

Scrutiny@Calderdale

The Annual Report of Calderdale Council's Scrutiny Panels



Annual Report 2015-2016



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Dear Calderdale Resident,

We are pleased to present the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Panels for 2015/16. The report highlights those areas where Councillors have looked in detail at some of the most important issues facing Calderdale residents.

It shows how we have tried to involve the public in our work and to act as a proper “guardian” of the public interest.

Scrutiny Panels have combined work in formal meetings with more in-depth scrutiny reviews.

The role of scrutiny in local Councils is of increasing importance. In times of austerity Scrutiny Panels should challenge the Council’s Cabinet and senior officers to make sure that every penny we spend is spent well on providing essential and effective services to Calderdale people. For example, one of the important duties of Scrutiny Panels is to be robust in challenging the Council and its partners to demonstrate that they are doing everything possible to safeguard vulnerable people.

And particularly in view of the on-going debate about the future of hospital provision in Calderdale, the importance of making sure that elected Councillors listen carefully to local residents, patients, service users and other stakeholders is imperative.

We would like to thank all the officers, colleagues from other organisations and members of the public who have helped us in our work throughout the year by providing us with high quality evidence about a wide range of issues. We hope to hear from even more of you next year.



Councillor Malcolm James, Chair, Adults Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel



Councillor James Baker, Chair, Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel



Councillor Marcus Thompson, Chair, Communities Scrutiny Panel



Councillor Rob Holden , Chair, Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel



Councillor John Ford, Chair, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

So what is scrutiny.....?

Calderdale Council has five scrutiny panels. Each panel has seven or eight Councillors and two of them have additional “co-opted” members.

The Panels:

- act as a “critical friend” to the Council’s leadership and senior officers
- drive improvement in public services
- enable the concerns of the public to be heard
- consist of independently minded people who decide their own agenda and how they will do their work

The Scrutiny Panels all met at least ten times during the year. The panels are:-

Adults, Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel

Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Communities Scrutiny Panel

Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel

Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel

The panels try to take a thoughtful, evidence-based approach. That means listening to different people who have an interest in what we are discussing, including, of course, the public.

We try to limit our meetings to discussing two or three issues in depth. This helps us really “get under the skin” of an issue and put together proposals for improvement and change.

Over the year scrutiny panels looked at several issues which were of major concern to a particular group of people, who turned up in numbers when that issue was discussed. Their views are important and helped the panel make informed recommendations. Here are a few examples:

Public Health: 0-5 year olds

(Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel)

On 1 October 2015, responsibility for commissioning public health services for children aged 0-5 transferred from NHS England to the Council. These services include the Healthy Child Programme, which includes health visiting and the Family Nurse Partnership, which is targeted services for teenage mothers. These services are provided by Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust (CHFT).

The council plans to keep the contract for these services running until March 2017 before re-commissioning. This will allow time to analyse the needs of the local population to make sure that we commission the most appropriate services and to work with partners to develop a more integrated service.

Moving on from Ofsted

(Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel)

The Council has been successful in moving out of “intervention” in our children’s services, which happened following an Ofsted inspection that uncovered a number of areas of concern. That means that there is no longer a need for the Council to have the independently chaired Improvement Board that the Government had insisted should be established. Some of the responsibilities of the Improvement Board have passed to the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel and the Panel has put together a clear plan of how it will pick up those responsibilities. It is important that there is rigorous Councillor scrutiny of services for the most vulnerable children in the Borough to help ensure that the previous problems do not re-occur.

Community Use of Council Land

(Communities Scrutiny Panel)

In March, Communities Panel looked at the policies and processes involved in helping to make sure those community events that take place on Council land are safe and successful.

Many events have taken place over the years and the events agenda grows larger every year.

We took a careful look at the process for managing such events, and asked officers to look at a number of ways of improving the event management process.

As part of our evidence gathering we asked all 51 Councillors for their views, based on their experiences within their own wards.

In the end the panel all agreed that the procedures we already have given us the ability to respond to proposals from community groups both flexibly and with safety in mind.



Image 1: a public open place

Asset Transfer

(Communities Scrutiny Panel)



Image 2: Hebden Bridge Town Hall

Asset Transfer happens when a local community organisation takes the management of a building or land that was previously managed by a council or other statutory organisation. We wanted to look at how well this is working in Calderdale.

One of the best examples of an asset transfer – not just in Calderdale, but nationally – is Hebden Bridge Town Hall where the management has been transferred from Calderdale Council to Hebden Bridge Community Association, so – for this discussion - we moved our meeting from our normal venue at Halifax Town Hall to Hebden Bridge Town Hall. And several members of the public joined our discussions.

