



St. Helens Council

Overview and Scrutiny

Annual Report 2014/15

July 2015

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Chairman's Foreword

As the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for 2014/15, I am pleased to introduce this year's Scrutiny Annual report which has been prepared to give an insight into the work undertaken by Scrutiny on behalf of the people of St Helens.

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all members involved in the scrutiny process for their time, effort and dedication over the past 12 months. However, we need to recognise that the Council continues to experience huge change. The biggest contributing factor to this is the massive pressure put on St Helens Council by the size and severity of cuts to the Councils funding from central government. The way in which we design and deliver services requires reappraisal. As a council we look and feel differently than we did even three years ago. Decisions the Council makes need to be made well, with full knowledge of the impact such decisions are likely to have on our communities. The scrutiny function provides a means to ensure all elected members have a clear role in this process. During this difficult time Scrutiny must not take a back seat – but must strive to improve and make our voice heard.

I would like to thank everyone who has taken part in our reviews this year. Thanks to those of you who gave us the ideas and started the ball rolling, those who have given up their time to share their views and concerns, helped us gather evidence or been involved in preparing briefings. This has resulted in well prepared and presented scrutiny reports and recommendations that have been a huge help to Cabinet and the Council in understanding what's happening in St Helens.



Councillor Anthony Burns
Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2014/15

Some Questions Answered

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny role allows councillors to look closely at services and issues which affect the lives of local people - usually with a view to improving them. It's now more commonly referred to simply as Scrutiny.

Scrutiny councillors try to involve local people in identifying issues of concern. They can then address those issues by gathering relevant information and making recommendations based on what they've found out. They're not restricted to Council services – they can look at anything that has an impact on the quality of life of people in St Helens.

Overview and Scrutiny councillors also keep an eye on how the Council's and other organisations services are performing and whether targets are being met and are able to make recommendations as to whether new policies or changes to existing policies would lead to better outcomes.

The Cabinet is the Council's main decision-making body and scrutiny councillors have a responsibility to oversee its work and can challenge its decisions. Unlike the Cabinet, Scrutiny councillors do not hold any decision-making powers.

How many Overview and Scrutiny Panels are there and who sits on them?

There is an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Commission and five Scrutiny Panels. Any Council member who is not a member of the Cabinet can undertake scrutiny. During 2014/15 the following councillors and co-opted members have served on the Scrutiny Panels:

Overview and Scrutiny Panel	Remit in Brief	Membership 2014/15
Overview and Scrutiny Commission	Acts as the general interface with the Cabinet for all Overview and Scrutiny issues, reviews the Council's Budget, Forward Plan and identifies possible policy or strategy reviews.	Cllr Anthony Burns (Ch) Cllr Dave Banks, Cllr Joe De'Asha, Cllr John Fulham, Cllr Stephen Glover, Cllr Tom Hargreaves, Cllr Jo-Ann Halliwell, Cllr Jimmy Jackson, Cllr Paul Lynch, Cllr Charlie Preston, Cllr Marie Rimmer, Cllr Sophie Robinson, Cllr Sheila Seddon, Cllr Teresa Sims and Cllr Allan Jones Co-opted Members Rev D Hall, Rev T Neylon

