

CALDERDALE MBC

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

COUNCIL – 26 September 2013

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2012/13

Report of the Head of Democratic and Partnership Services

1. Purpose of Report

To present to Council the fifth Annual Scrutiny Report.

2. Background

This is the fifth Annual Report of the Council's scrutiny activity. The Council's five scrutiny panels considered a wide range of issues in 2012/13 and completed a number of detailed reviews.

A draft of the Annual Report has been considered by the Chairs of Scrutiny Panels in 2012/13 and 2013/14 and incorporates their comments.

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 the Panels at work 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,

We are pleased to present the Annual Report of the Scrutiny Panels for 2012/13.

The report highlights those areas where Councillors, working on a cross-party basis, 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.

We reduced the number of formal meetings we held last year and instead concentrated our efforts on examining a smaller number of issues in greater depth.

The role of scrutiny in local Councils is becoming increasingly important. In times of austerity, it is crucial that the Council’s Cabinet and senior officers are challenged to ensure that every penny we spend is spent well on providing essential and effective services to Calderdale people.

Council powers are also increasing, in particular around the localism agenda and with the return of public health to the Council.

And recent reports into the scandals in mid-Staffordshire hospitals and Winterbourne View Hospital in Gloucestershire stress the importance of making sure that elected Councillors listen carefully to patients and service users.

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 they 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 Ruth Goldthorpe, Adults Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel
Councillor David Hardy, Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel
Councillor Colin Raistrick, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel
Councillor Helen Rivron, Communities Scrutiny Panel
Councillor John Beacroft-Mitchell, Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel

So what is scrutiny.....?

Calderdale Council has five scrutiny panels. Each panel has seven 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.

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:

Calderdale Royal Hospital – ward closure

In July 2012 Councillors learnt through the local press of proposals to close the breast cancer ward at Calderdale Royal Hospital. More than 800 residents of Calderdale had signed a petition expressing their concerns at this decision.

Mr Peter Holdsworth from the Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust met with Scrutiny Councillors and explained that the changes involved establishing a new women's ward and that there would be no reduction in service. Two of the petitioners also attended the meeting.

After close questioning of Mr Holdsworth and the petitioners, the Panel was content that the proposals would not result in a reduction in service levels.

Listening to service users

In May, 2013, the Adults Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel focussed on listening to issues raised by service users.

The Panel heard how some young people with disabilities feel that the council's resource allocation system does not take full account of their needs; and *Healthwatch* reported their concerns about making sure that the Council is properly funding care for people with dementia in residential homes.

There are no easy answers to these issues – and increasing resources for one user group can often be at the expense of others. But the Scrutiny Panel decided that they should continue to focus on funding and resource issues and this will form a major part of the work programme for 2013/14.

Meeting with Children and Young People – Queen’s Road Neighbourhood Centre - “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 about the work of the Children and Young People’s Voice and Influence team in Calderdale. Contributors at the meeting included members of the Disabled Youth Forum who talked about work they had undertaken inspecting accessibility at Jerusalem Farm; the Youth Parliament who raised awareness of the Youth Parliament National Campaign – a curriculum for life.

All present hoped that next year the new Orange Box youth hub would be open and that next year’s meeting could be held there.

Floods – Todmorden Town Hall

In the summer of 2012, swathes of Calderdale were left devastated by severe flooding. The Economy & Environment Scrutiny Panel wanted to know what the impact had been on residents and businesses, how the council and other agencies had responded, and what measures were being put in place to help recovery and prevent this happening again.

The Panel met in Todmorden, and beforehand members had a look at some of the worst affected areas. There were a lot of local residents at the meeting, as well as representatives from the Council and the Environment Agency.

The panel were very impressed by the way the community had come together during this time of crisis, and by the way staff from all agencies went the extra mile.

But they also sought reassurances that structures were being put in place to help mitigate the effects of any future floods.

Welfare Reform

The Communities Scrutiny Panel recognised the concerns that people had about some of the impacts of welfare reform legislation and decided to hold a half day session to hear from a variety of organisations, including the Department of Work and Pensions, the Citizen's Advice Bureau, public health specialists and Pennine Housing.

They heard about some of the challenges that would face both residents of Calderdale and agencies such as the council.

They looked at how we all need to work together to mitigate the effects of the changes, and agreed a course of action on moving forward.

Critical Friend

Asset Management / Facilities Management Transformational Programme

The Council's Asset and Facilities Management Transformational Programme is central to ensuring that we make best use of the buildings and land that we own and use for service provision and office accommodation. Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel has received regular reports on the Strategy which should deliver £3.3m savings in 2013/14.

