

CALDERDALE MBC

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

COUNCIL – 27 September 2012

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2011/12

Report of the Head of Democratic and Partnership Services

1. Purpose of Report

To present to Council the fourth Annual Scrutiny Report.

2. Background

This is the fourth Annual Report of the Council's scrutiny activity. The Council's five scrutiny panels considered a wide range of issues in 2011/12 and completed a number of detailed reviews.

A draft of the Annual Report has been considered by the Chairs of Scrutiny Panels in 2011/12 and 2012/13 and incorporates their views.

As last year, the Annual Report will be written as a report to the public, rather than in a more traditional committee report format. The report will be "published" on the internet, rather than as a booklet.

After Council has received the Annual Scrutiny Report, the Council's Print Unit will design the report so that it is easily accessible on the internet. The internet pages will include photographs of scrutiny activities and links to the reports of detailed reviews and other material. This will include a facility for the public to contact easily the Council's scrutiny function to suggest items that they wish a Scrutiny Panel to consider. In order to ensure that the Annual Report is as accessible as possible, there may be some minor changes to the wording, although the subject included will remain as presented to Council.

The Annual Report will also be available through the Centre for Public Scrutiny website.

3. Recommendations

- a) That the Council endorses the Annual Scrutiny Report
- b) That the Annual Scrutiny Report is published on the Council's website

For further information on this report contact:-Mike Lodge, Senior Scrutiny Support Officer, mike.lodge@calderdale.gov.uk, 01422 393249

Dear Calderdale Resident,

Each year our Scrutiny Annual Report sets out the most significant pieces of work we have done. This year we have done some important work focussing on matters of real importance to Calderdale people.

Our report on social care for children looked in detail at how Councillors can contribute to making life better for our most vulnerable children. And the dementia report, *A Bold Approach*, calls on the Council and the Health Service to work together to find imaginative and radical ways of supporting people with dementia to live at home, rather than in residential care or hospital.

Increasingly our Scrutiny Panels are deciding that detailed review work often produces the most effective results. So next year, we have altered the way we work so that we will spend less time sitting in committee rooms and more out talking to the people who use our services and the people who provide them.

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.

As last year, we heard from many different organisations during the year. Communities Scrutiny Panel alone listened to more than forty different organisations during the year! We want to increase that number next year.

We would like to thank all the people who gave up their time to help us last year – without you our work would not be possible. And we would like to thank all the thirty three Calderdale Councillors who sat on our Scrutiny Panels during the year.

Councillor Ruth Goldthorpe, Adults Health and Social Care
Councillor David Hardy, Economy and Environment
Councillor Colin Raistrick, Children and Young People
Councillor Helen Rivron, Communities
Councillor Bryan Smith, Use of Resources

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
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.

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

Enabling the concerns of the public to be heard

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:

Milner Royd Allotments

In June 2011 concerns were raised by allotment holders at Milner Royd that sampling of the soil showed above normal levels of potentially toxic substances. The Council had issued advice about eating food grown on the site, but the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel felt that more needed to be done. At a packed meeting, we heard from council officers, allotment holders and independent experts.

They recommended that further work be undertaken to ascertain exactly what was in the soil and what this might mean.

This work, and more, was done, and Cabinet agreed a course of action in agreement with the allotment holders in February 2012, which included a potential second site.

Dog Control Orders

The Council's Cabinet consulted on proposals to introduce dog control orders, which would restrict where dogs could be allowed off the lead.

The Panel heard dog-walkers and people from sports clubs express fiercely held views and after our discussions, the Cabinet member agreed to amend the original proposals to consider dog control orders on a park by park basis.

Our intervention led to a better relationship between dog-walkers and the Council as people felt they had been given a real opportunity to air their views and had been listened to.

Shibden Park Car-parking Charges

Cabinet had drawn up proposals to charge for parking at Shibden Park but, following some opposition, they asked scrutiny to look at it in more detail.

Communities Panel heard from park users, local residents and businesses based in and around the park about the potential impact of various charging options.

They asked officers to go away and produce a detailed impact assessment. This was completed and discussions took place between the council and those who might be affected, which resulted in a proposal with which everyone could agree.

Annual Meeting with Children and Young People – Queen’s Road Neighbourhood Centre

“Listening to Children”

Our Children and Young People 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 over 35 Young People who showcased the work they had been undertaking to the Scrutiny Panel Members at a meeting held at the Queen’s Road Neighbourhood Centre in February, 2012.

The Panel received several presentations, including from the Deaf Youth Project; and from the Young Researchers on a mapping project they had undertaken aimed at finding out which recreational activities were being accessed by disabled children and young people, what was available and what activities the children and young people would like to access.

The progress of the Orange Box project was discussed along with the outcome of the recent youth parliament elections and a

regional campaign update on work done by the young carers.

The main theme emerging from the meeting was for the Members of the Panel to meet more frequently throughout the year with groups of children and young people and hear about and discuss the key matters that affect them.

Examples of engagement with Children and Young People since this meeting have included the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel meeting with Members of the Youth Parliament and YouthWorks and Panel Members attending a Young Carers school passport scheme launch event.