<p>Health and Adult Social Care</p>	<p>Covers the provision, planning and performance of social and health care in services for older people and vulnerable adults across the borough.</p>	<p>Cllr Tom Hargreaves (Ch)</p> <p>Cllr Geoff Almond, Cllr Anthony Burns, Cllr Jo-Ann Halliwell, Cllr Jimmy Jackson, Cllr Paul McQuade, Cllr Lisa Preston, Cllr Keith Roberts, Cllr Terry Shields and Cllr Rupert Nichols</p> <p>Co-opted Members Brenda Smith – Healthwatch St Helens</p>
<p>Audit and Financial Monitoring</p>	<p>Scrutinises internal and external audit activity and monitors and scrutinises the financial performance of the Council.</p>	<p>Cllr Marie Rimmer (Ch)</p> <p>Cllr Geoff Almond, Cllr Keith Deakin, Cllr John Fulham, Cllr Pat Ireland, Cllr Dennis McDonnell, Cllr Terry Shields and Cllr Teresa Sims</p>
<p>Children and Young People's Services</p>	<p>Covers the whole range of services relating to the provision of children and young people's services.</p>	<p>Cllr Sheila Seddon (Ch)</p> <p>Cllr Geoff Almond, Cllr Jeanette Banks, Cllr Pat Ireland, Cllr Pat Jackson, Cllr Dennis McDonnell, Cllr Lisa Preston and Cllr Teresa Sims</p> <p>Co-opted Members Rev D Hall, Rev T Neylon and Mr Innes Arnold</p>
<p>Safer Communities</p>	<p>Considers items relating to crime and disorder issues.</p>	<p>Cllr Charlie Preston (Ch)</p> <p>Cllr Alan Cunliffe, Cllr Gareth Cross, Cllr Stephen Glover, Cllr Pat Ireland, Cllr Paul Lynch, Cllr Sheila Seddon and Cllr Linda Mussell</p> <p>Co-opted Members Merseyside Police – Chief Inspector Helen Corcoran Merseyside Fire Service - Chris Case – St.Helens District Manager</p>
<p>Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure</p>	<p>Considers items relating to borough wide economic development, regeneration, housing, culture, leisure and libraries.</p>	<p>Cllr Joe De'Asha (Ch)</p> <p>Cllr Alan Cunliffe, Cllr Sandra Dyer, Cllr Jimmy Jackson, Cllr Pat Jackson, Cllr Keith Roberts and Cllr Linda Mussell</p>

How do we decide what work to do?

Each Panel develops its own work programme for the year which is then subject to agreement by the Scrutiny Commission. The sort of work we get involved in aims to reflect the issues that matter most to local people. It should also match the Council's priorities. Each year we invite suggestions from key partners such as the Police, local Health Trusts, local business representatives, school head teachers and governors, parish and town councils, voluntary and community organisations, the community empowerment network and of course members of the public. This is to find out if there are any issues of concern that could benefit from a scrutiny review.

Once all the suggestions have been gathered, the Scrutiny Commission and the Scrutiny Panels decide which issues have the highest priority. Carrying out Scrutiny Reviews can be very time consuming and it is impossible to address all the issues that are suggested.

As Scrutiny Councillors we try to choose only those issues where we believe we can make a real difference.

How you can get involved in Scrutiny

There are many ways in which you can get involved:

- **Attending meetings** – Scrutiny meetings are open to the public (details of meetings can be found on the Council's website, www.sthelens.gov.uk)
- By **responding to questionnaires or providing written evidence** in relation to a particular scrutiny review
- By offering to **appear as 'expert witnesses'** during scrutiny review meetings, when invited to do so
- **Applying to be a co-opted member** – by taking part in scrutiny through co-option onto Task and Finish groups. Task and Finish groups are fact-finding forums and are invaluable for members of the public to raise concerns and issues, to allow Councillors to make evidence-based recommendations (details of how to apply can be found on the Council's website, www.sthelens.gov.uk)
- **Suggesting a topic** – You can suggest a topic for scrutiny in several ways. Firstly there's a form at the back of this report that you can complete and return. Alternatively forms are available at most Council reception areas or you can complete the online forms at www.sthelens.gov.uk If you would like to speak to us then please contact us on 01744 676277 or email us at scrutiny@sthelens.gov.uk.

Please note that Scrutiny cannot deal with individual complaints (to complain, please ring **01744 676789**) or look at decisions taken by Licensing or Planning, unless the issue concerns policy.

Key Messages from this Year's Scrutiny Reviews

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Tom Hargreaves MBE

Health Checks for Adults with Learning Disabilities.

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Anthony Burns (Chair), Marlene Quinn, Robbie Ayres and Rupert Nicholls.

Co-opted Members: Alan Griffiths, Healthwatch St Helens

What we wanted to do

People with learning disabilities face serious health inequalities. They have significantly poorer health than their non-disabled peers. In part this is because they have more difficulty in identifying important symptoms and getting access to appropriate care. They are less likely to proactively seek help to address health issues.