As well as Hebden Bridge Community Association we also invited Holywell Community Pub Limited - an example of an *Asset of Community Value* – to join us.

This enabled the Panel to explore key lessons and learning of what worked so that this could be fed back into the Council's processes and shared with other groups

Winter Services Review

(Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel)

The Panel looked at the Council's winter services policies and received an update of the Council readiness for the 2015/16 winter.

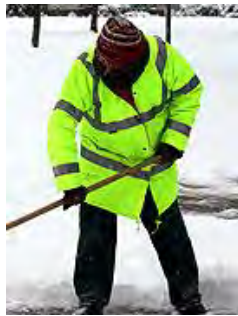


Image 3: snow clearing

The current winter services policy was adopted in 2009, following work undertaken by a detailed scrutiny review group.

Seven years has now passed since the adoption of that policy and we felt it was about time the policy was reviewed.

We took evidence from officers and Cabinet Members and heard about what steps were being taken to prepare for the 2015/16 winter period.

We also heard that the Directorate intended to undertake a fundamental review of the winter service in 2016 after this winter as the service was felt to be unsustainable from a financial point of view, even for a typical winter. This will involve a thorough review of all the routes, the gritters that the Council use, the salt spreading and service procurement, in order to improve the efficiency of the service. The review will also consider the contribution that residents and businesses in Calderdale could make.

Later in the year, when the Panel considered the Cabinet's draft budget proposals, we recommended that that a budget be identified for considering requests for increasing the provision and siting of new grit bins at locations across the Borough, as grit bins are a sensible proposal for addressing the costs of slips and falls over the winter months.

On-Street Parking in Calderdale

(Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel)

An interesting and informative discussion was held on on-street parking in Calderdale.

Some people from Halifax Society of the Blind attended the meeting and spoke passionately about the challenges they encountered on a regular basis with on-street parking and particularly pavement parking and the impact it has on them.

A representative of Suez (formerly Sita), one of the Council's contractors, addressed the Panel and spoke about the challenges fleet vehicles had in accessing a number of streets and sites, particularly where pavement parking, on-street parking and junction parking impacted on the service.

We also heard about balancing the needs of residents as well, many of whom lived in old terraced housing which had been around many years before mass car ownership became the norm.

We concluded that it is better to “educate” than “enforce” on the issue of on-street parking.

So we made a number of recommendations to Cabinet, which we hope will be accepted, including that they undertake an information and awareness raising campaign on “On-Street” Parking, in consultation with the Halifax Society of the Blind and other stakeholders.



Image 4: An on-street parking pay and display sign

Town Centre Office Strategy

(Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel)

The Council's Corporate Projects team provided us with a detailed presentation at our November meeting on the background, progress and challenges of the Halifax Town Centre Office Strategy.

We heard how the Council approved an "invest to save programme" in July 2012 and, in July 2013, a "Smarter Working Policy", with modern and flexible ways of working to be implemented in central Halifax. This will reduce the number of office buildings the Council uses. Smarter Working will deliver operational benefits and make better use of our office accommodation, producing estimated savings of £7.6 million over the next 25 years.



Image 5: A smarter working office environment

Devolution

(Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel)

Devolution of powers from central to local government is a topical and controversial subject and, at our September 2015 meeting, Merran McRae, the Council's Chief Executive, provided us with a detailed briefing on the discussions she has been involved in at a national and regional level.

Councillor Barry Collins, Deputy Leader of the Labour Group, Councillor Stephen Baines, Leader of the Conservative Group and Councillor James Baker, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group each outlined their respective groups' positions on devolution.

Discussions continue on the extent of devolution in Yorkshire and the geography that each *devo-deal* will cover. Whatever form devolution takes, it will have a major impact on the local economy, transport infrastructure and other key areas of everyday life and we will revisit it regularly.

Quality and Sustainability in Care Homes

(Adults, Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel)

In December, we invited two care home managers and the Care Quality Commission to join us in a discussion on the quality and sustainability of the residential and nursing care home market in Calderdale.

Councillors were particularly interested in the Council's new duties under the Care Act 2014 of *market shaping* and managing provider failure and other service disruptions.

The supply of quality residential, nursing home and home care provision has an impact all parts of the health and social care system. Delays in people leaving hospital, for example, is sometimes attributed to the supply problems in the residential and home care market.

Councillors asked whether a scheme for them to visit residential and nursing homes in the same way that they visit children's homes could be introduced and Council officers are currently developing a scheme to allow this to happen.



