



**A Report from the
Overview and Scrutiny Committees**

**Annual Report of the Overview and
Scrutiny Committees 2001/02**

April 2002

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the first annual report of Carlisle City Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Its production is a requirement of the Council's Constitution which states:

"Overview and Scrutiny Committees must report annually to full Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate."

2. CONSTITUTIONAL POSITION

The Council has established three Overview and Scrutiny Committees and an Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

Briefly, the Management Committee's responsibilities are to approve work programmes, decide which committee will deal with a cross-cutting issue, allocate work referred by the Executive or Council and oversee the workload of the individual Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The three Overview and Scrutiny Committees each have responsibility for functions exercised by two or more Executive Portfolio Holders. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Portfolios for which they are responsible are set out below:

Committee	Portfolios
Community	Community Activities Health and Wellbeing
Corporate Resources	Corporate Resources Strategy and Performance Finance and Resources Promoting Carlisle
Infrastructure	Economic Prosperity Infrastructure Environment and Transport

Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee has 8 Members and is politically balanced. Each of the 3 political groups (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat) hold a chair of one of these committees, whilst the Managing Committee is chaired by a Member of the controlling group. The committees meet on a 6 weekly cycle whilst the Management Committee meets every 4 weeks (also to be 6 weekly henceforth see page 7).

The minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Committees are reported to full Council where each of the chairmen also presents a personal report on that period's business in respect of his or her committee. Where Overview and Scrutiny

Committees make recommendations, references or comment to the Executive, these are individually itemised on the Executive Agenda.

It has also recently been agreed by the Executive in response to a suggestion of the Chairman of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee that committee Chairs can attend Executive meetings to speak to referred items.

The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the respective committees have been as follows during the year of report:

Committee	Chairman	Vice-Chairman
Management Committee	Councillor Jefferson	Councillor J Prest
Corporate Resources	Councillor Guest	Councillor J Prest
Community	Councillor Ellis	Councillor Boaden
Infrastructure	Councillor Rutherford	Councillor E Mallinson

3. THE NEW SYSTEM – GETTING STARTED

By an unfortunate coincidence the new political structure was introduced at a meeting of the City Council on 11th September 2001. The new system went live from that date without there having been a "dry-run" period. As a consequence this involved a steep learning curve for both Members and Officers. This was particularly true for Overview and Scrutiny since there had been no similar function within the former political management arrangements. This report, whilst it is the first "annual report", covers the period 11 September 2001 to 30 April 2002.

There were a number of Officer and Member training events during the months leading up to September 2000 and in particular a successful simulation event organised by North West Employers Organisation which was held on 6 September and helped with the initial transition. North West Employers have provided two further training events for Overview and Scrutiny Members in the early part of 2002. Overview and Scrutiny Committees will need to review their future training needs and how these can best be met.

Council agreed that Overview and Scrutiny required senior, experienced and dedicated Officer support. The Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy was seconded to this role from the start of the new structure. A new post of Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer was also created and this was filled with effect from the start of 2002. A protocol for officer support was agreed and as part of this individual Chief Officers were given the task of providing further high level input to Overview and Scrutiny Committees should this be

needed but experience to date has not required this additional input (beyond Chief Officers service/departmental inputs).

The issue of Officer support will be further considered within the Organisational Assessment Best Value Review which is currently underway. In the longer term the level of support will need to be kept under review as the function develops, especially in the areas of community engagement, subject reviews and external scrutiny. Experience elsewhere shows that subject reviews/inquiries grow both in number and extent as the process matures. Also Government expectations are that Local Authorities will have an increasing external scrutiny role (e.g. in both health and transport scrutiny).

A budget of £5,000 has been agreed for the coming year to support research, consultation, expert witnesses and other direct expenses associated with Overview and Scrutiny.

4. NETWORKING ACTIVITY

In order to provide a vehicle to share experiences as Overview and Scrutiny develops, to disseminate best practice and to share training and development opportunities the North West Employers Organisation formed two separate networks in which the council participates. These both meet approximately quarterly, one being for Overview and Scrutiny Chairs across the north west region and the other being for Officer practitioners. Both these networks have provided substantial benefits for those who have participated.

On a local level the Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy has initiated an Officer Group for authorities in Cumbria to compliment the region network. This will act as a forum for discussion of common issues including joint working and external scrutiny, which as already stated, will become more important, particularly over the medium term.