The implementation of annual health checks for people with learning disabilities in England has been repeatedly recommended over the past five years as one component of health policy responses to the poorer health of people with learning disabilities. The aim of the review was to investigate how St Helens could increase uptake of annual health checks for those adults.

What we found out

- In 2013/2014 there were 759 people aged 18 and over who were eligible for an annual health check in St Helens. As of November 2014 this had increased by 74 to a total of 833.

- To date 35 out of 37 GP practices in St Helens are participating in Learning Disability Annual Health Checks. Participating surgeries are required to sign up to the DES (Direct Enhanced Services) and are paid £102.16 per health check. Surgeries who have not signed up do not carry out health checks. Participation is clear and the service is commissioned and monitored as an enhanced service by NHS England.
- We heard that the Intelligence and Outcomes Unit (IOU), as part of their quality monitoring visits, sample select a number of service users' files to check that the information is accurate and complete. This includes checking that a health check has been undertaken and a Health Passport is in place. If this is something that has not been undertaken, it will be identified during a quality monitoring visit and included in the Quality Improvement Action Plan.
- The In house Supported Living Service confirmed that all 57 service users had a signed Health Action Plan and have a yearly health check that is updated after each visit. They also have a Health Passport in place to speed up admission to Whiston Hospital. Private sector Supported Living customers have also begun the implementation of the Health Action Plans and yearly checks. The Care Quality Commission do monitor the implementation of both Health Action Plans and Health Passports.

What our report recommended

1. That the requirement to discuss and document discussions about Learning Disability Health Checks with all 16 year olds going through transition be added.
2. That a requirement for a Learning Disability Health Check continue to be discussed with Supporting Living Providers, for the outcomes to be documented and this continue to be monitored by the Intelligence and Outcomes Unit (IOU).
3. That social workers ensure that discussions around Health Checks are part of Learning Disabilities assessments and reviews, that these discussions are documented and that all eligible service users are guided to their GP or Learning Disabilities Community Nurse.
4. That the joint funding form be upgraded to include Learning Disabilities.
5. That work be undertaken to identify how other boroughs have supported Learning Disabilities health checks and implement any best practice.
6. That documentation produced around Learning Disabilities health checks be in easy read format.
7. That Public Health and Adult Social Care and Health work with GP's to encourage better implementation of Learning Disabilities health checks.
8. That all agencies recognise that the Learning Disabilities Health Check now includes those aged 14 years and under.

What happens next

Our findings and recommendations have been submitted to Cabinet and we expect a response to these shortly.

Review of Self Harm

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Tom Hargreaves (Chair), Joe De'Asha, Jimmy Jackson, Pat Jackson, Charlie Preston, Lisa Preston, Keith Roberts and Sheila Seddon

What we wanted to do

During the 2014/2015 Scrutiny work programme consultation, Healthwatch St Helens suggested that the Panel look at issues around Self Harm and what as a borough we were doing to prevent and help with this. It was agreed that the initial part of the review would be around young people and the transition into adulthood.

What we found out

- St Helens hospital admission figures for 2012/2013 show the area as statistically higher than the England rate for deliberate self-harm, however, there are very few areas in the North West with low rates, which are possibly due to coding anomalies. The Chief Medical Officer's report states that 'currently there are not robust systems for recording self-harm accurately at a national level.'
- Although, even with these figures it is still not an accurate picture as many self-harm incidents will go unreported as many people suffer by themselves for many years. It is known that people that self-harm more than once are at a higher risk of suicide, so it is vital that we educate and support people at an early stage and ensure we have robust systems in place.
- Comprehensive work has been and is currently being undertaken with our schools by the Public Health Section.
- The task group met with *No Secrets* a voluntary organisation based in St. Helens, Wigan and Halton to talk about their work. *No Secrets* work with people over the age of 16 and hold group support meetings on a regular basis. They do not receive a grant but rely on charitable donations.
- A review of CAMHS services within St Helens has been undertaken jointly between the CCG and LA and has identified a number of concerns relating to current service provision, as part of the review a comprehensive needs assessment was undertaken which helped identify issues within service provision.
- Adult Social Care and Health and Children and Young People Services are in the process of working together to develop one transition strategy for St Helens. This strategy will identify standard principles of good practice for

transitions for all children and young people and will detail particular pathways for specific cohorts of children including CAMHS. The first step is mapping current service provision.