The Panel has heard about:- the appointment of a lead officer for Corporate Asset and Facilities Management; future FM delivery arrangements; implementing new ways of working; the Halifax Town Centre Office Strategy; asset management reviews; *Community Asset Transfer* and *Community Right to Bid*; and budget reviews to achieve financial savings.

NHS "Walk-in" GP Services

We became aware of proposed changes to the two GP "walk-in" services in Calderdale, based in Park ward and Todmorden and full Council asked the Adults, Health and Social Care Scrutiny Panel to prepare a detailed report on this matter.

The Panel looked at this issue in considerable detail and quizzed senior NHS staff about their proposals and the reasons for them. As a consequence, NHS Calderdale decided to commission an external review of primary and community unplanned care provision and committed to retaining the walk-in service until this review has been completed.

Driving improvement in Public Services

Social Care for Children

The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel has continued to keep abreast of service improvements and the continued challenges in relation to social care for children.

Looking after vulnerable, neglected and abused children and young people is one of the most important things the Council does and all Councillors have a role to play as "Corporate Parents".

The Council latest Ofsted inspection still deemed our social care for children services "inadequate" and the Panel is determined to play its part in improvement through continued challenge and support.

The Panel will continue to make this a priority and will do so until the Council is no longer the subject of an Improvement Notice from the Department for Education.

"Aiming Higher" – A Scrutiny Review of School Effectiveness

The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel decided to set up a working party to look at how effective the Council is in helping schools improve.

Scrutiny Members met several times, including a visit to Leeds Council and meeting with colleagues from other Local Authorities. The working party report, *Aiming Higher – A Scrutiny Review of School Effectiveness* was endorsed by the Scrutiny Panel and welcomed by Cabinet.

Councillors are going to follow up with a second report in autumn 2013 covering: how effective the school-to-school support systems are proving to be in terms of raising standards and ensuring good quality leadership and governance; how well the central school effectiveness team has developed its strategies for monitoring and intervening in schools; the outcomes of OFSTED inspections in 2012-2013; and how school governors contribute to school effectiveness through strong leadership.

“Children Count” – A Scrutiny Review of Performance and Data

Ofsted and the Local Government Association have told us how important it is that we make best use of good performance information to help us manage our services and keep children safe.

The scrutiny report, *Children Count* – A Scrutiny Review of Performance and Data sets out the reasons why it is important for Council members generally, and the Children and Young People (CYP) Scrutiny Panel in particular, to make best use of performance data and proposed an initial data set for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel to use during 2013/14.

This information will allow Councillors, staff and, most importantly, the public to see where services are working well and where there is room for improvement.

“Smarter Working – A Springboard”

The Use of Resources Scrutiny Panel was keen to learn about progress and future plans for “smarter working” across the Council. Smarter Working is about how Council employees can work most effectively to provide a good service and to operate more efficiently.

The Director, Economy and Environment presented his draft policy and guidance, “Smarter Working – A Springboard” to us and the Panel looked at how the scheme had been received by staff, and consultation and engagement. Smarter working is an important

strand of the Council's budget savings and the Panel will continue to examine this closely.

Domestic Violence

The Communities Scrutiny Panel held a major seminar in May 2013 to talk with the key people involved in trying to prevent domestic violence. These included the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire, Victim Support, WomenCentre, the White Ribbon Campaign, housing organisations, police officers, probation service and representatives from various parts of the council.

It was clear that there are many things going on which either help to prevent domestic abuse or are designed to support victims and address perpetrators. However, it was also clear that the problem is one which continues to be of major concern to everyone at a time of reducing resources.

The Panel will continue its work on this significant issue.

Being independently minded

Fuel Poverty – collective switching

As part of its work looking at fuel poverty, the Economy & Environment Scrutiny Panel wanted to see how we can help people reduce the cost of their fuel bills.

One idea that had been tried in a few other places was a collective switching campaign. This is where as many people as possible agree to sign up to a scheme and then an auction is held with the energy companies to see which one will offer the best price. The scrutiny panel liked this model and recommended that Calderdale Council get involved.

The Council joined forces with others in the Manchester area and afar, and in the first auction over 2,600 Calderdale households registered and ending up saving an average of £122 a year.

The Challenges Ahead

Scrutiny Panels have identified identified a number key areas of work for 2013/14. These include:

- Detailed reviews examining Economic Regeneration and the Green Economy in Calderdale;
- Continuing to press for improvements in social care services for children;
- Seeing how our schools are performing under 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 progress against priorities of the new Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire; the implementation of Welfare Reform; changes to health delivery, and the performance of the public health responsibility, which has recently transferred 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.