Image 6: A care home setting

Extra Care Scheme in Calderdale

(Adults Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel)

In October, 2015, Cabinet made decisions in relation to the new Extra Care Scheme in Calderdale.

The decisions were “called-in” by a Member of the Adults, Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel so that the Panel could consider whether all options for progressing an extra care provision in the Lower Valley had been properly considered.

After a detailed discussion the Panel felt confident that all options and alternatives had been considered by Cabinet and so released the decision for implementation.

Panel members were pleased to hear from the Cabinet that work is progressing on the Central Brighouse scheme.

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Detailed Scrutiny Reviews

Most Scrutiny Panels decide to look at some issues in greater depth and undertake detailed reviews.

In 2015/16, four detailed reviews were undertaken, two of which are still underway.

The Communities Scrutiny Panel examined wild flower planting and weed control policies. The review group was very supportive of more wild flower planting where possible, and also of making sure that the flower seeds are collected and either re-sown or passed on to community groups. Their findings and recommendations were subsequently adopted by Cabinet.

The Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel undertook a major detailed review on Attendance Management at the Council. Their final report was endorsed by the Panel in March 2016. The Panel’s recommendations were presented to Cabinet in April 2016.

On-going work includes: a detailed review by some members of the Children and Young People and Communities Scrutiny Panel on “Building Cohesion in Calderdale”; and a review of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel on the work of the work of the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

We are also pleased to see that the Cabinet has built on the work of a detailed review undertaken by the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel in 2014/15 by recently launching an initiative known as “Vitamin Green”. The initiative reviews progress across a range of environment issues in Calderdale and signals the link between environmental sustainability, economic health and public health. It proposes a programme of work to assist in continuing progress on these agendas.

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Calderdale and Kirklees Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Calderdale and Kirklees Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met seven times between June 2015 and April 2016, undertaking detailed scrutiny work into hospital reconfiguration in Calderdale and Kirklees.

A 14-week consultation by Calderdale and Greater Huddersfield Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) on the reconfiguration proposals began on 15 March, 2016.

Four meetings in March and April 2016 have started to examine the CCG proposals in great detail.

The CCG proposals have attracted a lot of public interest and not a little controversy and all the Joint Committee meetings have been well attended by members of the public.

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Calls-In

“Call-in” is an important way Scrutiny Panel Councillors can hold the Council’s Cabinet to account. A call-in delays implementation of a Cabinet decision until a Scrutiny Panel has had a close look at

the decision. The Scrutiny Panel may choose to ask Cabinet to reconsider its decision.

There were three call's-in of Cabinet decisions in 2015/16

23rd November, 2015 – Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel – Charging for water supplies under the Private Water supplies regulations 2009

3rd November, 2015 – Adults, Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel – New Extra Care Scheme

3rd December, 2015 – Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel – Prosperous Towns, Strong Communities – Proposals for Town Boards

In all three cases, the Scrutiny Panel decided to release the Cabinet decision for implementation, rather than asking Cabinet to reconsider.

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Engaging the public

As well as publishing our agenda and reports on the internet and in libraries, we now also:

- Publish a monthly Scrutiny Bulletin
- Tweet regularly about scrutiny (@ScutinyCdale)
- Promote our work through local media
- Publicise our dedicated email address:-
scrutiny@calderdale.gov.uk

When scrutiny meetings are considering controversial subjects or matters of public interest, we often get a good number of members of the public attending.

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Petitions

The Council has a new way of dealing with petitions, which means that some petitions will be considered by Scrutiny Panels.

The first petition to be considered this way was a petition against the proposed closure of Halifax Central Post Office.

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The Challenges Ahead

We expect that the Scrutiny Panels next year will have as busy and wide-ranging a programme as we have had this year.

Some of the major challenges – not just for the Council – but for the whole population of Calderdale that the Scrutiny Panels should address are:

- The plans for hospital reconfiguration will make major changes to the way that health services are provided for the people of Calderdale.
- The Council’s Flood Commission will report in the Spring and the Communities Scrutiny Panel and the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel in particular will need to make sure that their recommendations are implemented so that the next time we suffer major flooding, we are as well prepared as we can be and that action has been taken to reduce the impact of flooding and increase our resilience to it.
- We anticipate that proposals for devolved powers from Government to our local area will be published soon. Scrutiny has the responsibility to look at these proposals in detail and make sure that they will benefit Calderdale people as much as they can.
- Reductions in public expenditure have presented major challenges to the Council over the past few years and the resource available to the Council has reduced dramatically. There is no doubt that this challenge will get bigger over the coming years and scrutiny needs to look at all budget proposals in detail to ensure that essential services continue to be delivered whilst making sure the Council continues to balance its books.