

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

POLICY AND CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17th July 2023

The Committee received an update on the Regulatory of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) activity, reviewed the Procedural Guide and received feedback from the RIPA Inspection held in November 2022. Although the inspector was pleased with progress since the Council's last Inspection in 2019, a few recommendations were made:

- Data Security and Document Retention
- Additional oversight and risk assessment by the Council's RIPA Co-ordinator of departments that undertook social media research or monitoring of the purpose of evidence gathering.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Board adopt the amendments requested.

The Committee also agreed the following Work Programme for 2023/24:

- Sickness Absence
- Update on Finance
- Digital Management

11th September 2023

Members received a presentation which detailed staff absence data from April 2018 to March 2023. Following the presentation, Members asked a number of questions and made statements on the topic. They also received information and questions from the Joint Unions.

They resolved to be provided with information on the breakdown of absence data between clerical and manual staff and long-term absences (over 20 days or more). They asked that consideration be given to increasing the hours of the part-time in-house Occupational Health Advisor and that the arrangements relating to Occupational Health support be reviewed. More proactive support was requested regarding Mental Health/Neurodiversity and the Menopause before people needed to access support, such as Mental Health First Aiders. They also requested consideration be given to re-introducing dedicated HR support to project manage sickness absence.

8th January 2024

The Committee received an update on recent meetings of the Call-In Committee which had met on 21st December 2023 (Burial and Cremations Fees) and 4th January 2024 (Car Park Fees). Following debate and discussion, the original decisions by the Executive were upheld at both meetings.

Members also received an update on Finance, which provided an overview of the latest budgetary position. Significant costs in Children's Services were reported, which was a demand-led budget, and issues raised in the recent MacAllister report into the Children's Social Care system, which highlighted the problems within the sector nationally. Similar issues existed with Adult Social Care, which led to higher costs and demand and made budget forecasting difficult.

A reduction in debts was highlighted along with a focus on no new borrowing.

The Committee agreed that training should be agreed for Members that would cover the Scrutiny and Call-In process, highlighting the different roles of both, for existing and new Members.

11th March 2024

The Committee received an update on Digital Management at the Council focusing on help for residents who were digitally excluded and lessons learnt from procurement of IT systems over recent years.

The Committee was advised on the Council's approach to supporting residents, which included an emphasis on designing services with residents, simplifying the Council website, providing intelligent voice forms, focussing on support in libraries, learning centres and Family Hubs, a digital skills offer and working with companies to improve internet connections.

Technical Debt Recovery and Risk Management approach was outlined which highlighted the position from early 2023 to where the Council wanted to be in late 2024.

Members discussed with officers' issues experienced by residents, and it was acknowledged that because of these issues the approach outlined was being taken.

There was also reference to Cyber Security and the systems the Council had in place to address this.

PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3rd July 2023

The Committee considered presentations on the main priorities and portfolio objectives for Growth and Development and Environment and Operations, and a few key areas were highlighted.

The Committee agreed that one key issue would be focussed on each meeting and agreed the Work Programme for 2023/24 would include:

- Infrastructure
- Environmental Crime
- The third item to be agreed at a future meeting.

14th August 2023

The Committee received a report and presentation on Waste, Litter and Dog Fouling Enforcement and debated the key issues arising.

They requested that dog fouling hotspots and the Whatsapp contact information for reporting littering and dog fouling offences be circulated to Members. They also requested that consideration be given to reviewing the current FPN charges with a view to increasing the fees to reflect national charges. It was also agreed that the littering and dog fouling contract be reviewed on its renewal date and consideration be given to strengthening the role of the dog enforcement officer.

13th November 2023

The Committee received a report and presentation on Highways Infrastructure in the Borough, and they made a number of comments and observations relating to issues with traffic lights, contacting the Highways Team, the funding and quality of road repairs, issue with road markings, line painting and street signage.

4th March 2024

The Committee received a report containing responses from the Highways Team to the issues raised relating to Highways Infrastructure. The main agenda item was the scrutiny of the Council's fleet management plans concerning the use of alternative fuels.

1st July 2024

Following presentations from the two Portfolios, the following Work Programme was agreed:

- Food Waste Strategy
- Public Transport

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12th June 2023

The Youth MP provided the Committee with an update on recent events and activities.

The Local Government Association (LGA) had offered to hold a two-hour, in-person development session for the Committee, which would explore effective scrutiny practice in relation to the '6 steps for effective scrutiny'. The session would also focus on equipping the Committee with skills to develop effective questioning techniques, develop an effective work programme and use influence and recommendations to make a difference to the lives of children and young people.

The Committee received a presentation which gave further details of the shift to a Blackburn with Darwen based model for the Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership (CSAP) from a Pan Lancashire model. A workshop day was held on 4th April 2023 followed by a development day in June 2023 to discuss the Business Plan.

