

South Lakeland District Council Scrutiny Annual Report

2016/17



Chairman’s Foreword

Welcome to the Annual Report by Overview and Scrutiny 2016/17.

Overview and Scrutiny is a non-partisan committee which exists to examine, scrutinise and challenge in a constructive and productive manner.

It carefully considers reports presented by Cabinet members (portfolio holders) and provides positive input through questioning and discussion between all participants. Overview and Scrutiny also facilitates and encourages collaborative works with partners and third party sectors by utilising the skills, knowledge and experience of committee members. This enables Overview and Scrutiny to be a critical friend, recognising good practise and always looking out for change which embraces improvement.

This has been a busy and productive year and I would like to thank Overview and Scrutiny colleagues plus all those involved in Task and Finish groups for their contribution and commitment, in this, my first year as Chair.

I look forward to next year's work programme and the contribution we can make towards South Lakes continuing to be a great place to live, work and explore.



Councillor Dyan Jones
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Introduction

Welcome to the annual report on the scrutiny function at South Lakeland District Council (SLDC), which sets out the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Performance Sub-Committee between May 2016 and April 2017. The report also sets out the work carried out through workshops and task and finish groups commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of its 2016/17 Work Programme.

Scrutiny is a key mechanism for promoting the best interests and wellbeing of the district, and ensuring that local people receive high quality services that are relevant to their needs. The council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee does this by acting as a 'critical friend' to the Cabinet, holding it to account and providing challenge when necessary. Scrutiny also plays a key role in the areas of policy review, formulation and development. Over the past twelve months, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has continued to play a vital role in pre-decision scrutiny; by considering topics such as the South Lakeland Housing Strategy and the Cumbria Choice Allocations Policy at an early stage in their development, scrutiny can add real value before the final policies are presented for decision by Cabinet.

Amongst the roles of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee set out within the council's Constitution is an opportunity for scrutiny to "consider any matters which affects the council's area or its communities". This theme has been constant throughout the work of scrutiny, but perhaps the clearest example is that of the Tackling Poverty Workshop held in December. Bringing together SLDC councillors, officers and representatives from Age UK South Lakeland, Barnardo's, Cumbria County Council, South Lakes Citizens Advice and South Lakes Housing, not only raised awareness within the council and amongst partners, but has resulted in a position statement and action plan which has the potential to make a real difference to the residents of South Lakeland.

As the value of South Lakeland District Council's scrutiny function becomes increasingly well recognised both internally and externally, its ability to make a difference to the work of the council and to residents becomes ever stronger. An effective, balanced and timely 2017/18 Work Programme will continue to further the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work to assist the council in realising its ultimate aim; **"to make South Lakeland the best place to live, work and explore."**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Membership:

Norman Bishop-Rowe
 Andrew Butcher
 Brian Cooper
 Nick Cotton
 David Evans (Sept 2016 onwards)
 Shirley Evans
 Anne Hall
 Keith Hurst-Jones
 Colin Jones (to Aug 2016)
 Dyan Jones
 Vivienne Rees
 Mark Wilson
 Mary Wilson

Chairman: Colin Jones (to Aug 2016), Dyan Jones (Sept 2016 onwards)

Vice-Chairman: Dyan Jones (to Sept 2016), Shirley Evans (Sept 2016 onwards)

Performance Sub-Committee Membership:

Andrew Butcher
 Brian Cooper
 Shirley Evans
 Colin Jones (to Aug 2016)
 Dyan Jones
 Vivienne Rees

Chairman: Colin Jones (to Aug 2016), Dyan Jones (Sept 2016 onwards)

Vice-Chairman: Dyan Jones (to Sept 2016), Shirley Evans (Sept 2016 onwards)

Year in review: Overview and Scrutiny 2016/17

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met seven times during 2016/17. In addition to the five scheduled meetings of the Committee, two additional meetings were called to enable early consideration of the South Lakeland Housing Strategy (in August 2016) and the council's Development Management Policies Development Plan Documents and the Arnside & Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Development Plan Documents (in February 2017).

The Committee considered a wide variety of subjects over the course of those seven meetings, including the council's draft budget, the draft Contaminated Land Strategy and a review of the Cumbria Choice Allocations Policy.

At its meeting in November 2016, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was provided an update on the work of the Barrow and South Lakeland Community Safety Partnership (CSP). Colin Cox (Director of Public Health, Cumbria County Council), Superintendent Rob O'Connor (Cumbria Constabulary) and Barrow Borough Councillor Brendan Sweeney (Chairman of the Barrow and South Lakeland Community Safety Partnership) attended the meeting as representatives of the CSP.

Performance Sub-Committee Meetings

The Performance Sub-Committee met four times during 2016/17. The Performance Sub-Committee considered quarterly performance and financial monitoring reports, as well as receiving annual updates from each of the seven Portfolio Holders.

Flood Review Workshop (31 August 2016) – The Flooding Review Workshop investigated South Lakeland District Council's role and response during, and following, the flooding caused by Storm Desmond in December 2015. The workshop focussed on the areas that SLDC had delivered directly or influenced strongly, with

an emphasis on looking forward. This workshop played a key role in capturing the views and experiences of the community as communicated to members. Fifteen councillors attended the workshop, as well as a number of officers whose work was closely linked to the response and recovery following Storm Desmond.

