

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24





Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has overall responsibility for the performance of all Scrutiny functions (under the Local Government Act 2000) on behalf of the City Council.

Budget and Performance Panel

The Budget and Performance Panel has specific responsibility for providing overview and scrutiny to issues regarding the City Council's performance, budget and financial issues.

Holding Cabinet Members to Account

Overview and Scrutiny Members continue to hold Cabinet Members to account. This takes place through the Call-in process and considering items of business at scrutiny meetings and also through arranging for Cabinet Members to come to meetings to discuss issues and developments within Cabinet portfolios.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Each year a Community Safety meeting is arranged.

This year the Chair welcomed Councillor Caroline Jackson, Inspector James Martin, the Chief Officer for People and Policy and the Resilience and Community Safety Officer.



The Committee was advised that since the last Crime and Disorder meeting in November 2022, the Serious Violence Duty had come into force and amendments had been made to Section 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which made preventing and reducing serious violence a priority for all Community Safety Partnerships.

Serious violence consisted of the following crime types; Homicide, Knife Crime, Gun Crime, Assault resulting in injury, rape, robbery, aggravated burglary, domestic abuse and violence, child exploitation (criminal and sexual.)

It was reported that data produced for the Lancaster District Needs Assessment had indicated that the Lancaster District had the 5th highest rate of serious violence in Lancashire, with Lancaster City Centre having the highest volume within the district.

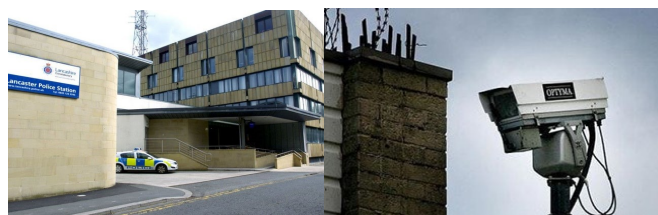
The Committee noted the current priorities from the Strategic Needs Assessment were; domestic abuse, violence, anti-social behaviour, road safety, serious & organised crime and exploitation (criminal and sexual).

It was also noted that the Lancaster District Community Safety Partnership had identified three issues to concentrate on. These were; anti-social behaviour, violence and road safety.

The Committee was informed that anti-social behaviour data provided by both Lancashire Police and Lancaster City Council indicated a decrease in the number of ASB incidents reported over the last 12 months, however Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service continued to experience an increase in deliberate secondary fires.

The Committee was advised that the Lancaster District Public Space Protection Order that had been made in December 2021 was working well.

Members were given details of several funding streams which had been used to address local issues such as CCTV on the cycle path between Morrisons in Morecambe and Lancaster city centre. Funding had also been successfully gained by the Community Safety Partnership across the district. In Poulton Ward, a bid to the Police Crime Commissioner's Safer Neighbourhood Fund for £10,000 had been successful and match funded by Morecambe BID to install additional CCTV cameras covering areas that had been identified as hot-spot locations for both incidents of antisocial behaviour and serious violence.



The Committee went on to discuss Community Triggers and how they worked. Members also asked a number of questions covering issues including Public Space Protection Orders, Anti-Social Behaviour and the work of the Community Safety Partnership.

Members also discussed the use and legality of E-bikes and E-scooters as there had been issues with fake batteries setting on fire. It was reported that it was not illegal to sell these items and also the law regarding such vehicles was in need of updating.



PEER REVIEW CHALLENGE—PLANNING

The Committee received updates throughout the year on the LGA Peer Review Challenge regarding Planning.

The aim of the Peer Challenge was to independently review the local planning authorities operations and performance and consider how it can respond to present and future challenges.

As a result of the Peer Challenge the Council has produced an Implementation Plan 2023/24 to address issues raised.

DRAFT PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY PROTOCOL

In September the Committee considered the introduction of a Pre-Decision Scrutiny Protocol.

The Committee felt that it would be useful to have a protocol on how senior officers and Cabinet keep Scrutiny informed of major decisions as they are developed with the potential to allow Scrutiny members some involvement in policy development. The Committee recognised that this would have to involve building in safeguards to mitigate risks around the sharing of sensitive information with Scrutiny members.

The Committee discussed whether a formal protocol or a more inform approach should be taken.

It was agreed that the Pre-Scrutiny Champion would meet regularly with Democratic Support Officers to consider Forthcoming Key Decisions. This would be done on an informal basis.

The Committee will consider the draft Protocol again in the new Municipal Year.

DISCUSSIONS WITH CABINET MEMBERS

Throughout the year the Committee has invited members of Cabinet to attend meetings and provide updates on their portfolios.

