overview and Scrutiny are confident that with continued support and access to information the scrutiny process will continue to deliver further benefits to the Council and residents of the District.

The Committee are continuing to raise the profile of Overview and Scrutiny within and outside of the City Council. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee are eager to learn from the best practice methods adopted in other authorities and, where possible, to share best practice with other authorities.

Future Direction

Both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Budget and Performance Panel have begun to consider items for their Work Programmes for 2006/07. Many of the items are new including the establishment of three additional task groups.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Fly Tipping Task Group – To assess the current situation regarding fly tipping in the district including the resource implications, and to create a clear policy on how the Council deals with this issue.

Homelessness Task Group – To understand and review the Council's performance with regard to homelessness in the area in comparison with other Lancashire districts and national figures, and consider what action could be taken to improve the situation.

Pollution in Morecambe Bay - To define the areas in the Bay where abandoned vehicles and fishing/cockling debris is located, determine land ownership, clarify powers and responsibilities for controlling pollution/navigation/public safety in the bay and hold agencies/public bodies and government departments to account on this issue.



Budget and Performance Panel

Value for money/Efficiency Strategy - The Panel has now formally adopted the role of scrutiny for the Council's Value for Money/Efficiency Strategy arrangements and the monitoring of achievements of the targets included in the Council's Annual Efficiency Statements. It is proposed that different component parts of the strategy (Corporate Property, Star Chamber - Gershon, Procurement, Consultation, E-govt, Human Resources, Risk Management, Performance Management) will be scrutinised at each meeting.

Audit Commission Quality of Life Area Profiles – The Panel will attempt to understand how quality of life indicators can be used and interpreted on a local basis with a view to enhancing service delivery and performance.



Acknowledgements

Overview and Scrutiny Councillors and Officers would like to thank the following for their contribution to the Scrutiny process during 2005/06:

- Cabinet Members who have appeared before Overview and Scrutiny bodies;
- All members of the Administration Services team;
- Staff who have participated in Overview and Scrutiny reviews;
- Members of the public who have attended meetings or submitted evidence as part of the ongoing work of Scrutiny.
- Councillor Roger Mace (Chairman of the Committee until May 2005).
- Councillor Sarah Fishwick (Member of Committee until December 2005).

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer Support Team

To contact the Overview and Scrutiny Support team, or to make suggestions for issues you would like to see included in the Overview and Scrutiny Work programme, e-mail scrutiny@lancaster.gov.uk

Name and Position	Responsibility	Contact Details
Roger Muckle Corporate Director (Central Services)	Corporate Director with overall responsibility for Overview and Scrutiny	(01524) 582022 rmuckle@lancaster.gov.uk
James Doble Principal Democratic Support Officer	Responsibility for day to day management and development of Overview and Scrutiny process	(01524) 582057 jdoble@lancaster.gov.uk
Suzanne Trippier Senior Democratic Support Officer	Support to Overview and Scrutiny Process and Task Group support	(01524) 582074 smtrippier@lancaster.gov.uk
Jenny Kay Democratic Support Officer	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (including Call-in) and Task Group support	(01524) 582065 jkay@lancaster.gov.uk
Liz Bateson Democratic Support Officer	Budget and Performance Panel and Task Group support	(01524) 582047 ebateson@lancaster.gov.uk

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would like to thank Georgina Atkinson (Democratic Support Officer) for supporting the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements during the year. She has since been promoted to become a senior scrutiny officer, taking up post at Blackpool Council (a unitary authority).

Appendix A

CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

How does the Scrutiny function contribute to the Council's Corporate Objectives?

Issues Considered	Corporate Objectives									
	Meeting essential needs	Taking part	Care and Respect for Everyone	Life Long Learning	Travel and Access	Fun Creativity and Leisure	Using Resources Wisely	Protecting Wildlife and Landscapes	Economy and Work	Positive Planning and Development
Climate Change	√						√	√		
Playgrounds and the Disability Discrimination Act	√		√			√				
Consultation on Access to Services Accommodation Review	√	√			√					
Flower Bed and Urban Meadows						√	√	√		
Non Voluntary Organisations Service Level Agreements and Funding for 2005/06 and beyond	√	√	√				√			
Neighbourhood Policing		√	√							
Consultation on the Primary Care Trust Structure within the District	√	√	√				√			
Update on Cycling Strategy	√	√			√	√	√			√
Review of Service Head Posts	√					√				
Carnforth Skate Facility	√	√	√			√	√			
Star Chamber Process	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Best Value Performance Plan	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Performance Management							√			
Partnership Monitoring	√						√			
Business Plan Monitoring	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Corporate Finance							√			
Budget 2006/07	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Corporate Grants Service Level Agreements	√	√	√		√	√	√			
Value for Money/Efficiency Strategy	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Open Source Software							√		√	
Poulton Area Renewal	√	√			√	√	√	√	√	√
West End Area Activities	√	√	√			√	√		√	√
Young People and Lancaster City Council		√	√			√				
Cemeteries Task Group	√		√				√	√		
Civic Task Group		√					√	√		
Pollution in Morecambe Bay	√		√					√		
Fly Tipping	√		√				√	√		
Homelessness	√		√			√				