What we recommended

- That the task group re-visit this review when the CAMHS review has been completed and had time to establish and when the transition strategy for St.Helens has been developed.
- That work between the Council and No Secrets continues to ensure that residents can benefit from their services.
- No Secrets be invited to the Governors Forum.
- That the self harm awareness training session provide by No Secrets to the task group be extended to all Councillors.

What happens next

Our findings and recommendations were submitted to Cabinet for consideration. We are expecting feedback shortly.

Joint Review of Transforming Cancer Care

During 2014/15, a joint health scrutiny Committee for Cheshire and Merseyside was established to look at the changes to cancer care in Cheshire and Merseyside and the Clatterbridge Cancer Centre. A number of meetings and site visits were held during an 8 week period. The exercise was led by Liverpool City Council and Councillor(s) Terry Shields and Jimmy Jackson represented St Helens. The Joint Committee agreed with the proposals for change set out by Clatterbridge and commented on the professional and informative way in which the review had been undertaken. A full copy of the report can be found on Liverpool City Council's Website.

Joint Scrutiny Review of Transforming the Secure Pathway for Medium Secure Services at Scott Clinic (Mersey Care NHS Trust)

A Joint Health Scrutiny Committee was established in January 2015 to consider proposals for the future provision of medium secure services provided by Mersey Care NHS Trust. The Committee was established in line with the "Protocol for Establishment of Joint Health Scrutiny in Cheshire and Merseyside".

The consisted of six elected Members, three from each, from St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council; and Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council.

The review was led by Sefton. The Committee met on three occasions and heard evidence from the following:-

- Executive officers from Mersey Care NHS Trust;
- Patients;
- Staff members;
- Local Healthwatch organisations;
- A local Ward Councillor for Sudell Ward, Maghull; and
- The Clerk of Maghull Town Council.

In addition to the above, members undertook a tour of Scott Clinic to look at the current facilities available and visited the proposed site in Maghull where they spoke with employees with patient experience about the proposed changes. The Committee also visited the new Mersey Care NHS Trust facility at Clock View which set new standards for mental health care in the UK. The hospital, named after the clock tower which overlooks the site, included garden courtyards, gyms, activity areas and en-suite bedrooms. Members were impressed with the facility and believed it to be a fantastic example of how provision should be and felt it would go a long way towards helping tackle the stigma associated with mental ill-health.

The Joint Committee agreed with the proposals that the future of medium secure services provided by Mersey Care NHS Trust be supported, namely for a new build for medium secure services at the Ashworth Hospital site to be pursued.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

The Panel was presented with the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which identified the Health and Social Care needs of the local population which supports local providers to commission and delivers the best possible services to the residents of the borough.

The JSNA was the first assessment since the formal establishment of St Helens Health and Wellbeing Board, the authorisation of St Helens Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the transfer of Public Health functions to the Council and the formation of Healthwatch St Helens.

There have been a number of major needs assessment and surveys undertaken in the last few years and these in depth pieces of work provide a valuable insight into the relationship between health, wellbeing and the wider determinants of health such as housing and the economy. The aim of combining these sources is to give a much richer picture of local health and wellbeing, lifestyles and patient experiences.

The JSNA would be a living document which would be used to inform future scrutiny work programmes, highlighting possible areas for further work to be undertaken. It will be refreshed during 2015 and Scrutiny will have a role in overseeing this.

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Sheila Seddon

Scrutiny Review of Physical Activity and Extra-Curricular Activities in Schools

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Sheila Seddon (Chair) Stephen Glover, Jimmy Jackson, Pat Jackson, Charlie Preston, Lisa Preston and Teresa Sims

What we wanted to do

During the process of agreeing the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2014/2015 the Children and Young People Service's Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to look at the Physical Activity and Extra-Curricular Activities in Schools. The aim of the review was to investigate what level of physical activity schools offer to pupils both during and after schools hours and how this is beneficial to young people's wellbeing.

