

## **REPORT OF THE CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR OF THE POLICY AND CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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DIRECTOR: TOM STANNARD.**

**DATE: 25<sup>th</sup> April 2013**

### **Municipal year and annual review**

We have reached the end of the municipal cycle however it was agreed some time ago, that in the absence of an election, the committees would continue to deliver their work programmes through to the end of the municipal year. This agreement has worked well and enabled some of the committees to extend projects they chose to deliver: A focus group with children and young people was rescheduled for after half term in order to conclude what is an excellent piece of work from the safeguarding children task group. Similarly the adult health task group on loneliness would not have been in a position to have considered the strategy commitment and action plan of the joint strategic needs assessment on the 24<sup>th</sup> April, and the regeneration and neighbourhoods committee would have had to make recommendations in the absence of the awaited legal opinion on waste in order to conclude its review. Consequently, as opposed to the usual practice of receiving end of year reports at the last meeting of policy and corporate resources in the municipal calendar, these reports will be considered at the annual review of scrutiny now taking place on the 30<sup>th</sup> April (all members welcome).

### **Policy and corporate resources overview and scrutiny committee**

At the last meeting of policy and corporate resources, the committee discussed with the executive member for resources the latest budget position update, followed by a discussion with both the executive member for resources and the executive member for regeneration on the first phase of joint partnership advice services shortly to be launched at Blackburn Central library and Darwen Town Hall. Members have been invited to a walkthrough tour of services once they are operational, an offer we are sure will be met with some enthusiasm by members, not least as there will be a dedicated officer to deal with member enquiries, which in the current financial climate will unfortunately be met with an anticipated increased demand. Members of the committee commended the work done by the executive members in forward planning (and project delivering) the new advice services model to meet the increased needs the borough will face in such austere times.

### **Children and health overview and scrutiny committee**

Based on the agreement outlined earlier, the children and health committee finalises its work programme at the end of April, with both sub groups agreeing final recommendations after the last committee meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> March. At that meeting members were given a thorough explanation of the 2012 school tests and assessments by the executive member for schools and

educations team, whilst the executive member for children's services chose to respond to recommendations made earlier in January by the safeguarding children and young people task group. The committee were also made aware of the formal response made by the chair and vice chair to the Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust consultation "working together to improve specialist dementia care services in Lancashire". Members will be aware that the response after a 12 week dementia public consultation by NHS Lancashire, a decision was been announced in favour of the first of two options proposed in the consultation; a single specialist site, in a location to be identified, that would invest in the provision of 30 dementia inpatient beds and greater investment in community services, allowing for improved integration in local community services for dementia.

### **Regeneration and neighbourhoods overview and scrutiny committee**

The regeneration and neighbourhoods committee has completed one its work programme through it two task groups: The "regeneration of town centres". The task group undertook a number of meetings with officers about challenges the boroughs town centres face, including loss of income to the Council and job creation in the borough. After receiving convincing evidence and advice, members focused their attention on the outskirts of the town centres and how the Council could address the issue of empty properties left as a consequence of the shopping experience in the borough heavily concentrating into the Mall. Having carried out a site visit with officers particularly around the Northgate area, members have seen first hand the effects of such trends. In concluding their review members studied a variety of information and considered recommendations focussed on the number of vacant properties in the borough and the options open to the council.

As outlined at the beginning of this report, the waste task group has now been informed that the Council has received the legal opinion it had been waiting for and this information was being presented to the task group in April. Leading up to this, members continued to receive information about waste, waste conversion, treatment of landfill and the options open to the Council. The committee acknowledged that the Council has undertaken a considerable amount of work so far and the task group will formalise recommendations on this subject having been apprised of the legal opinion.

In order to fully consider and comment on some of the complexities facing local government, there will be training on some of the potential topics for the next municipal year: Namely; the previously unseen changes in the last three years to the amount of public finance the council and its partners receive (and the subsequent challenges that is already bringing), the reintegration of public health as a council service (and the positive potentials that may offer), the challenges faced by the council to ensure that its shape, size and focus continue to deliver the best for citizens of the borough, and the way scrutiny and council performance is challenged in local authorities, partnerships and by residents of the borough to ensure this.