5. FUNCTIONS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The main functions of Overview and Scrutiny under Carlisle City Council's Constitution can be summarised as follows:

Holding the Executive to Account, Call-In, Policy Development, Best Value Reviews, Monitoring Best Value Action Plans, Subject Based Reviews/Inquiries, Consultative (both internal and external), Performance Monitoring and Audit Matters (Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee only).

6. WORK PROGRAMME 2001/02

Each committee has developed a work programme for the year which has then been approved by the Management Committee and reviewed at each individual meeting to monitor progress, schedule future work and consider workload issues.

A simple tabular presentation of these work programmes was agreed which shows specific items of business under functional headings. It also identifies Lead Officer(s) and reporting dates. The overall work programme itself is included within this report as the appendix.

The next sections of this report give a brief review of the work undertaken under each of the functional headings.

7. BEST VALUE REVIEWS

Each committee has been responsible for two or three such reviews with each first being the subject of a "scoping" exercise by the Management Committee to give direction to that review.

Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been responsible for Community Safety, Bereavement Services and Strategic Approach to Housing. For differing reasons none of these particular views have, as yet, been completed. Progress on the Community Safety Review has been delayed by the need to give priority to the Crime and Disorder Audit and subsequent Strategy, both of which have to be completed to statutory deadlines. These documents are, however, crucial to the review and will enable it to again go forward once they are completed.

Bereavement Services, which is a small unit, has had staff changes and sickness both of which have put back completion of this review. It has started and the committee have been appraised of the delays and the reasons for them. A revised timetable for this review will come forward shortly.

The Strategic Approach to Housing review has been considered by the committee who have given direction and also agreed that some of the issues will need to be taken forward within the Organisational Assessment Review whilst others will be reported further in due course.

Corporate Resources Committee has established a small sub-committee to undertake the Organisational Assessment Review, which is proceeding according to timetable.

The Customer Contact Review is also proceeding well with good engagement between the Officer team and the committee.

The Risk and Safety Management Review is underway and will be reported further in accordance with the agreed timetable.

Infrastructure Committee is undertaking two Best Value Reviews. That for Concessionary Fares has been completed and was a very well conducted review with effective Member input; the final report has been recommended to the Executive and Council. This review has produced an Action Plan, which has and will see significant service improvements.

The Regeneration Review has started but remains at the initial stages with the Officer Team undertaking research and information gathering. The committee has been kept informed of progress to date and future reporting intentions.

8. MONITORING BEST VALUE ACTION PLANS

Ten such Action Plans have been included in the current work programme and seven of these have been the subject of comprehensive reports to responsible committees. These have resulted in a review of actions to date and the giving of future direction to these Action Plans.

Of the others, then the committee has agreed that Waste Management will be considered as part of the Best Value inspection process, whilst individual elements of that relating to Economic Development and Tourism have been reviewed and further elements are being programmed. The Municipal Maintenance Action Plan remains to be reported to committee.

9. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The committees have considered half yearly and nine monthly reports and a comparative report against the Council's family group and in all cases commented on performance in relation to specific indicators. Members have also made suggestions relating to future reporting including the provision of background information and the style and content of reports.

An important direction has been set for the future focus of this work. It has been agreed to concentrate scrutiny on indicators of less good performance with a view to identifying and recommending means of securing improvement. This work will be included in next year's work programme.

10. SUBJECT REVIEWS/INQUIRIES

This is a particularly important function of Overview and Scrutiny. The adoption of Overview and Scrutiny part way through the year has limited its scope this year. However, several areas are being or have been considered. These include Options for Celebrating the Queen's Golden Jubilee, E-Government Targets, Dog Fouling, Smart Cards and Managing Radioactive Waste Safely. The last two listed heard evidence from expert witnesses (Mr J Littleton, chairman of the North East Regional Smart Card Consortium and Dr M Courtis a member of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee) which proved helpful and informative. This approach will feature in more reviews in the coming year.

Some of these were short-term reviews and were reported to Executive/Council via the Committee Minutes, the larger reviews have, and will henceforth, be the subject of formal Overview and Scrutiny reports (in the style of this document). This will both provide a record of the committee's work and a clear focus for the views and recommendations which came out of the review. It will also enable circulation and publication of this work to other interested authorities and external partners.

11. CALL-INS

There have been four decisions called-in during the period under report. These are as set out in the following table:

Decision Ref. No.	Subject	Called-In By
EX.078/01	Review of Member Support Needs	Chairman of Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Councillor Guest
EX.133/01	Carlisle South Sure Start Programme – Interim Steering Group	Councillors Boaden, McMillan and Weber
EX.028/02	Leisuretime Externalisation Documentation	Councillors Boaden, McMillan and Weber
PF.005/02	Executive "Away Day" Event	Councillors Guest, Styth and Parsons

In two cases (EX.078/01 and PF.005/02) procedural changes were agreed although the decisions themselves remained unchanged. In one case (EX.028/02) the decision was amended by the decision-maker to reflect the committee's wishes.

