

Scrutiny@Calderdale



The Annual Report of Calderdale Council's Scrutiny Panels

2009/2010



www.calderdale.gov.uk

Dear Resident

Calderdale's Scrutiny Panels examine many issues in detail and recommend improvements for local people. This is our report back to you on our activity. We think you will find it interesting and very much hope you will tell us what you think and give us your ideas about subjects you would like us to look at in the future.

Our meetings are open to the public, and we try to make sure our work reflects real and important issues for Calderdale residents. We were delighted a number of you joined in several of our discussions.

Four of us took over as chairs of the panels halfway through the year. We would particularly like to thank our predecessors for their work in the first half of the year. Further details about the panels are included on page 11.

In all, well over half of Calderdale's Councillors served on Scrutiny Panels during the year. In addition, other people gave their time and expertise as co-optees. We would like to thank them all.

*Peter Coles (former councillor),
Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel*

*Cllr Mrs Ruth Goldthorpe,
Adults Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel*

*Cllr Mrs Olwen Jennings,
Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel*

*Cllr Mrs Jennifer Pearson,
Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel*

*Cllr Colin Stout,
Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel*

(former Scrutiny Panel Chairs, October 2009 – May 2010)

About the scrutiny panels.....

Calderdale Council has five Scrutiny Panels which each look at certain types of things, such as education or leisure. They all meet every three weeks. Each panel has seven Councillors on it. Two of the panels now also have ‘co-opted’ members of the public.

What do the panels do?

- 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.

We try to take a thoughtful, evidence-based approach when looking at the issues that affect the Borough. That means listening to different people – most importantly, of course, the public. Recently we have tried to limit our meetings to discussing two or three issues in more depth, rather than numerous reports.

Over the next pages we will give you a flavour of some of the things we have been doing in the past year, and how we feel our work contributes to making Calderdale a better place for everyone.

Acting as a “critical friend” to the Council’s leadership and senior officers

A critical friend is *“a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend.”*

What this means for scrutiny in Calderdale is that we try to look at how we can improve or add value to things, rather than opposing proposals for the sake of it. If we think something isn’t ideal we’ll say so, but we’ll also say why, and offer suggestions about how it can be made better.

Here are a couple of examples from the past year where we have examined issues of particular concern, both to the Council and its partners such as voluntary organisations, the police and health services.

Procurement

Procurement is about how the Council buys things. This could mean computers or buildings, or services such as professional advice.

The Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel has just completed a detailed review of procurement procedures. We want to be confident that the Council is spending your money wisely by buying the best quality goods and services at the best price possible.

Scrutiny Panels look closely at major projects, for instance building new libraries, to ensure we are getting value for money. We also look at the quality of services we pay external organisations for, such as residential care for older people.

Ridings School Site

Following the decision to close down the Ridings School in North Halifax, there was a great deal of interest in what would happen to the land and buildings.

The Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel decided to look into some of the options. The Council agreed to fund some work to find out the condition of the buildings, and members of the Scrutiny Panel worked with council staff, other groups and people from North Halifax to see what could be done.

Panel members went to Huddersfield to see how Kirklees Council had used a similar site. They also looked into local issues which could be addressed through the site, such as improving skills and training, improving health and better community facilities. They heard from Sport England and the Football Association about schemes in other parts of the country.



The panel made a number of recommendations, including that proposals are developed to transform the site into a hub for sport, leisure, learning and health. They also recommended that ultimately, the site should be transferred to a community trust. This would represent all the groups and individuals who care passionately about improving this area.

These recommendations are now being addressed by the Council.

Scrutiny helping to drive improvement in public services

Parking review

The parking review was a major piece of work undertaken by the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel. Members looked at issues including availability and cost of town-centre parking, winter parking, enforcement, loading bays and taxi ranks.



They made 31 recommendations to Cabinet, including a review of budgets and income targets. Cabinet asked council staff to look at the cost implications of the review. A number of the recommendations are now to be acted upon.

Local Involvement Network (LINK)

Calderdale LINK, like others throughout the country, was set up in 2008 to give communities a stronger voice in how their health and social care services are provided, and to help them monitor the quality of those services.

Throughout the year we were very concerned about the slow progress that the LINK was making in establishing itself and producing tangible results. We expressed our views strongly at several meetings and asked Council officers to work with the LINK to improve this situation.

In April 2010 the Shaw Trust took over the role of coordinating the LINK and, although it is early days, we feel reassured that better progress is now being made.

Winter Services review

The winter of 2008-09 was one of the worst in recent memory.

