



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

**Annual Report of the Overview and
Scrutiny Committees 2004/05**

Report Reference: OS 01/05

April 2005

1. 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.

When first established in 2001/02 the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Community, Corporate Resources, Infrastructure) each had responsibility for functions exercised by two or more Executive Portfolio Holders. At the start of the current year, however, the Leader of the Council (who determines the number and responsibilities of portfolios under the Council's Constitution) reduced the number of portfolios from eight to six. This resulted in portfolios which cross Overview and Scrutiny committee's areas of responsibility. The terms of reference of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee are set out in detail in Part 4 on the Council's Constitution. For ease of reference they are also analysed in a report showing which Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for each individual policy or service area.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the principal areas for which they are responsible are set out below:

Committee	Main Areas of Responsibility
Community	Community Activities, Health and Wellbeing and Culture and Recreation
Corporate Resources	Corporate Resources, Finance and Best Value
Infrastructure	Economic Prosperity and 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.

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. Chairs are also invited to attend Executive meetings to speak to referred items if they so wish.

The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the respective committees are currently as follows:

Committee	Chairman	Vice-Chairman
Management Committee	Councillor Jefferson	Councillor Bradley
Corporate Resources	Councillor Guest	Councillor Prest
Community	Councillor Boaden	Councillor K Rutherford
Infrastructure	Councillor Mallinson	Councillor Dodd

It is a constitutional requirement that the committees review ways of working and produce an Annual Report the requirement reads as follows:

"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. MEMBER TRAINING

As it is still a relatively new function and continues to evolve it is particularly important that training is available and encouraged. If Members are to fulfil their various roles a programme to meet their needs is essential.

As in previous years the following Member training was delivered: Induction for New Overview and Scrutiny Members, Overview and Scrutiny Specialist Skills.

Individual Members needs are identified and addressed via the Framework for Member Development. Key core skills for Overview and Scrutiny will continue to be made available within this framework.

3. OFFICER SUPPORT

From the outset the Council agreed that Overview and Scrutiny required senior, experienced and dedicated Officer support. This is provided by the Overview and Scrutiny Manager and an Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer. National studies into the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny have shown that adequate support is a key factor in determining success.

Bearing this in mind, the level of support may need to be reviewed, in the longer term, as the function continues to develop. Experience elsewhere shows that subject reviews/inquiries grow both in number and extent as the process matures. Government expectations continue to be that Local Authorities will have an increasing external scrutiny role.

A budget of £5,000 has been provided 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 meet approximately quarterly, for both Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Officer practitioners. These networks have recently met jointly and continue to provide substantial benefits for those who have participated.

On a local level the Overview and Scrutiny Manager initiated and administers an Officer Group for authorities in Cumbria to compliment the regional network. This acts as a forum for discussion of common issues including problem solving, joint working and external scrutiny. A specialist officer from the Audit Commission Regional Office is a member of this network reflecting the importance attached to this function by that organisation and the central role they see for it in future inspection regimes. The group has organised cost-effective joint training events for all seven Cumbrian authorities.

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 Improvement Plans, Subject Based Reviews/Inquiries, Consultative (both internal and external), Performance Monitoring and Audit Matters (Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee only).

6. WORK PROGRAMMING

Each committee develops a work programme for the year which is then approved by the Management Committee and reviewed at each individual meeting to monitor progress, schedule future work, consider any additional proposals and review workload issues.

A simple tabular presentation of these work programmes is used which shows specific items of business under functional headings. It also identifies Portfolio Holders and Lead Officer(s) and reporting dates. The current overall work programme is included within this report as Appendix 1.

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

7. HOLDING THE EXECUTIVE TO ACCOUNT

O&S committees consider and comment on many individual Key Decisions and the Executive listens to their views, whether or not they are taken on

board. A big improvement has been made to the Forward Plan, there are no longer standing items or holding reports. The format is greatly improved with clarity of O&S information and officers are now proactively planning for O&S involvement in taking issues forward.

Whilst these improvements facilitate better scrutiny of individual key decisions, the Executive are not yet being effectively held to account at an outcome level. This was recognised in previous O&S workshops but progress has not limited since improvements to performance management systems which are still in hand are an essential requirement. Another prerequisite is having a set of clear and manageable Council and Executive priorities, progress has been made here and further work is underway which should facilitate improvement in this area of work.

8. POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Improvements to Forward Planning agreed last year, have aided O&S input to policy reports as they make their way to Executive. There are a number of examples where this has been productive including the Housing Strategy and its related new policies.

There is still improvement to be made in this important area of work.

9. BEST VALUE REVIEWS

Each committee is responsible for conducting such reviews with each first being the subject of a "scoping" exercise by the Management Committee to give direction to that review. The Management Committee allocates a review to a particular committee and considers participation by chairs of other committees if appropriate.

Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been responsible for a BV Review of Democratic Engagement and has recently held the first monitoring session on the extensive Action Plan.

Corporate Resources Committee is undertaking a BV Review of Revenues and Benefits which has identified a wide range of improvements, this review is scheduled to be completed in August 2005.

Infrastructure Committee's current BV Review of Planning Services is proceeding satisfactorily.

One of the problematic areas of BV Reviews used to be effective member engagement; experience to date shows that this has been addressed successfully by BV Reviews being done by Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Members play an effective part in Review Teams and the committees are fully engaged with the use of workshops being a particularly valuable tool for this work.

10. MONITORING BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Upon completion each Best Value Review produces an Improvement Plan, which will usually include planned improvements for both short and medium term. It is obviously good practise to monitor these and each Improvement Plan is reviewed on a six-monthly basis for at least two years after approval.

11. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The committees continue to consider quarterly Performance Indicator reports and comparative reports against a wider group of similar authorities. However, the authority has reviewed its performance management systems and reporting arrangements and as a result changes are being put in place unfortunately these and quarterly reporting have been disrupted by the January 2005 storm and flooding.

Monitoring of Business Unit Plans has also been reviewed but, as yet, the new system has not settled down, although some initial reservations have not been borne out in practice. This particular monitoring not only scrutinises performance against key challenges, linked to council objectives, but also enables members to more easily see the issues behind current performance. In addition it allows an opportunity to celebrate success.

12. SUBJECT REVIEWS/INQUIRIES

This is a particularly important aspect of Overview and Scrutiny and one which is widely accepted as a critical success factor for this function. However, in order that these potentially time-consuming reviews do not dominate their work and/or the resources available each committee sets its priorities and usually undertakes only one such review at a time. The first step in each review is a background report that sets the scene and leads to setting of terms of reference and direction for the conduct of that review.

These reviews in particular allow contribution from external witnesses, which can be very helpful and indeed inspirational. They also allow the committees to be flexible and innovative in their approaches. Members can find this work particularly rewarding and that they can be powerful tools to influence change.

The programme set for 2004/05 was as follows: -

Evening and Night-time Economy (a joint review of Community and Infrastructure Committees carried out by a Task Group), Anti-Social Behaviour (which has, unfortunately, had to be postponed as the planned evidence sessions were affected by the flood), Industrial Estates Policy (which has also been delayed as a consequence of the flood), Local Plan Review, Transport - Modal Balance, and Abandoned Vehicles.

In addition committees have continued to monitor progress in relation to the following reviews in particular: - Post FMD Environmental and Health Impacts, Environmental Performance of the Council, and Streetworks.

When completed these reviews have been the subject of formal Overview and Scrutiny reports (in the style of this document). These provide both a record of the committee's work and a clear focus for the views and recommendations which came out of the review. It also enables circulation and publication of this work to other interested authorities and external partners.

Completed reviews from previous years are, where appropriate, followed up, examples from this year include Environmental and Health Impacts of FMD and Environmental Performance of the Council.

At the time of writing none of the new reviews for the current year have been completed (for reasons outlined above) although the Final Report on the Evening and Night-time Economy is in draft form and will be finalised shortly.

13. CALL-INS

There have been six decisions called-in during this year (although one was in fact called in by two committees) in each case the agreed protocol was used to aid the process.

The first call-in related to Extensions to Off-Street Car Parks. In that case part of the decision relating to Bitts Park Car Park was referred back to the Executive who subsequently confirmed their decision. The second one related to Comprehensive Performance Assessment – Days Leave Granted to Staff, after consideration the committee decided not to refer back. Both Community and Corporate Resources Committees called in the third matter, Representatives on Outside Bodies. The former referred it back whilst the latter did not. The Executive made some changes to nominations upon reconsidering the decision. The Fourth related to Land and Property Transactions but no reference back was made. The fifth was in relation to Proposed Disposal of Land at Fusehill Street Community Gardens and resulted in reference back. The Executive confirmed its earlier decision but clarified the main point of concern raised by the committee. The last call-in related to Broadband for Members and it was referred back with Executive changing arrangements for the proposed pilot scheme.