How we did it

- We checked our School websites to establish what information has been published with regards to the Primary Sports Premium.
- We visited various schools to establish any good practice.
- We talked with staff and pupils to get a feel for the ethos of the school with regards to physical activity.
- We met with schools who are proactively trying to overcome barriers relating to the dis-engagement of young girls in KS4 towards physical activity.
- We met with Gordon Pennington to discuss schools use of the Saints Programme.

What we found out

- Following our site visits to several local schools, talking to staff, pupils and Council Officers, the task group was pleased to establish that our schools are providing a great PA offer to our pupils. There is a wide range of sports and activities that pupils can choose from, during school time and after school hours. Schools have dedicated staff to ensure the best is made of the time and resources available, although we acknowledge that schools have increasing pressures from other areas and some minor improvements could be made.
- It was apparent that although some have published very comprehensive information with regards to the Primary Sports Premium, others have only issued very basic information and 29% of primary schools and two thirds of special schools have not made any information available at all. The task group were informed that the Council's Sports Development Team have issued schools with a proforma to assist with the publishing of the required information, although it was noted during the review that few schools utilise it.
- It is imperative that schools understand the importance of the Primary Sports Premium Grant and the conditions attached to the grant, which include, issuing a statement of the planned use of the grant. Schools should utilise this funding to its full extent and in a way that will benefit the pupils the greatest.
- The Change 4 Life scheme is an excellent opportunity for schools to work in partnership with the Council and Public Health. From our site visits it was evident that the children involved with the scheme really enjoyed being part of it and being given the opportunity to be 'ambassadors' was enabling them to develop skills for their futures.
- Schools stated that the key challenges for providing more physical activity in core hours was a busy curriculum timetable and access to the facilities. We acknowledge that other pressures are being put on schools to deliver core curriculum subjects and to gain good exam results, but by reducing physical exercise lessons this puts the health and fitness of the pupils at risk.
- Saints Community Development Foundation with St Helens RFC offers a unique provision for our schools to learn coaching skills that they can use throughout the whole school. It was stated that the engagement so far has been slow from local schools. The task group feels that every school could benefit by accessing more of the CPD opportunities which are available not only through St Helens RFC but also through the wide menu available within the 'Four Boroughs' programme which is shared at the start of the academic year with all schools. This would not only support the development of staff but would also ensure that pupils are given a High Quality PE and school sport experience.

What we recommended

1. Guidance should be communicated to all relevant schools in St.Helens to ensure that Schools understand that comprehensive information with regards to Primary Sports Premium Grant amounts and its uses are to be made public and updated on an annual basis to comply with grant conditions.
2. School Governing Bodies should encourage their schools to work towards the Sainsburys Schools Games Mark as an inspirational achievement.
3. Schools should give some consideration to providing some after school physical activity provision that is free to pupils of all levels and ages, if they do not already do so, to ensure that sport is made available to everyone.
4. Public Health should consider engaging again with the schools not yet involved with the Change 4 Life scheme to ensure all our schools benefit from the benefits of the scheme.
5. Consideration should be given by schools to hearing the '*pupils voice*' when deciding new physical activities on their timetables / after school clubs.
6. Schools and Governing Bodies should consider being proactive in identifying and encouraging those less active to engage and participate in extracurricular activities.
7. Schools / Governing Bodies should be encouraged to engage with the Saints Programme to benefit from coaching training and consider signing up for at least one member of staff to attend the CAYPABLE courses 2015 - 2016.

What happened next?

Our report setting out our findings and recommendations was submitted to Cabinet and we are awaiting a response.

Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Joe De'Asha

Review of Welfare Reform and Housing Provision

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Joe De'Asha (Chair), Alan Cunliffe, Allan Jones and Keith Roberts

What we wanted to do

The aim of the review was to investigate how changes to the benefits system as it is being implemented is effecting the housing provision in St.Helens, particularly privately rented properties.