12. OTHER WORK ITEMS

The first success for Overview and Scrutiny came with the highlighting of problems with Member information flows under the new structure which resulted in the introduction of the well received monthly Member Briefing.

The committees gave views on a wide range of policy reports, consultations and matters referred from the Executive. They also began a programme of Service Plan presentations to familiarise Members with those services for which their committees have scrutiny responsibility. The Corporate Resources Committee also provided scrutiny of the budget and its associated reports and processes. It also considered a number of audit matters.

A start was made on external scrutiny in two areas. Proposals for a new Strategic Health Authority and the relationship between the County Council and its external partner responsible for highway matters were both examined with the aid of external witnesses.

13. WORKSHOP

A Workshop for Group Leaders, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny was held on 27 February 2002. The purpose was to review progress and to consider issues, which had arisen during the first months of Overview

and Scrutiny. The session was facilitated by Head of Corporate Policy and Strategy and proved both to be constructive and productive. It resulted in a broad consensus in relation to all the main topics discussed and a significant number of improvements were agreed. Almost all these improvements can be implemented without further recourse to formal decision.

The action points arising were as follows:

- The Council should aspire to have a high performing Overview and Scrutiny function.
- Overview and Scrutiny needs to do a balance of internal and externally focussed work, with neither dominating.
- Both the Council Leader and Overview and Scrutiny Chairs were committed to improving channels of communication between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny.
- Officers should, in liaison with Portfolio Holders, ensure that appropriate Forward Plan items allowed for Overview and Scrutiny involvement.
- The constitutional role of Management Committee should remain as at present but its meeting frequency should be reduced from 4 weekly to 6 weekly in line with the other committees.
- There should be a commitment from both Portfolio Holders and Overview and Scrutiny Committees to have greater ownership of Performance Indicators.
- There would be a particular focus in the coming year on Performance Indicators where performance was in or close to lower quartile of district authorities.
- Subject reviews/enquiries should be limited in number so as not to overstretch capacity (one large, one medium, one to two small per committee perhaps) and would only be held as separate meetings where appropriate to their likely length or availability of witnesses.
- Members, staff and the community (via the Citizens Panel) should be consulted on suggestions for subject reviews/enquiries.
- Greater team-working by committees and a multi party approach should be encouraged.
- Overview and Scrutiny should seek out and where appropriate adopt best practice approaches.

- There should be a corporate and inclusive approach to briefing and preparation for Overview and Scrutiny meetings. There will be a private briefing session with Overview and Scrutiny support staff for all Members before each committee meeting.
- Room layout should be considered further including experimenting with a horseshoe or open-ended meeting table arrangement in Committee Rooms A and B.
- Seating arrangements were important and it was felt that Members should all sit together and that nameplates should be used for the benefit of both witnesses and the public.
- Minute taking was highly regarded and it was agreed that where an individual view was recorded it would be attributed to "a Member".
- Chairs would ensure that they summed up what was to be recorded as the committee's view on each occasion and work with Committee Clerks to ensure clarity in this respect.
- Agendas should not be overlong with an emphasis on examining fewer issues more thoroughly.
- Overview and Scrutiny support staff and Committee Administration to co-operate in providing brief explanatory text for each agenda item to clarify the committee's role.
- A number of areas for further development were identified including external scrutiny, participation of outside bodies, co-opting Members to particular reviews, meeting outside the Civic Centre if a suitable area based issue arose and seeking feedback from witnesses.

These actions are now being taken forward.

14. CONCLUSION

Overview and Scrutiny has made a good start despite the inherent difficulties of adopting an entirely new way of working. The committees are beginning to make a real difference and have had a number of early successes.

There has been a successful review of progress and issues, which has resulted in positive action and improvements; this has been an important input to this annual report.