In September the Leader of the Council provided an update on the policies and objectives for the district and advised that the LGA had been invited to work with the new Cabinet to focus on priorities and the Corporate Plan. An update was provided on Frontierland. Members also discussed Canal Quarter and White Lund Depot.

In October the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Housing and Homelessness provided an overview on, amongst other things, the Council's Housing stock, private rented accommodation, affordable housing and the Homelessness and the Housing Task Force. A Homeless Strategy had just been approved by Cabinet and the Housing Strategy was due to be updated.

It was reported that there had been an increase in homelessness due to s.21 evictions, lack of rented properties and raising rent costs. The Council has introduced support to combat this. Updates were given on Skerton High School, Mainway, Mellishaw and the Co-op Building.

The Cabinet Members with responsibility for Environmental Services attended the December meeting and provided updates on the Grassland Management Strategy, Green Bins and the work of the Recycling Working Group.

The Committee was also updated on the Council's work with Keep Britain Tidy to tackle fly tipping which had resulted in a significant reduction in fly tipping across the district.

In January the Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods attended to discuss the Tenants Satisfaction Survey 2023. The Cabinet Member for Property also attended to provide and discuss a Property Group update.

OTHER ISSUES CONSIDERED BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

EDEN PROJECT MORECAMBE UPDATE

At the March 2024 meeting the Committee received an update on the Eden Project.

FLY TIPPING

Also at the March meeting the Committee received an update on the development of a Council-wide Fly Tipping Strategy.

TENANTS SATISFACTION SURVEY 2023

At the January 2024 meeting Members were given details of the outcomes from the recent Tenants' Satisfaction Survey. It was reported that as part of the new housing regulation regime that had been introduced after the Grenfell Tower fire and recent deaths due to mould, all registered social housing providers would be required to submit data about their performance alongside the outcome of a tenant satisfaction survey each year from 2024. This information would be used to benchmark housing providers across the UK to provide a national picture.

The Council Housing Team had undertaken the survey over the Summer in 2023.

The survey revealed that seven out of ten residents who completed the survey were satisfied with the overall service provided by Lancaster City Council (71%), with tenants being considerably more satisfied (72%) than leaseholders (51%). It was noted that year on year, the National satisfaction rates reduced and the results for the Lancaster district mirrored this.

The Committee was advised that the housing service had been restructured and had increased its focus on safety in homes, conditions surveys and neighbourhoods including tackling anti-social behaviour.

Members went on to discuss the impact anti-social behaviour had on residents and how important it was to tackle those few who caused it to create happier neighbourhoods.

PROPERTY GROUP UPDATE

Also at the January 2024 meeting Members were given an overview of the Council's diverse non-housing portfolio of over 1,300 assets, ranging from car parks, corporate operational buildings, land of varying sizes, retail units and other non-housing properties with a value in the region of £90million. As part of the Outcome Based Resourcing (OBR) process in 2022/23 a full review of the Council's asset base resulted in the identification of several assets which were considered appropriate for disposal.

It was reported that within the service, there were three main areas of activity:

- (1) Asset Maintenance,
- (2) Property Compliance and
- (3) Estate Management.

Approval for a full stock condition survey had been gained and an interim capital/revenue programme developed. Alongside this work part of the White Lund Depot redevelopment had been prioritised.

Also discussed was the Asset Management Strategy that had been approved by Cabinet in October 2022. With changes to management over the past few years and the OBR process, Cabinet had used the Strategy as a framework to focus resources on priorities but it was in need of a refresh. Work identified within the Strategy had been undertaken such as the leasing of Palatine Hall and work was underway to dispose of identified assets.

The Committee also discussed the future of Ryelands House and how the problems that existed there could be overcome.

BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Throughout the year the Panel has undertaken scrutiny on various reports including quarterly, Treasury Management Mid-Year Reviews, Outturn and MTFS.

The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance and Resources has attended meetings to present reports and answer questions from the Panel. A number of other Cabinet Members attended the Annual Stakeholder meeting.

The Panel has also received reports and presentations on the following.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) for 2024/25 which included the Annual Investment Strategy was presented to the Panel in February 2024. A the Mid-Year Review had also been submitted for scrutiny to the Panel in December 2023. The Panel considered and noted the Strategy.

BUDGET CONSULTATION

In January 2024 the Panel held its annual Stakeholder meeting. A presentation from Councillor Tim Hamilton-Cox, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance, and Resources was provided on the City Council's Budget and Policy Framework Proposals for 2024/25. The presentation contained details regarding:

- Public Finances

- Changes in core spending
- 2024/25 General Fund Budget (Draft)
- Provisional Settlement allocations for Lancaster City Council 2024/25 vs 2023/24
- 2024/25 General Fund Budget (Draft)
- General Fund - Capital Program
- Fit for the Future

Councillor Hamilton-Cox also responded to questions. Other Cabinet Members and City Council officers in attendance also assisted with responses to queries.