How we did it

- We received information from Manager Private Sector Housing Services / Housing Strategy and Policy Development Manager on background information to Welfare Reform and Housing Provision.
- We undertook online research via news articles, published reports etc.
- We attended a Landlords Forum meeting held in the Town Hall.
- We issued a brief questionnaire to all members of the Landlords Forum.
- We met with the Council's Housing Benefits Manager to discuss and obtain local statistics.
- We spoke to the Citizens Advice Bureau to gain their comments on what was happening to local tenants and their thoughts.

What we found out

- It is obvious from national and local press that the Welfare Reform is having a significant impact on the people involved. With confirmation of implementation dates for more people to switch to Universal Credit, more residents will begin to move towards this system and therefore the scale of the impact in St.Helens will increase.
- Research from Spareroom.co.uk is showing that more private landlords are choosing not to rent out to housing benefits tenants due to increasing levels of rent arrears and delays in benefits payments. This may have a consequential effect on the level of available, suitable properties on the market.
- Through meetings with Officers from various departments within the Council it is clear that there are some funds available to assist people with financial difficulties and that Officers signpost people to the correct organisations, such as St.Helens CAB.

- Moving to a system of Universal Credit will present a challenge for those who are currently struggling to manage their finances. Whilst tenants in receipt of LHA at present are already receiving the payment direct, in future they will receive their housing costs as part of a wider payment through Universal Credit.

What we recommended

1. That the Welfare Reform Group is made aware of this report and the recommendations made are considered.
2. That consideration be given to establishing a system to monitor the impact of welfare reform in relation to the operation of the private rented sector in St.Helens, and this to be reported to the Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel on a six monthly basis.
3. That better links are established with Lettings Agencies to understand their perceptions of local housing markets.
4. That the number of people accessing Council services due to the cessation of an Assured Tenancy is monitored to understand the local changes to rental markets.
5. That consideration be given to ensuring that welfare reform is an agenda item and key topic for discussion at the Landlords Forum.
6. That regular updates are given to the Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel with regards to the impact of welfare reform and statistics from local housing providers.
7. This report be circulated to local MP's for their consideration of the potential impact of Welfare Reform and Housing Provision in St.Helens.

What happens next

A report setting out our recommendations was submitted to Cabinet. Cabinet have accepted our recommendations and have agreed to report back on the impact of welfare reform on private rented sector activity to the Panel on a regular basis. Recommendations from this report will be considered at a future meeting of the Landlords Forum and in addition, contact has been made with local letting agencies to help promote better engagement. The Chair of the Panel also attended a meeting of the Welfare Reform Working Group to discuss our findings.

Review of the Restoration of Victoria Park

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Joe De'Asha, Sandra Dyer and Keith Roberts

What we wanted to do

In January 2013, members of the Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture & Leisure Scrutiny Panel visited Victoria Park prior to the start of the restoration project. Members of the Panel again visited the park in August 2014 to review the work that has been undertaken.

What we found out

- The park has been restored to a high standard and all the hard work from the contractors and the Councils Officers is a credit to the Borough.
- The Gate Lodge restoration opens up great opportunities for local groups to benefit from its facilities with Friends of Victoria Park (FOVP) working hard to maintain this community involvement. CCTV is situated around the Gate Lodge, but this has not been extended to other areas of the park, and Councillors thought that some other vulnerable areas could benefit from these security measures.
- Although very few instances of dog fouling were witnessed during the visit it was pointed out that there is currently a problem around the Gate Lodge and a main entrance to the park. Dog bins are provided throughout the park.
- The Orangery is a fabulous building and can be used for weddings and other functions and activities. The building is part of the Mansion House and therefore belongs to Age UK, grant funding of £1.3 million was allocated to this building as it is an integral part of the parks history. Although the Mansion House itself is in need of some remedial work, mainly exterior painting, to bring it up to the standard of the works recently completed on the Orangery.
- We understand that community groups will be able to use the Orangery on a regular basis and that a joint usage agreement is being drawn up between Age UK and the Council. Income for Age UK will be generated from the hire of the Orangery for general use, events and weddings.