And of course, 2009-10 was even worse still!

Scrutiny had already conducted a review of winter services and suggested improvements including gritting times, storage of grit and the availability of grit bins.



After last year's severe weather, we decided to see if our suggestions had been implemented successfully, and if anything more could be done.

One of the many things that became clear was that the Council has to work as part of a bigger team in extreme circumstances such as this. We were pleased to see that Calderdale worked closely with other councils to ensure that we kept the borough moving during this testing time.

Plain language

The Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel has been keen to point out how important it is that the Council communicates clearly and openly with the public. The Panel supports the Plain Language Campaign. Plain language 'champions' have been trained within the Council, and our customer service staff are being coached to help make leaflets and letters clearer.

Enabling the concerns of the public to be heard

Domestic Violence

One of the biggest 'hidden' social issues is domestic violence. In March, Scrutiny heard from a number of agencies about how this is being combated and how victims are being supported in Calderdale.

But the most moving testimony was from two women who had endured years of domestic abuse. They told the panel about what they and their children had suffered, and how they were now rebuilding their lives.

Their courage made a great impression on the panel and helped members get a clear idea of the complex issues involved. This meant they were much more able to push for the support that is needed for other people in the same situation.

Working with children and young people

If a Scrutiny Panel wants to make sure that it understands the concerns of any group of people, then it's obvious they need to talk with that group as often as possible!



The Children and Young People panel did just that throughout the year. We did this by:

- Holding a panel meeting at Eureka!
- Hearing from Year 7 pupils on their transition to secondary schools
- Hearing from sixth formers about their options around training, work placement, further and higher education choices
- Inviting a group of gay and lesbian young people to talk about some of the day-to-day challenges they face living, learning and working in Calderdale.

Children's Social Care

Looking after vulnerable, neglected and abused children and young people is one of the most important things the Council does. So when first PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), and then Ofsted, published reports that expressed serious concerns about social care services, we immediately set up a Working Party to give close attention to making sure these services improve.

We have already interviewed Council Chief Executive Owen Williams, who chaired the Social Care Improvement Board, and Janet Donaldson, the Director of Children and Young People's Services. PwC were highly critical of the Council's information systems, so we have looked at these in some detail.

We have met several times already to scrutinise the progress being made in this area and to provide the necessary challenge to keep this work on track.

We will continue to monitor the Council's Improvement Plan closely throughout 2010 and will immediately report any concerns to Cabinet and Council.



Being independently-minded

Workforce

Most of the money the Council spends goes on paying staff to provide services throughout Calderdale. We need to make sure we are employing the right people with the necessary skills to provide those vital services. We also need to be sure we are treating our employees fairly.

Scrutiny Panels can step outside management-staff relationships and negotiations with trade unions to take an independent look at staff issues.

Last year we took a close look at how the Council undertakes performance appraisals. Not enough staff were benefiting from a regular appraisal and our recommendations have already led to improvements.

We are continuing to examine closely how staff training is provided across the Council.

Different Perspectives

Scrutiny Panels get a different perspective on how our services are doing by listening to people from outside the organisation.

Some Panels have appointed “co-opted” members, who are not councillors, but bring invaluable personal experience and specialist knowledge.

We have mentioned elsewhere in this report how we have learnt from what happens in other councils. And we recently called in expert outside advice to help us assess the Council’s financial strategy.

More about the scrutiny panels.....

The Council's scrutiny panels are:-

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

The Scrutiny Panels each met at least fifteen times during the past 12 months.

All Councillors (excluding those appointed to serve on the Cabinet) had the opportunity to serve on scrutiny, either as a directly appointed Member to one or more of the Panels or by individual attendance when items of interest and/or concern were considered by a particular Panel. A comprehensive training and development programme helps us fine-tune our skills and keep us up-to-date with local and national developments.

In addition, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel also appointed both statutory (voting) and non-statutory (non voting) Co-optees to serve on the Panel who contributed to the work of this Panel throughout this year.

Some Councillors and Co-opted Members also served on Working Parties appointed by Scrutiny Panels that undertook some in-depth detailed scrutiny reviews on a number of topics, such as the review of the Ridings School Site; Post 16 Education and Winter Services review.

If you'd like more information on how scrutiny works, or what we've looked at recently, then please visit our web pages:

www.calderdale.gov.uk/scrutiny

Have your say.....

Is there something you'd like scrutiny to have a look at?

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?

Name

Address

Postcode

Email

Tel. number

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