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APPENDIX

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2001/02

Committee/Review	Lead Officer	Reporting Date(s)
O & S Management Committee		
<i>Best Value Reviews (Scoping)</i>		
Bereavement Services	Euan Cartwright	20/12/01
Organisational Assessment	Peter Stybelski/HACAS	17/01/02
Strategic Approach to Housing	Laurie Brewis	17/01/02
Community O&S Committee		
<i>Best Value Reviews</i>		
Community Safety	Paul Musgrave	29/11/01 21/02/02
Bereavement Services	Euan Cartwright	
Strategic Approach to Housing	Laurie Brewis	
<i>Monitoring BV Action Plans</i>		
Leisuretime	Euan Cartwright	
Elderly Services	John Little	10/01/02
Housing Debt Recovery	Stephen Soars	10/01/02
Housing Empty Property Management	Sean Parnaby	29/11/01
<i>Performance Monitoring</i>		
Performance Indicators Report	Stephen Vertigans	10/01/02, 04/04/02
<i>Policy reviews</i>		
Options for celebrating Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee	Rob Burns	29/11/01
Smart Cards	John Mallinson/David Taylor	29/11/01, 10/01/02, 21/02/02, 04/04/02
Managing radioactive Waste Safely		26/02/02
<i>Service Plans</i>		
Sport & Recreation	Helen Ryan	May
Community Support Unit	Rob Burns	04/04/02
Tullie House Development & Marketing Plan	Joanne Orr	
Environmental Services	Richard Speirs	
<i>Reports Requested</i>		
Raffles Community Buildings	Rob Burns	29/11/01

<i>References from Executive & Consultations</i>		
Budget - Estimates	Angela Brown	29/11/01
Quality Town & Parish Councils		10/01/02
County Council Corporate Strategy		10/01/02
Rural Strategy	David Beaty	21/02/02
Government White Paper		10/01/02
Community Sports Development Plan	Helen Ryan	May
Cultural Strategy	Euan Cartwright	May
Health O&S		21/03/02
LSVT		26/03/02

Corporate Resources O&S Committee

<i>Best Value Reviews</i>		
Customer Contact	John Nutley	06/12/01, 24/01/02, 28/02/02, 18/04/02
Risk and Safety Management	Mike Battersby	18/04/02
Organisational Assessment (sub-committee)	Peter Stybelski/HACAS	24/01/02, 22/02/02, 15/03/02, 22/03/02
<i>Monitoring BV Action Plans</i>		
Communications	Sharon McKee	24/01/02
Property Management	David Atkinson	18/04/02
Municipal Maintenance	John Robinson	
<i>Performance Monitoring</i>		
Performance Indicators Report	Stephen Vertigans	24/01/02, 28/02/02
<i>Policy reviews</i>		
Council Budget	Doug Thomas	08/01/02 – special
E Government (government targets)	John Nutley	06/12/01
<i>Service Plans</i>		
Corporate Policy & Strategy	Jim White	24/01/02
Communications	Sharon Mc Kee	18/04/02
Revenues & Corporate Support	Doug Thomas	

<i>Reports Requested</i>		
Web Design	Sharon McKee	06/12/01
<i>References from Executive & Consultations</i>		
Budget – Estimates	Angela Brown	06/12/01
County Council Corporate Strategy		24/01/02
Government White Paper		24/01/02
Rural Strategy	David Beaty	28/02/02
<i>Audit Committee Matters</i>		
Future reporting	Ian Beckett	06/12/01
Annual Audit Plan 2002/03	Ian Beckett	28/02/02
DA Management Letter		28/02/02

Infrastructure O&S Committee

<i>Best Value Reviews</i>		
Regeneration	Rob Burns	31/01/02
Concessionary Fares	Peter Mason	13/12/01
<i>Monitoring BV Action Plans</i>		
Waste Management	Richard Speirs	1st Q 2002
Economic Development	Catherine Elliot	
Tourism	John Bell	
<i>Performance Monitoring</i>		
Performance Indicators Report	Stephen Vertigans	31/01/02, 07/03/02
<i>Policy reviews</i>		
Local Plan Roll Forward	Alan Eales	
Dog Fouling	John Mallinson/Richard Speirs	31/01/02
<i>Service Plans</i>		
Planning Services	Mike Battersby	31/01/02 07/03/02
Parks & Countryside	Euan Cartwright	
Licensing	John Egan	25/04/02
Carlisle Works		
Design		
<i>Reports Requested</i>		
Relationship City/County/Capita	Mike Battersby	13/12/01 31/01/02
OMNI Cabling	Mike Battersby	13/12/01
Assembly Rooms	John Bell	13/12/01

<i>References from Executive & Consultations</i>		
Budget – Estimates	Angela Brown	13/12/01
County Council Corporate Strategy		07/03/02
Government White Paper		07/03/02
Planning Green Paper	Mike Battersby/Alan Eales	31/01/02
Rural Strategy	David Beaty	07/03/02

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