Occasionally where members have considered calling a matter in the Overview and Scrutiny Manager has been able to provide background information; or bring members and officers and/or members and portfolio holders together. This has obviated the potential call-in as greater understanding or a mutually acceptable way of proceeding has resulted.

14. OTHER ELEMENTS OF WORK

The Corporate Resources Committee provides scrutiny of the budget and its associated reports and processes. Delays in the agreed timetable necessitated special meetings which enabled Overview and Scrutiny's comments to be made on time and in detail. Community and Infrastructure

Committees' input was again built into the programme. Although volumes of paper were still inevitably considerable, officers put great effort into structuring agendas and removing duplication. Corporate Resources Committee also acts as the Council's Audit Committee and this involves setting the annual internal audit programme and receiving the resultant reports. This committee also considers the Council's external Auditor's reports.

One particular scrutiny subject, Sheepmount Project, led to important changes to the project and its management with the Community Committee continuing to have an important monitoring role including site visits and tailored monitoring reports. Lessons learnt have already been applied to other projects.

As well as significantly disrupting the committees' work programme the January storm and flood has itself become an important element of that work programme with each committee having agreed aspects of ongoing work relating to impacts and recovery.

15. NATIONAL RESEARCH AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The authority is participating in a five-year ODPM study of the new political structures and Members and officers gave initial evidence to researchers in December 2002 and again in February 2004. We will input further to this project as it progresses.

It is well recognised nationally that Overview and Scrutiny is still a developing function and this is also the case here in Carlisle. We have continued to make progress but still need to put significant effort into development issues.

Our CPA report made the following comments on O&S: -

'O&S has been set up to provide both challenge and policy development support to the Executive. While this role is not yet fully understood and embedded, there are some early examples of engagement of O&S in monitoring service delivery, driving best value reviews and challenging the Executive.'

'O&S Committees have been involved in identifying poor performing areas, such as sickness absence and planning turnaround times, and developing action plans to address them. O&S Committees have also played a key role in driving performance through best value reviews.'

In order to assist us to meet best practise in O&S Management Committee agreed to commission a review of O&S Development by an external consultant. We were fortunate to secure the services of Dr Stephanie Snape of Warwick Business School who is a nationally recognised expert in this field. See more on this review below.

16. REVIEWING PROGRESS - ANNUAL WORKSHOP

Whilst issues are usually addressed as they arise and improved ways of working identified on an ongoing basis, it is important to stand back, take stock and review progress from time to time. In previous years such a review was undertaken in a Workshop for Group Leaders, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny which have resulted in a broad consensus in relation to the main topics discussed and a significant number of improvements have been agreed in this way. This year it was intended that the workshop would receive the consultant's report from Dr Snape detailing her findings and recommendations. Unfortunately Dr Snape's work was twice delayed, firstly by illness and secondly by the flood. She has now concluded her on-site work which has included observing each O&S Committee at work, meeting with appropriate Members and officers, focus groups and also consideration of a great deal of paperwork associated with the O&S function. Her report will be considered at the start of the new Civic Year and its recommendations will form the way forward for O&S development in that new year. The annual workshop was itself a victim of the flood, taking place, as it does, in January.

17. CONCLUSION

Carlisle City Council aspires to be high performing in its Overview and Scrutiny function. Also recognising that this is, both nationally and locally, still a developing and challenging function. Members and officers have together responded well to these challenges.

Our CPA Report acknowledged that Overview and Scrutiny is making a strong contribution to the authority's corporate agenda yet, crucially, is also acting as a critical friend.

The committees started 2005/05 with enthusiasm and commitment and there were some good examples of progress, most notably perhaps the start of Task Group working.

The decision to undertake an externally led review was both timely and positive, however, the events of January have disrupted not only that review but the work programme particularly in key areas like subject reviews.

We need to get back on track with our continuing development and commence 2005/06 with a determination to take forward the development recommendations which come out of the review.