The Committee agreed the following for inclusion in its Work Programme for 2023/24:

- Corporate Parenting
- Local Safeguarding Assurance Partnership
- School Improvement Strategy.

4th September 2023

The Committee received an update from the Youth MP and Youth Forum on their recent events and activities.

Members also discussed next steps following the recent LGA Training "6 steps to Effective Scrutiny of Children's Services." All the advice and recommendations were noted. Discussion was taking place about implementing as much as possible whilst recognising many were dependent on extra capacity. The proposal to merge the Corporate Parenting Special Advisory Group (Members) and the Corporate Parenting Executive Board (officers and partners) to form a Corporate Parenting Panel was being investigated.

The Committee also received a report and information on the Wellbeing Champions project, commissioned by the Public Health Team along with a detailed presentation and information relating to Corporate Parenting.

There were then discussions around the role of the Virtual School and detailed Corporate Parenting performance data. It was reported that Foster Carer Recruitment continued to remain a priority and a challenge, as it continued to be nationally.

6th November 2023

The Committee received an update from the Youth MP and Youth Forum on recent events and activities.

The main item for discussion was an update on the Local Safeguarding Assurance Partnership, with much of the last six months focussed on the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) and Action Plan and the embedding of the new arrangements. Members commented on the improvements they had already seen on the move to a place-based approach, which gave more assurance.

Additionally, following on from the recent LGA training, the Committee had requested that key performance dashboards should be attached to reports wherever possible, as well as reports circulated in good time to ensure Members could digest the information and prepare questions.

12th February 2024

Again, the Committee received an update from the Youth MP and Youth Forum on their recent events and activities.

The Committee received a report along with a supporting presentation on the School Effectiveness Strategy for 2023-2026. The Council had commissioned an independent review of the Strategy and following a period of consultation, the Council had launched the co-produced revised School Effectiveness Strategy for 2023-2026.

Five missions were contained in the Strategy, along with six public commitments, as well as agreed joint priorities that all schools across the Borough would collectively work on. The presentation gave detailed data on the performance of the Borough for Primary and Secondary age pupils in comparison to others in the North-West and nationally.

The Committee also received two reports detailing information on Education Data and the Speech, Language and Communication Initiative, along with a supporting presentation. Included was information on Early Years Foundation Data, Phonics data and Key Stages data which highlighted the significant progress over 2022/23.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5th June 2023

The Committee received a report back from the Executive Member for Public Health, Prevention and Wellbeing in response to recommendations of the Refresh Task Group. The Committee provided feedback and suggestions on access to services to help further improve them.

The Committee also noted the Draft Safeguarding Adult Board Business Plan and agreed its Work Programme for 2023/24:

- Scrutiny of the arrangements for the Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Care Quality Commission (CQC) Self-Assessment
- Scrutiny of Care Homes in the Borough

7th August 2023

This meeting was dedicated to the scrutiny of the Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB. Kevin Lavery, Chief Executive for NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria gave a presentation about the expectations for the ICB. Claire Richardson, Director of Health and Social Care Integration (Blackburn with Darwen) at NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB presented on Developing Health and Care Integration in Blackburn with Darwen within a place-based partnership. Mark Warren, Strategic Director of Adults and Health also reported on the Adults and Health Service Plan for 2023/24.

The Committee highlighted the need for better use of Darwen Health Centre to alleviate pressures at Royal Blackburn Hospital A&E and other hospitals.

9th October 2023

This meeting was dedicated to scrutiny of the CQC Self-Assessment process. The Committee received a presentation which provided an update on the key changes relating to the Regulation of Local Authorities by the CQC along with an update on the Council's preparations. Although the Committee noted the progress and preparations made, they felt a very good evidence base was needed to support this. The Committee requested an update at a future meeting.

5th February 2024

At this meeting, the Committee received a report that provided feedback from the visits of the Task and Finish Group to three care homes in the Borough. It was acknowledged that the care homes visited provided a good overview of the diverse range of care home provisions and quality status within the Borough. Officers provided updates on the work of its staff in follow up areas of concern with the care homes themselves, with satisfactory evidence and processes in place.

The Committee also received an update on the Integrated Care Partnership. It was reported that a utilisation review was underway at Darwen Health Centre and would identify current and future predicted demand, key clinical priorities and estimated estate requirements.

Members also commented on support for Mental Health Groups and the funding and support available for them from various sources.

Concerns were raised about housing conditions in Blackburn South-East and it was noted that a Housing Strategy was required for the Borough along with a Housing Survey. The

Committee were advised that work was ongoing in this regard, with outcomes being considered.

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATION

Request for all future items at the four overview and scrutiny committees to be accompanied by a report which is published with the agenda.