The People who work for us

As well as keeping an eye on services provided for the people who live in Calderdale, we also need to consider issues about the 3750 people who work for the Council. This year we:

- Quizzed the Council's Chief Executive about the Action Plans prepared as a result of the staff survey
- Made a series of recommendations about accelerating the Council's home working and flexible working initiatives
- Summoned managers from the Adults Health and Social Care Directorate to explain why their department's sickness absence was higher than other parts of the Council
- Asked for an explanation for the delay in implementing a Council decision to centralise training for staff, which will bring about an improvement in training and a reduction in costs.

Critical Friend

Joint Waste Contract

The Council's Residual Waste Contract that has recently been agreed with Bradford Council is one of the largest and most far reaching we have ever had. It aims to provide a solution to getting rid of all the unrecyclable waste we produce over the next twenty five years. So it was important that we looked closely at the plans.

We joined up with Bradford's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and grilled their officers as well as ours!

Working with partners both within Calderdale and beyond is something that is very important and will only increase over time as the Council looks to work as efficiently as possible with the resources we have available. It is equally important that accountability is maintained, and the work with Bradford was a great example of this.

Young People's Services Scrutiny Review – 2012

The main purpose of our review of the Young People's Service was to advise the Council on future priorities for the Young People's Service and on how the budget savings required for 2011/12 and 2012/13 could be made.

As well as taking evidence directly from Council officers, we talked to young people from Youth Works and made several site visits where we met with young people and staff.

We produced a detailed report and Council officers are currently considering how to address our recommendations.

Driving improvement in Public Services

Social Care for Children Review Group

Looking after vulnerable, neglected and abused children and young people is one of the most important things the Council does. So when the Council was criticised by Ofsted for the quality of our social care services for children, it was inevitable that this issue would dominate the work of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel last year. We met ten times over a three month period and then produced recommendations on service improvement and, in particular, the contribution that Members of Council should make.

Implementing all our thirty two recommendations will take some time, but we are pleased that speedy progress has been made in completing more CRB checks for councillors so that they can play a full part as "corporate parents" and that regular check-up visits to childrens homes have now been fully re-instated.

Being independently minded

Hate Crime

Communities Scrutiny Panel spoke to people from a wide variety of backgrounds about their views and experiences of hate crime. Hate crime is any hate incident, which constitutes a criminal offence, perceived by the victim, or any other person, as being motivated by prejudice or hate.

We heard from many organisations and individuals, including Safety Net, which represents people with learning difficulties. They talked to us about Mate Crime, where people pretend to befriend someone with learning disabilities in order to take advantage of them.

They told us about Safe Places Schemes, which operate in some parts of the country. Safe Places Scheme operators, such as libraries, shops etc, display a sticker which lets people with learning disabilities know that they can go there for help if they feel lost or threatened.

The Panel was very impressed by this idea and, as a result of their recommendation, a Safe Places Scheme for Calderdale was launched on 27th March 2012.

Dementia

The Adults Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel focused on an in-depth examination of services for people with dementia. Our report, *A Bold Approach*, was finished in April 2012 and made a number of far reaching recommendations.

The report calls for a radical restructuring of services so that more people can receive an earlier diagnosis of dementia and services are available to support them – and their carers – at earlier stages of their illness. This should mean that admission to residential care can be avoided or delayed and that lengths of stay in hospitals can be reduced.

We recommended that Calderdale should become a “dementia friendly” Borough by April 2014, where bus drivers, shopkeepers and bank staff have a greater awareness of what it means to suffer from dementia and so can provide a more appropriate and sympathetic service. This recommendation was accepted by the Cabinet, along with all our other recommendations and work is now underway on implementing them all.

Council Land and Buildings

The Council is looking at all ways in which it can make more efficient use of its land, offices and buildings, in particular how office staff should be accommodated in Halifax town centre.

We have not always been completely satisfied with the speed of progress on this matter, so have kept this matter under close scrutiny. We are pleased to see that the Council has now adopted a clear way forward and that the project is beginning to realise significant financial savings.

Cabinet has now agreed a way forward on office accommodation in Halifax town centre and we will scrutinise this work closely to make sure that it brings about the required improvements and savings.

The Challenges Ahead

The Council has decided to reduce the number of formal Scrutiny Panel meetings. This will give the Panels more time to complete detailed reviews and to go out and get evidence from local people and site visits.

Scrutiny Panels have already identified key areas of work for 2012/13. These include:

- Examining how fuel poverty can be reduced in Calderdale
- Continuing to press for improvements in social care services for children
- Making sure our schools are prepared for the new Ofsted framework of inspection and can demonstrate real improvements in the education provided for our children

- Assessing the preparedness of the Council for dealing with increasing demands on services, particularly because of the growing elderly population combined with the long term prospect of continuing reductions in the resources available to the Council.
- Holding detailed discussions with managers in the NHS and social care services to ensure that the Calderdale and Huddersfield Health and Social Care Strategic Review delivers the best outcomes for all Calderdale people

We also know that there are some big challenges in the coming year which will have to be addressed, such as the election of a Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire; the implementation of Welfare Reform; and changes to health delivery, including the transfer of public health responsibility to the council.

And, of course, all of this will be happening against a backdrop of tough economic times. This makes it even more vital that scrutiny does its job of acting as a critical friend to decision-makers and helping to drive forward improvements for the benefit of the people of Calderdale.