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APPENDIX

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2004/05

Review/Issue	Portfolio Holder & Lead Officer	Reporting Date(s)
Community O&S Committee		
<i>Flood Recovery Monitoring</i>		
Welfare Issues	All/John Mallinson	24/03/05
Housing Strategy	Councillor Bloxham/Simon Taylor	TBC
<i>Best Value Reviews 2004/05</i>		
<i>Monitoring BV Action Plans</i>		
Democratic Engagement	Councillor Knapton/ Carolyn Taylor, David Taylor	24/03/05
<i>Performance Monitoring</i>		
Performance Monitoring Reports (PI's & Business Plans)	All/Maggie Mooney/Vivienne Coleman	26/08/04 18/11/04 TBC
Lower quartile PI's Crime	Councillor Bloxham/Steven O'Keeffe	Workshop 30/09/04 Action Plan update 26/08/04
<i>Subject Reviews/Inquiries</i>		
Post FMD Environmental & Health Matters	O&S Support	26/08/04 06/01/05 10/02/05
Evening Economy	O&S Support	Special Task Group Sessions now finished. Report being drafted.
Anti-social Behaviour	O&S Support	18/11/04 06/01/05 Special meetings TBA
<i>Reports Requested</i>		
Monitoring CHA Contract	Councillor	15/07/04

	Bloxham/Simon Taylor	18/11/04 June 05
Local Air Quality	Councillor Bloxham/David Ingham	06/01/05
CCTV Annual Report	Councillor Bloxham/Michael Battersby	Shopwatch & Pubwatch, CCTV Review 2004
BAC Update	Councillor Knapton/Maggie Mooney	26/08/04
Crime & Disorder – Audit & Strategy 2005-2008	Councillor Bloxham / Steven O'Keeffe	24/03/05
Sheepmount Monitoring	Councillor Knapton/Mark Beveridge	15/07/04 26/08/04 07/10/04 29/11/04
Sheepmount Bridge	Councillors Knapton & Bloxham/Mike Battersby	24/03/05
Museums Development Plan	Councillor Knapton/Mark Beveridge	29/11/04 9/06/05 or 21/07/05
ECCP	Councillor Bloxham/Mark Beveridge	26/08/04
Changes to CHA Contract	Councillor Bloxham/Simon Taylor	24/03/05
Gypsy & Traveller Protocol	Councillor Bloxham/Simon Taylor	07/10/04
Cumbria Sub-Regional Housing Strategy	Councillor Bloxham/Simon Taylor	18/11/04
Homelessness Review	Councillor Bloxham/Simon Taylor	06/01/05 10/02/05 TBC
<i>References from Executive, Management Committee & Consultations</i>		
Monitoring Rural Strategy	All/David Beaty	26/08/04
Licensing Policy	Councillor Bloxham/Jim Messenger	18/11/04
Housing Strategy	Councillor Bloxham/Simon Taylor	26/08/04 18/11/04 06/01/05 24/03/05
Budget	Councillor Firth/Angela Brown	Special 29/11/04

Diversity Policy	Councillor Knapton/Karen Hook	26/08/04 18/11/04 06/01/05 TBC
Talkin Tarn	Councillor Knapton/Mark Beveridge	26/08/04 Special 26/10/04

Corporate Resources O&S Committee

<i>Flood Recovery Monitoring</i>		
Emergency Plan Review	Councillor Geddes/Maggie Mooney	TBC
Public Assets (including the Civic Centre)	Councillor Firth/David Atkinson	Update 31/03/05 Special TBA
Financial Implications of the Flooding	Councillor Firth/Angela Brown	31/03/05
<i>Best Value Reviews 2002/03</i>		
Risk and Safety Management	Councillors Geddes & Firth/Jason Gooding	22/07/04 02/09/04 Workshop 04/11/04
Risk Management Policy	Councillor Firth/Jason Gooding	31/03/05
<i>Best Value Reviews 2004/05</i>		
Revenues and Benefits	Councillor Firth/Peter Mason	22/07/04 25/11/04 31/03/05
<i>Monitoring BV Action Plans</i>		
Customer Contact Centre Update	Councillor Geddes/Jason Gooding	22/07/04 14/10/04 13/01/05
<i>Performance Monitoring</i>		
Performance Monitoring Reports (PI's & Business Plans)	All/Maggie Mooney/Vivienne Coleman	02/09/04 25/11/04 TBC
Lower Quartile PI's Sickness Absence	Councillor Geddes/David Williams	02/09/04
<i>Subject Reviews/Inquiries</i>		
Industrial Estates Policy	Councillor Firth/David Atkinson	Workshop 04/11/04
<i>Council Budget</i>		
Budget	Councillor Firth/Angela Brown	22/07/04 22/11/04 13/01/05
Statement of Accounts	Councillor Firth/Angela Brown	22/07/04
Provisional Outturn	Councillor Firth/Angela Brown	22/07/04
Gershon Report	Councillor Firth/Angela	17/02/05