What we recommended

1. That the possibility of local business and groups sponsoring a bench / picnic table be investigated to assist with the purchase of additional seating equipment.
2. That correspondence to be sent to all the boroughs schools to encourage them to use the parks facilities and get involved with the on-going community projects.
3. That consideration be given to holding events such as 'movies in the park' to include all age groups, from young people and families, to afternoon matinees for older people.
4. That the feasibility of extending the CCTV coverage to other vulnerable areas of the park be investigated, funding streams should be explored.

5. That the newly established team of Enforcement Officers ensure that Victoria Park is monitored on a regular basis to help combat any dog fouling and litter issues. And that the possibility of a local by-law being put in place with regards to dogs remaining on leads / dog fouling is investigated.
6. That a clearly documented agreement between Age UK, Friends of Victoria Park and the Council on the use and maintenance of the Orangery be drawn up and reviewed on a regular basis.

What happens next

Our findings and recommendations were submitted to Cabinet in February and all were accepted. A number of them require further consultation and we have invited the Portfolio Holder to attend our meeting in September to update the Panel.

Review of Earlestown Market

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Joe De'Asha (Chair), Charlie Preston, Lisa Preston, Keith Roberts, Sandra Dyer, Jimmy Jackson, Keith Deakin and Dave Banks

What we wanted to do

Following on from a review of shopping centres within the borough, the panel agreed to re-visit Earlestown Market, speak to traders and highlight any areas where further improvements to promote and encourage use of the market could be made.

What we found out

- Earlestown Friday market is a traditional market. The physical structure of the market consists of approximately 150 defined positions of which 64 are stalls supplied and maintained by the Council, the remaining positions being let as pitches. The 64 supplied stalls are permanently sited on the market and the Council's Cleansing Section adjusts non fixed stalls into position once per week. The Council has recently replaced some of these non- fixed stalls with fixed 10ft stalls. The initial replacement programme provided 27 new stalls at a total cost of £58,833 with £48K funding from Service Modernisation and remainder from revenue budgets. These new units are bolted to the ground thus removing the need for weekly adjustments. New traders are given a choice of all available stalls for the day. Restrictions do however apply where commodities clash on adjoining stalls.
- The market operates throughout the year and is traditionally a busy market with 80% - 90% occupancy during the peak trading months of April to December. The quietest months being January to March. Traders are currently allowed 4 weeks rent free holiday per annum, however some traders have requested a reduced rent policy for the quieter periods in January, February and March.

- New traders are not discouraged, however, a policy limiting the number of pitches stocking similar ranges exists.
- There is a diverse range of products at the market however, advertising for specific commodities may help support its growth and attract new businesses.
- The rental amount for the pitches is dependant on size. These range from £11.20 to £35.80 per day, the average being £17.00.
- Earlestown market's heritage needs to be celebrated as it provides both a social and business development function whilst also providing a tourism attraction linked to its past.

What we recommended

1. A possible increase to the planned maintenance budget for Earlestown market to allow for the management of annual stall replacement programme.
2. Provision of 4 interpretation boards to be sited around the square.
3. Provision of advertising banners to be sited on high level lampposts on square.
4. Refurbishment/improvements to existing public convenience on square.
5. Possibility of bringing the old market offices back into use for traders and or visitors.
6. Discussions with market traders as to possibility of reducing rents in January, February and March instead of the 4 weeks rent free holiday period.
7. Identification of parking areas for visiting coaches.
8. Promotion of market as a tourist attraction for visitors to St Helens Council.
9. A possible trial for the recycling of cardboard to identify how much is generated from the Friday Market.
10. The use of the Shoppers' car park in Fairclough Street be monitored, particularly in the morning, to assess what percentage of usage is by rail passengers.

What happens next

We submitted our findings and recommendations to Cabinet and we are awaiting their response.

Review of Funeral Costs

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors: Joe De'Asha (Chair) Sandra Dyer, Jimmy Jackson, Pat Jackson, Marleen Quinn, Keith Roberts and Rev D Hall

What we wanted to do

During 2014/2015 the issue of Funeral Costs was raised as a possible Scrutiny topic and the Council's Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to look at the subject.

