

scrutiny@calderdale



Annual Report 2010-11



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Scrutiny Annual Report – 2010/11

Chairs' Introduction

Dear Calderdale Resident,

Calderdale's Scrutiny Panels have two jobs. One is to *overview* issues important to Calderdale and make recommendations for changes and improvement. The other is to *scrutinise* decisions taken by the Council and the way in which they have been implemented to check that they are in the best interests of Borough residents. This, our third Annual Report, gives examples of how we have done this.

Our meetings are open to the public and we always welcome contributions from people who attend our meetings or send us their views. We were delighted that a number of you came to several of our meetings to tell us what you think.

We try and make sure that we learn from others as well as people within the Council. This year, amongst others, we heard from Calderdale school and college students, Leeds and Bradford Universities, Friends of the Earth, the Calderdale LINK and Todmorden Town Council. We hope this list lengthens in future years and that we involve some local businesses as well.

In all, 33 of the 51 Calderdale Councillors sat on Scrutiny Panels, as well as other people who are co-optees on the Panels. We would like to thank them all.



Councillor Amanda Byrne



Councillor Ian Cooper



Councillor Ruth Goldthorpe



Councillor Bryan Smith



Councillor Megan Swift

So what is scrutiny.....?

Calderdale Council has five scrutiny panels. Each panel has seven Councillors and two of them have additional members of the public as “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 fifteen times during the year. The panels are:-

- Adults, Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel
- Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel
- Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel
- Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel
- Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel

The panels meet every three weeks and 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.

The following sections of this report give some examples of the work the panels have done over the past year.

Acting as a critical friend to the Council's leadership, senior Officers and the Council's partners.....

Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) and Charges for Care

Fair Access to Care Services is the way that the Council decides whether an elderly or disabled person is eligible to receive care services. There is a charge for most care services based on ability to pay.

We considered both FACS and the level of charges during the year. We worked hard to explore how best to balance the need for care with the financial resources available to the Council.



The Council decided to change the Fair Access to Care Services eligibility banding from low to moderate from April 2011, which now means that fewer people are eligible for care managed services. Charges were also increased from the same date.

We will continue to monitor closely the impact of these changes on people who use these services throughout the year.

A public airing of this sort of issue at a Scrutiny Panel is an important part of our role as Councillors in holding public agencies to account.

Another example of this is the following:

Adults Safeguarding – Serious Case Review

Most of our scrutiny work involves an examination of strategic issues. But, occasionally, we look at how an individual Calderdale resident has been served. One example of this was when we considered a Serious Case Review following the death of an 82 year old man following him falling at home. His daughter was subsequently convicted of his manslaughter.

We wanted to make sure that lessons were learnt from this tragic incident to make sure that all the right agencies work together to prevent similar incidents in the future.



Halifax Borough Market

Above the Borough Market in Halifax are the little-known “streets in the sky”. These are two rows of three-storey terraces containing 21 houses. Most of them have been empty for decades. The Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel visited the houses and felt they were a great asset to the town centre and should be refurbished and re-occupied.

They’ve asked for detailed proposals to move things forward, and also persuaded the Council’s Cabinet to set up a group to look at all market issues.



Children’s Social Care

Looking after vulnerable, neglected and abused children and young people is one of the most important things the Council does. We acted swiftly when our services were criticised in inspections in 2009 and we continued to scrutinise this area closely throughout last year.



As well as meeting with the independent chair of the Children’s Social Care Improvement Board we have made sure that we have heard from front-line staff as well, including head teachers, independent reviewing officers and a locality team manager.

Regular reports from the Improvement Board have shown improvements in a number of areas, which is very pleasing. We will continue to monitor this carefully to check that improvement continues apace.

Review of Secondary Schools

We have paid careful attention to the review of secondary schools provision that has taken place during the year and Cabinet agreed an improvement programme in March. Making sure that the programme is delivered on time and on budget, as well as – most importantly – bringing about improvements in the quality of education delivered throughout Calderdale will form a major part of the scrutiny work programme over coming years.



Free swimming

In early June 2010 the Government announced that it would be ending the funding of free swimming for under-16s and over-60s with effect from the end of July. Members were concerned about the impact this would have, particularly as it was at the start of the school summer holidays. We suggested to Cabinet that they continue the scheme using Council money through to September 2010 and were delighted that they acted on our recommendation.

Scrutiny helping to drive improvement in public services....

Redundancy / efficiency of the service

The government reductions in public expenditure made it inevitable that the size of the Council workforce would reduce. In August, we reviewed the Council's redundancy schemes and recommended that a maximum level of redundancy pay be set, so that there would be an end to very large payouts to a few senior staff and greater equity across the workforce.

Recognising that Calderdale had a more generous scheme than many local authorities, Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel recommended reducing the maximum number of weeks redundancy pay that an employee could receive. Cabinet accepted our recommendations and the revised scheme has now been implemented.

Budget

All the Scrutiny Panels took a very careful look at the Cabinet's budget proposals in January and February. The appropriate Cabinet member attended each meeting and answered detailed questions about the proposals. Several changes were made to the proposals during the consultation period.



During 2011/12 we will take a careful look at the implementation of budget savings, both to make sure that budget targets are reached, but also to consider what the impact is on services to the Borough's residents.

Enabling the concerns of the public to be heard



Hospital Matters

We have a duty to scrutinise the work of the NHS as well as Council services and this year we have examined several issues including; pressure sores; single sex wards; and plans to reduce lengths of stay in hospital.