	Brown	
Carital Strategy & Asset Management Plan	Councillor Firth/Angela Brown/David Atkinson	16/06/05
Medium Term Financial Plan & Corporate Charging Policy	Councillor Firth/Angela Brown	16/06/05
Reports Requested		
Trades Union Consultation and CJC Minutes	Councillor Geddes/David Williams	22/07/04 25/11/04
Broadband for Members	Councillor Geddes/John Nutley	14/10/04 25/11/04
References from Executive, Management Committee & Consultations		
Health and Safety Policy	Councillor Geddes/Arup Mahji	22/07/04
Partnership Policy	Councillor Firth/Karen Hook	22/07/04
Guidelines for Boards of Arbitration	Councillor Geddes/Penny Crack	13/01/05
Information Management Policy	Councilor Geddes/Fiona Musgrave	17/02/05
Cumbria Sub-regional Strategy	All/Karen Hook	31/03/05
Audit Committee Matters		
Audit Plan	Councillor Firth/Ian Becket	31/03/05
Use of Consultants VFM		?
Final Accounts 2003/04	Audit Commission	
Annual Audit Letter	Audit Commission	
SAS610 Statement	Audit Commission	Special 04/11/04 22/11/04
Internal Audit Outturn Report 2003/04	Councillor Firth/Ian Becket	22/07/04
Audit Commission Inspection Plan 2004/05	Councillor Firth/Ian Becket	22/07/04

Infrastructure O&S Committee

<i>Flood Recovery Monitoring</i>		
Infrastructure, including Clean Up Operations	Councillor Bloxham/ Mike Battersby	24/02/05 07/04/05
<i>Best Value Reviews 2003/04</i>		
Planning	Councillor Bloxham / Chris Hardman	
<i>Best Value Reviews 2004/05</i>		
<i>Monitoring BV Action Plans</i>		
Supporting Communities	Councillors ML Bowman, Knapton/Maggie Mooney	29/07/04 09/09/04 02/12/04
<i>Performance Monitoring</i>		
Performance Monitoring Reports (PI's & Business Plans)	All/Maggie Mooney / Vivienne Coleman	29/07/04 02/12/04 TBC
<i>Subject Reviews/Inquiries</i>		
Evening Economy	O&S Support	Special Task Group Sessions now finished. Report now being drafted.
Transport: Modal Balance in Carlisle	Councillor Bloxham/ O&S Support	Visit to York 22/09/04. 09/02/05
Abandoned Vehicles	Councillor Bloxham/ Mike Battersby	09/12/04 07/04/05
Environmental Performance of the Council	Councillor Bloxham/ Mike Battersby	Report completed. Committee to monitor progress on 07/04/05
Streetworks	Councillor Bloxham	Interim report completed Committee to monitor progress on 23/06/05
Local Plan Review	Councillor Bloxham / Chris Hardman	Special: 23/03/05 14/04/05
<i>Reports Requested</i>		
Tourism	Councillor M Bowman/ John Bell	21/10/04

Development Briefs		
References from Executive, Management Committee & Consultations		
Integrated Service Delivery on an Area Basis	Councillor Bloxham/ Mike Battersby	
Budget	Councillor Firth/Angela Brown	Special 01/12/04
Grass Cutting Service	Councillor Bloxham/ Mike Battersby	02/12/04
Waste Management	Councillor Bloxham	02/12/04 09/02/05
Car Park Ticket Machine Replacement	Councillor Bloxham/ Mike Battersby	21/10/04
Fusehill Street Community Gardens	Councillor Firth/ David Atkinson	29/07/04
Back Lanes	Councillor Bloxham/ Mike Battersby	9/09/04
Three Rivers Strategy	Councillor Bloxham/ Mark Beveridge	TBC