

WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING

06 JULY 2015

SUBJECT:	Scrutiny Annual Report 2014/15
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	Joe Blott, Strategic Director – Transformation and Resources
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Cllr Ann McLachlan (Governance & Improvement)
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides a summary of the work undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function for the municipal year 2014/15. The report captures the progress made and highlights the key pieces of work delivered.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Overview and Scrutiny is a legal requirement for local authorities under the Local Government Act 2000 and a key indicator of good governance. Effective scrutiny also provides significant opportunities to improve the Council's decision-making, service provision and cost-effectiveness.

2.2 Wirral Council commits to the principles of good corporate governance through the development, adoption and implementation of its Code of Corporate Governance. Scrutiny has a key role in meeting a number of supporting principles which promote good governance including:

- *'Being rigorous and transparent about how decisions are taken and listening and acting on the outcome of constructive scrutiny',*
- *'Exercising leadership through a robust scrutiny function which effectively engages local people and all local institutional stakeholders, including partnerships, and develops constructive and accountability relationships.'*

2.3 Wirral discharges its scrutiny function through four Policy and Performance Committees. There is one committee aligned to each of the Council's three Strategic Directorates and a fourth Coordinating Committee responsible for Coordinating all scrutiny activity and dealing with call-ins.

4.0 STATEMENT OF THE CHAIR OF COORDINATING COMMITTEE

- 4.1 The Council's Scrutiny function has continued to develop and strengthen during the last year, and it is encouraging to see more elected members involved in the in-depth panel work.
- 4.2 The Council's in-house scrutiny training for new members has been delivered and this included an elected member perspective on scrutiny, which was well-received. In addition, Committee Chairs are taking advantage of specific training offered to develop agenda setting and chairing skills as well as delivering scrutiny in times of austerity.
- 4.3 One of the ways that scrutiny can contribute to developing policy is through pre-decision scrutiny and this is something that the Policy and Performance committees will be looking to progress through the coming municipal year.

Cllr Moira McLaughlin

5.0 OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS 2014/15

- 5.1 During 2014/15 Wirral's scrutiny function continued to build on the foundation established with the introduction of new arrangements in 2013/14.
- 5.2 The significant achievements of 2014/15 include:
- Major improvements in Health Scrutiny facilitated by the creation of the Health and Care Performance Panel by the Families and Wellbeing Committee.
 - The detailed and comprehensive pre-decision scrutiny of the Future Council budget options during the autumn.
 - The increase in partnership scrutiny across wider geographical boundaries in relation to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and Joint Health Scrutiny of the service change proposals relating to the Clatterbridge Cancer Centre.
- 5.3 Overall the number of in-depth reviews (initiated and completed in-year) reduced slightly from 10 initiated and 7 completed in 2013/14 to 7 initiated and 6 completed in 2014/15. This is mainly due to the increased time and work dedicated to the scrutiny of the budget options emerging through the Future Council process. The pre-decision scrutiny of budget options increased notably in 2014/15 with each of the committees establishing dedicated task and finish sessions around the key savings proposals.
- 5.4 The number of Elected Members engaged in task and finish work outside regular committee meetings continued to increase from 27 in 2013/14 to 31 in 2014/15. This wider participation demonstrates the increased interest and willingness of Members to engage in focussed sessions that provide the opportunity to go into more depth than is usually possible at regular committee meetings.
- 5.5 With the largest scope of the Policy and Performance Committees, the Families and Wellbeing Committee continued to drive the largest workload of the Council's scrutiny work programme. The committee successfully implemented a number of measures to reduce the size of agendas at regular meetings, through the circulation of reports

for noting outside formal agendas and the introduction of Spotlight briefing sessions (see 6.5 below).

- 5.6 The number of meetings dedicated to the call-in of key decisions increased significantly during the year. This post-decision scrutiny dominated the workload of the Coordinating Committee, impacting on its ability to undertake any real horizon-scanning or more strategic, cross-cutting work.
- 5.7 Committee Chairs continued with the established practice of holding agenda setting meetings prior to formal committee meetings, with party spokespersons being invited to these. This provided the opportunity for all groups to influence the shape of agendas and the scrutiny work programme throughout the year.
- 5.8 Agendas continued to include a mix of items in line with the agreed work programmes of the committees. Regular update reports were provided in relation to the delivery of the work programme. In addition, there was continuity with the inclusion of standing items to review budget delivery performance as well as performance against the Corporate and Directorate Plans.