The Panel raised a number of issues including:

- Business Rates income and Heysham Power Station
- The Platform
- Car parking charges
- Homelessness and temporary accommodation
- Section 21 evictions
- New homes bonus
- Possible future charges for fly tipping and the forthcoming review of a

The Panel also considered information provided by the County Council and the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority as part of their budget consultations.

Recommendations were submitted to the County Council. Please see recommendations on the next page.

STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

In December 2023 and March 2024 the Panel received reports on the Strategic Risk Register. This had been considered by Audit Committee who recommended it be reported to the Panel quarterly.

The Panel considered whether going forward it would review all risks or just certain categories such as financial risk.

The Panel asked a number of questions relating to actions and completion dates, action plans, cyber security, and risk associated with commercial properties.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24—2032/33—CAPITAL STRATEG (INVESTING IN THE FUTURE)

In February the Panel considered Cabinet's final budget proposals in order that the Council can approve a General Fund Capital Programme for 2023/24 to 2028/29 and a Capital Strategy 2024/25 as required by regulation.

The report addressed the actions required to complete the budget setting process for its Capital Programme and Capital Strategy.

The Panel noted the report.

ANNUAL BUDGET CONSULTATION

In January 2024 the Budget and Performance Panel held its annual stakeholder meeting.

Councillor Tim Hamilton-Cox, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Finance and Resources, presented the Council's Budget and Policy Framework report and responded to question

The Panel also considered budget reports from Lancashire Combined Fire Authority and Lancashire County Council. Neither sent a representative to the meeting to present their budget proposals or to answer any questions.

LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

The Panel requested that the County Council consider the Panel's response to the budget consultation.

GET005 - We are proposing a saving of £150k in the cost of clearing vegetation from walking and cycling routes across Lancashire through the implementation of more effective and efficient working practices.

Budget and Performance Panel response:

The Panel requested clarification regarding this proposal.

City Councillors receive plenty of adverse feedback on the state of footpaths and cycleways and are worried that 'efficiency gains' will, as usual, actually simply mean a reduced service.

GET009 - A saving of £239k is proposed through the withdrawal of the £1 concessionary travel fare option for those with a disabled person's NoWcard, English National Concessionary travel pass, who travel by bus before 9.30 Monday to Friday.

Budget and Performance Panel response:

The Panel was concerned that the report does not consider the impact on disabled residents and would seem to discriminate against disabled people who are working and doubles the costs.

GET011 - A saving of £6.3m is proposed by reducing the cost of treating collected food waste compared to existing waste disposal methods. This will be done through the installation and modification of facilities at Farington Waste Recovery Park. The change will also have the benefit of producing electricity which can be used to offset energy costs. This proposal is the subject of a more detailed report on this agenda.

Budget and Performance Panel response:

As the City Council will be incurring increased costs in the collection of food waste the Panel wishes to see some of the County Council's cost savings being passed to the City Council to help with the cost of collection of food waste in this district.

GET019 – Introduce pay and display parking machines at Lancaster Park and Ride. This will require an initial investment to cover the cost of installation (£60k) but will save the authority an estimated £10k each year.

Budget and Performance Panel response:

The Panel do not want to see the introduction of park and ride pay and display parking costs as this will have a significant impact on sustainable transport in the district.

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

Pre-Scrutiny is the process mainly based on Cabinet reports and the study of the City Council's published 'Key Decisions' contained in the List of Forthcoming Key Decisions. The List is made available at each meeting. With this information the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can select issues that add value and may consider before a decision is taken.

This process 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.

The Committee's Pre-Scrutiny Champion is Councillor Gawith.

Overview and Scrutiny welcomes the opportunity to submit a response during the consultation phase of a decision.

OUTSIDE BODIES

At the request of Council the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has made the following appointments to outside bodies.

Representatives are asked to report back, if necessary, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of these bodies.

OUTSIDE BODY	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEMBERSHIP
Homelessness Forum	Councillor Chris Hanna
Lancaster, Morecambe and District Fairtrade Group	Councillor Abi Mills



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Budget and Performance Panel would like to thank the following for their contribution to the Scrutiny process during 2023/24:

- Cabinet Members who have appeared before Overview and Scrutiny bodies;
- Representatives from organisations, which have delivered presentations and provided information to the Committee/Panel this year;
- Officers who have attended meetings and participated in the work of scrutiny.