Income Generation Workshop (14 October 2016) – The Income Generation Workshop provided members with a forum to share their views on income generation, as well as giving officers an opportunity to gain members' perspective and ideas on how revenue planning could be carried out in the future. The Workshop focused primarily on those services areas which generated significant income for the council, namely car parks and Lake Windermere. Eight members attended the workshop, including the Finance and Economy Portfolio Holders.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the outcomes of the Income Generation Workshop at its meeting on Friday, 17 March 2017. Cabinet subsequently approved the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and agreed to take them into consideration during the planning of future income generation.

Tackling Poverty Workshop (9 December 2016) – The Tackling Poverty Workshop brought together officers, councillors and external organisations to help to shape the work of the council and partners through a better understanding of poverty and by identifying any gaps in service provisions. The workshop sought to raise ideas for improving the prospects of reducing poverty in South Lakeland through the work of both the council and partner organisations. Fourteen members attended the workshop alongside officers and representatives from Age UK South Lakeland, Barnardo's, Cumbria County Council, South Lakes Citizens Advice and South Lakes Housing.

The findings of the Tackling Poverty Workshop were brought together to develop the Tackling Poverty Together Position Statement. Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the outcomes at its meeting on Friday, 17 March 2017. Cabinet welcomed the findings of the review, and endorsed the Tackling Poverty Together Position Statement. The Position

Statement will act as a key step in continuing the work started by the workshop.

Older Persons' Housing Strategy Task and Finish Group (March 2016 onwards)

– As part of its 2016/17 Work Programme, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a task and finish group to work with officers in the development of the new Older Persons' Housing Strategy. The task and finish group had its first meeting on Wednesday, 22 March 2017, where Councillor Dyan Jones was appointed as the group's Chairman. It is anticipated that the work of the task and finish group will be completed by August 2017, with the final Older Persons' Housing Strategy expected to be presented to Cabinet in late 2017.

Asset Management Review Task and Finish Group (to begin in 2017/18)

– The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also agreed to undertake a task and finish group to assist officers and the council's property services contractors in a strategic look at the council's assets. In order to ensure that the work of the task and finish group was timely and effective, the start of this review was delayed until 2017/18. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to carry this review forward onto the 2017/18 Work Programme.

Effectiveness of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be a powerful committee that can contribute to the development of council policies and also hold the Cabinet to account for its decisions. Overview and scrutiny should be carried out in a constructive way which contributes to the efficient and effective service delivery which meets the needs and aspirations of the people of South Lakeland. As such, an annual review is undertaken to ensure that the work of scrutiny continues to be effective. The 2016/17 Review of Effectiveness mirrored the methodology of the Audit Committee's annual review of effectiveness; the checklist framework used has consistently proven to be a successful tool in measuring the effectiveness of the Audit Committee.

The review concluded that the Committee continues to operate effectively in its overview and scrutiny role. The review also considered the role of the Performance Sub-Committee in light of the review of the council's scrutiny arrangements and recommended that the responsibilities of the Performance Sub-Committee should be taken over by the parent Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

During 2016/17 a review of the work programme planning process was also undertaken. The review had found that the current work planning system, and the use of a workflow system for prioritisation of topics, continued to be effective.

Call-in and Urgency Provisions

The call-in process may be used to challenge Executive decisions. Call-ins are only to be used on an exceptional basis in line with paragraph 16 (a) to (i) of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules. During the council year 2016-17 there has been no call-in of decisions.

The urgency procedure, which allows items to be considered at short notice, is also only used on an exceptional basis. Urgent decisions are not subject to call-in. The urgency procedure has been used once in the past twelve months for Local Settlement Disabled Facilities Works (DEX/13, 30 September 2016), to authorise an additional payment beyond the Disabled Facilities Grant limit where it was not practicable to delay administration and payments until the normal approval process could be followed.

The use of the call-in and urgency provisions are reviewed annually by council.

Looking ahead to 2017/18

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed its work programme for 2017/18 at its meeting on Friday, 17 March 2017. The topics selected for review were:-

- Access to health and leisure activities for older people (task and finish group)
- Asset management review (task and finish group - carried forward from 2016/17)
- Development of neighbourhood working through Customer Connect (task and finish group)
- Review of the council's Active Travel Action Plan (one-day review)

Consideration was also given to the council's scrutiny arrangements where it was recommended that council approve the removal of the Performance Sub-Committee from the council's committee structure, with its responsibilities returning to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The changes, agreed by council at its meeting on Wednesday, 29 March 2017, ensures that the scrutiny function is both efficient and effective, and able to add best value for residents.

The coming year may also see the outcome of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's 'Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government' inquiry. The inquiry will "consider whether overview and scrutiny arrangements in England are working effectively and whether local communities are able to contribute to and monitor the work of their councils." The first inquiry into overview and scrutiny since the arrangements were first introduced by the Local Government Act in 2000; councils across the country will be watching its developments with interest.

Scrutiny contact details

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More information on the scrutiny function, including agendas, minutes, ongoing review work, and councillor details can be found on the council's website: www.southlakeland.gov.uk