6.0 KEY WORK COMPLETED IN 2014/15

6.1 Scrutiny of Budget Options

The detailed review of the Future Council budget options ensured these savings proposals received comprehensive pre-decision scrutiny. The Chair of the Coordinating Committee convened a meeting of all Chairs and Spokespersons to agree a consistent approach with the work being delivered alongside the public consultation. A significant amount of time was invested in a series of detailed evidence gathering sessions with the key officers and relevant stakeholders. Visits were incorporated into sessions where the budget options were site-specific. A detailed report was produced by each of the Directorate Policy and Performance Committees with feedback and recommendations being provided to Cabinet to inform its decision-making.

6.2 Joint Health Scrutiny - Clatterbridge Cancer Centre

Clatterbridge Cancer Centre has announced proposals for the development of a new Cancer Centre in Liverpool, which will operate as the hub supporting a network of cancer services. In July 2014, members of the Families and Wellbeing Policy & Performance Committee resolved that the proposals were “a substantial variation to service”. A Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee was established in partnership with seven other neighbouring local authorities to consider the proposals. The Joint Committee was convened for a period of six weeks and met on five occasions. The meetings heard evidence from senior officers and clinicians, patient representatives and staff members. The evidence related to quality of care, quality of facilities, access and transport, patient views, research facilities, project management and construction and financial sustainability. The Joint Committee concluded by supporting the proposed future model of cancer services for Cheshire and Merseyside. It was also proposed that a Joint Scrutiny Committee be established to oversee the delivery of the new build project in Liverpool and refurbishment of the Wirral site.

6.3 Wirral Health Scrutiny

The Families and Wellbeing Policy & Performance Committee is responsible for discharging the Council's statutory duty to undertake health scrutiny and is required to review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in the Borough. During the municipal year, a standing panel was established to review the performance of health and social care providers and commissioners. The Health and Care Performance Panel has seven members and met on six occasions between October 2014 and May 2015. A number of sessions have been held with representatives of the local health partners to hold them to account for the services they provide to the residents of Wirral. In addition, members have fully engaged in reviewing the draft Quality Accounts, which are produced by the local health providers as an annual statement of the quality of services provided.

In addition, good practice suggests that health scrutiny should develop constructive relationships with bodies such as the Care Quality Commission, Wirral Healthwatch and Wirral Health and Wellbeing Board. A draft protocol has been developed to promote effective joint working at a local level between Healthwatch, the Health and Wellbeing Board and health scrutiny.

6.4 Attainment Sub-Committee

The Families and Wellbeing Policy and Performance Committee has established the Attainment Sub-Committee to scrutinise the Council and its partners in raising educational attainment and improving outcomes of young people in terms of their education, training and social and economic wellbeing. This Sub-Committee has 7 members and met three times during the municipal year. Reports considered by members included the following:

- The outcomes of Ofsted assessments of schools in Wirral;
- School standards report for early years foundation stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, including a focus on narrowing the gap;
- Transforming early years provision;
- Child poverty pilot projects;
- The delivery of alternative education provision;
- Overview of potential interventions regarding closing the gap.

6.5 Spotlight Sessions

During the municipal year members agreed to hold Spotlight sessions, which, in an informal setting, enables a topic to be explored in greater detail than time would allow during a formal Committee meeting. The sessions particularly lend themselves to the horizon-scanning agenda. Four sessions were held during the municipal year:

- Navigating the new NHS – led by Fiona Johnstone;
- Implementation of the Care Act 2014 in Wirral – led by Graham Hodkinson;
- The provisions of the Children and Families Act 2014 – led by Julia Hassall;
- An information session led by CRI, the providers of drug and alcohol services.

6.6 Safeguarding Children

Members of the Families and Wellbeing Policy & Performance Committee have undertaken a detailed review of the Council's safeguarding arrangements for children. This review is giving members the opportunity to assure themselves that the Council and partners have adequate safeguarding mechanisms in place and that those processes work in practice. The review will provide challenge to the adequacy of those procedures. The task & finish group, comprising 5 members, has met on seventeen occasions in order to plan and undertake the evidence-gathering for review. Meetings have been held with a range of partner organisations and Council staff as well as families who have experience of the system. The evidence-gathering phase of the review is now complete. The report is scheduled to go to the Policy & Performance Committee meeting in September.

6.7 Car Parking Review

A review of Car Parking was added to the Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee's work programme in 2013. A Task & Finish Review Panel was set up and a series of meetings held between January and July 2014. A key outcome from the review was a series of Objectives and Principles proposed by the Review Panel, to provide a framework for the future strategy of Car Parking in Wirral. The final report was presented to the Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee in September 2014 before being referred to Cabinet where all of the Panel's recommendations were accepted.