We also discussed the closure of ward 5ab at Calderdale Royal Hospital with Health Trust managers to understand the impact of this closure on patients and staff.

Listening to Children



The Scrutiny Panel wants to make sure that it understands that the needs of our children and young people and one of the best ways of doing this is to listen to what they have to say to us. This year we heard from Calderdale's "Young Inspectors", the Sowerby Bridge Deaf Group, the Transitions Group, and Young Carers.

Children's Congenital Heart Services – Joint Health Scrutiny

The NHS has launched a major consultation on the way children's congenital heart services should be provided in the future and local authorities across Yorkshire and the Humber have joined together to take a close look at the proposals and what it means for children with heart problems and their parents.



Councillor Ruth Goldthorpe has represented Calderdale on this joint scrutiny committee, whose work will continue until the autumn.

The committee has the difficult job of balancing the desire for local services with the Government's aim of creating fewer, high quality regional centres of excellence. This may mean Calderdale children being admitted to hospitals in Newcastle or Liverpool, rather than Leeds, which is where they go now.

Education Maintenance Allowance

When the Government proposed scrapping the Education Maintenance Allowance, Council asked scrutiny to find out from Calderdale students and their lecturers what they thought the impact would be.

The clear message from the students was that the cost of transport to and from college was the thing that worried them most.

We talked to the Cabinet member responsible for transport and we are delighted that, following our representations, Cabinet has found a way to support some students with their transport costs in 2011/12.

Joe Cotton, a student from Calder High School, came to the meeting and told us afterwards:

“I was really glad to be there. I thought it was fantastic of the Council (and the Panel) to hold a session specifically for students to have their say and I’m very grateful of the results of the meeting, having been told recently about the introduction of a new travel scheme for students funded by the Council to help cover the loss of the EMA– this was one of the main issues that was brought up at the meeting and it’s ace that it’s been acted upon”.



Joe Cotton

Brookfoot Lane, Brighouse



Residents and local councillors had been trying to resolve the problem of safety on this steep road for some time. They were concerned about the road surface in parts, overhanging branches, and also about mud from the wheels of lorries from a nearby quarry. Bringing the issue to scrutiny enabled their concerns to be heard. As a result, interim work has been programmed for a whole weekend in August, and further investigations are being carried out on more permanent improvements.

Being independently minded....

Carbon Reduction in Calderdale

The Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel is in the middle of a major review of how the council, residents and businesses of Calderdale are dealing with the challenges posed by climate change. They've heard from housing experts, academics, environmental groups and buildings professionals. They've also visited a number of sites. So far they've recommended to Cabinet several proposals on solar power, all of which are being acted upon. The panel is now looking at the development of a full energy strategy for Calderdale.



Review of elections

After the problems that occurred elsewhere at the 2010 general election, we took a close look at the administration of the general and local elections of May 2010 in Calderdale. We were pleased to conclude that the elections here were conducted efficiently. We made several proposals for changes in information provided for candidates and their agents and these changes were introduced in time for the 2011 local election.



Academies

When the Government proposed to establish a new kind of school known as an *academy*, our Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel decided that they needed to understand what this meant for Calderdale as a matter of urgency. We invited the chairs of governors and head teachers of all relevant schools to meet us and nine schools attended at very short notice.



They told us that they had some concerns about the quality of some support services to schools that the Council provides. We have worked closely with council officers to address these concerns and significant changes to many of these services were delivered by the Council in the budget.

Burial Provision in Todmorden

Shortage of suitable burial sites is becoming a major issue in Todmorden and surrounding areas. The council had come up with a number of proposals for new or expanded cemeteries but there was strong local feeling that some of the sites being considered were unsuitable due to the extra traffic that would be generated



along narrow country lanes. Members of Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel visited the sites and then held a panel meeting in Todmorden Town Hall, to make sure that as many local people as possible could attend. Everyone got an opportunity to speak and the result was that the Cabinet Member responsible, who was at the meeting, agreed to look further at other options before a final decision is made.

Alison Grant – Parent Governor Representative

I was appointed to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel in February 2011 after a ballot of parent governors in Calderdale. Since being appointed, I have attended two formal meetings of the Scrutiny Panel, an informal meeting at Northbridge Leisure Centre and a showcasing evening presented by the Disabled Youth Forum and Moving on Group. I have found the formal meetings more interesting than expected and have felt moved to contribute views on both occasions. The informal meeting and showcasing event were both tremendously inspiring and a great way to hear directly from the young people in Calderdale about their activities, achievements and goals.

Although keen to volunteer when the request came through, because I have a young family, run my own business and have fostering responsibilities, I needed answers to the questions 'how often, what time and where?' And I've discovered that the time commitment is a lot more than I had originally been led to believe! Nevertheless, I take my commitments seriously and intend to fulfil the role I have been given for as long as I can. However, I strongly recommend that when recruiting future members, an information pack is available which provides factual, relevant and up-to-date advice on what the role involves.

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HAVE YOUR SAY

Overview and Scrutiny – suggest a topic

Name

Address

Postcode

Email address...

Telephone number

Brief description of the topic you would like to be considered by one of the Scrutiny Panels

Why do you think a Scrutiny Panel should consider this issue?

Would you like to attend a meeting of a Scrutiny Panel to discuss this issue with Councillors?

For enquiries / requests, please contact the Scrutiny Support Team, Democratic and Partnership Services, Calderdale Council, Westgate House, Westgate, Halifax, HX1 1PS

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Email: scrutiny@calderdale.gov.uk

<http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/scrutiny>

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