6.8 Review of Wirral Apprenticeships Programme

This review was set up by the Regeneration and Environment Policy and Performance Committee in October 2013. The purpose of the review was to ensure that funding allocated to the Apprentice Programme was being used effectively and was providing the best outcomes for apprentices through all available opportunities. The Panel made a number of recommendations around key themes including the requirement for support of apprentices, the availability and quality of information and guidance available to young people, getting young people ready for work, the Wirral Apprentice Policy and barriers to those who were considering an apprenticeship. The final report was presented to the Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee in September 2014 before being referred to Cabinet where all of the Panel's recommendations were accepted.

6.9 Local Welfare Assistance Scheme

As part of Cabinet's budget resolutions, £900,000 was held in a reserve for local welfare assistance following the Government's decision to withdraw direct funding effective from April 1st 2015. The objective of the Scrutiny Review was for the Review Panel to make appropriate recommendations to Cabinet on how the fund could be used to deliver local welfare assistance from August 1st 2015 when Wirral's scheme expires. An evidence day was conducted on 9th April 2015 involving detailed question and answer sessions with key officers from the Council. Members also invited a number of key representatives from key third sector organisations to help inform recommendations. The final report was referred by the Review Panel to Cabinet for consideration of the recommendations made.

6.10 Coastal Strategy

A scoping meeting for the Coastal Strategy Scrutiny Review was convened in March and this review will re-commence in the new municipal year.

6.11 Decisions called-in

During 2014/15, five decisions were called-in for further scrutiny which generated an extra seven meetings for the Coordinating Committee. This demonstrates a key component of the scrutiny function with the Executive being held to account for its decision-making. A summary of these call-ins is included in the table below:

	Decision Called-in	Date of Meeting	Outcome
1	Delegated decision – Lease of office space at, Birkenhead Fire Station	Decision revised in light of call in, no meeting required.	Decision revised
2	Cabinet decision – Financial Monitoring (public health expenditure)	7 th August & 18 th September 2014	Decision upheld
3	Cabinet decision – Leisure Facilities Pricing Structure	7 th August & 23 rd September 2014	Decision upheld
4	Cabinet decision – Outcome of the Lyndale School Consultation	2 nd October 2014	Decision upheld
5	Cabinet decision – Early Years and Children’s Centres	15 th October, 12 th November 2014 and 12 th February 2015	Decision upheld

7.0 SCRUTINY IN 2015/16

- 7.1 The new municipal year will provide opportunities to further develop and improve the Scrutiny Function. A key focus for development in 2015/16 is to identify greater opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny, providing scrutiny members with an opportunity to review proposals earlier in the planning process. This has the potential to improve decision making and reduce the likelihood of decisions being called in. This approach requires clear forward planning and a longer lead in time to decision-making.
- 7.2 An important goal in the coming year is for scrutiny to engage more with the public and service users as part of the evidence gathering process from the outset. Examples of this approach have been used to good effect in the past such as the Review into the Outcomes for Looked After Children. However, there is a need to place greater emphasis on service user feedback as a key starting point in developing the methodology for each review and how the voice of the public and service users will be heard.
- 7.3 As the Corporate Plan is in the final year of its delivery cycle, a new Council Plan is currently being developed for 2016 onwards. This will provide a new framework for the Council within which priorities for the scrutiny work programme will need to be selected and prioritised.

7.4 With the success of the Families and Wellbeing Committee's Spotlight Sessions as a vehicle for horizon-scanning, there is the potential for the other committees to schedule sessions like this in 2015/16. The policy areas to focus on will include local policy initiatives as well as national policy drivers identified from the Queen's speech and other announcements by the new government.

7.5 There is likely to be further progress with partnership scrutiny and working more across local authority boundaries, both in terms of the LCRCA and other partnership frameworks. With the likelihood of further proposals in terms of substantial variations to the provision of health services, there is a strong chance of further joint health scrutiny work across the Cheshire and Merseyside footprint.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 N/A

8.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 N/A

9.0 CONSULTATION

9.1 N/A

10.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS

10.1 N/A

11.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

11.1 N/A

12.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

12.1 N/A

13.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

13.1 N/A

14.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

14.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?
No, the report is for information to Members and there are no direct equalities implications.

15.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

15.1 N/A

16.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

16.1 N/A

17.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

17.1 Members are requested to note the contents of this report.

18.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

18.1 To provide Members with a summary of the work undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function during the municipal year 2013/14.

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APPENDICES

N/A

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Council – Reports from Policy and Performance Committee Chairs	10/03/14
Council – Reports from Policy and Performance Committee Chairs	16/12/13
Council – Reports from Policy and Performance Committee Chairs	14/10/13
Scrutiny Annual Report to Council	14/07/14
Council – Reports from Policy and Performance Committee Chairs	20/10/14
Council – Reports from Policy and Performance Committee Chairs	08/12/14
Council – Reports from Policy and Performance Committee Chairs	16/03/15