The aim of the review was to investigate funeral costs locally and nationally and to examine the St Helens Partnership Funeral Service

How we did it

- The task group visited St Helens Crematorium.
- We obtained background information from the Bereavement Services Manager.
- We undertake desktop research on the subject.
- The task group visited Green Acres Woodland Burial in Rainford.
- We visited and talked to several local Funeral Directors to obtain their thoughts and comments.
- We met and talked to St.Helens Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).

What we found out

- From our review it's clear that there is an increasing problem, locally and nationally with funeral poverty. People are getting into debt to provide 'a good send off' for their deceased loved ones and maybe even borrowing money from unscrupulous sources such as loan sharks.
- It's clear that St Helens crematorium and burial fees are amongst the cheapest in the area and are also ranked in the bottom 8% nationally, although the problem of funeral poverty is still a big issue within the borough.
- There are various organisations, including the DWP and British Gas that provide financial assistance to help to pay for funerals but only in certain situations, although not all residents are aware of this. It seems that people from across the country spend the same on funerals, although, some people do not have the access to the funds instantly or at all and end up owing money to cover funeral costs for years to come.

- Although the majority of Funeral Directors are members of the National Association of Funeral Directors and work towards standards set, others aren't and are not governed by a mandatory body. This causes vast differences in charges, even locally, and customers feel that once they have made initially contact with a Funeral Director that they cannot 'shop around' for a better deal. We found variances with regards to the deposits that Funeral Directors charged, although it was clearly noted that once disbursements are paid as a deposit they will not be reimbursed by the DWP or any form of other grants.
- There is currently no local guidance available to help people during this emotional time when wrong decisions can be easily made. People are not signed posted, by local Funeral Directors, to organisations able to provide financial advice/assistance such as the CAB and very few residents are aware of the St Helens Funeral Partnership Service which is currently available from the Co-Op Funeral Service.
- CAB are in the process of engaging with other charitable organisations to work on the Fairer Funeral Pledge. The task group members will require updating on its progress and could, along with the Council help deliver any achievable outcomes identified.

What we recommended

1. Consideration be given to producing, in partnership with CAB, a brief guide to the first steps of organising a funeral, expected costs and general contact numbers. Consideration to be given to the locations / organisations that could distribute the guidance leaflet.
2. Consideration be given by Citizens Advice Bureau to producing a guide to funeral allowances and grants, which could be included with the distribution of the guidance leaflet in recommendation 1.
3. The Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel be regularly updated on the progress of the St Helens Funeral Partnership Service tender process to ensure best value is obtained for St Helens residents.
4. Consideration to be given to advertising the St Helens Funeral Partnership Service in local newspapers, St Helens First magazine and other available options, including the Councils internet site once the tender process has been completed.
5. On completion of recommendation number 1 and 4, this should be shared with the Health and Wellbeing Board for their guidance on how this can be further promoted.
6. Bereavement and Grounds Maintenance Service should give consideration into investigating if the use of the output energy at the Crematorium can be further increased.
7. The Council should give consideration to working in partnership with Citizens Advice Bureau in regards to establishing a Fairer Funeral Pledge with local funeral Directors.

What happens next

Our findings and recommendations will be submitted to Cabinet and we will await their response.

Update on Review of Flood Defences

During Summer 2013 members set up a task group to review the Council's flood risk management to ensure that the risk of flooding in the borough is dealt with in-conjunction with partners such as the Environment Agency, United Utilities, the community and individual households.

The report and recommendations were presented to the Cabinet in Autumn 2013 and Cabinet responded back to the Scrutiny Panel in Spring 2014. There has been an update to the Panel with regards to the recommendations and their progress and members requested that this be revisited.

The flooding events in September 2012 in St Helens were mainly due to Main Rivers overflowing their banks or high flood flow levels (fluvial flooding) and were the worst for over a decade and prompted the Scrutiny to look at this more closely.

The Council and its partners have been working closely during the past two years to limit the effects of this type of event happening again within the St Helens area. They are also working on the bigger picture of the Mersey heading from St Helens down through Warrington and Widnes to the River Mersey which has a knock on effect to events in St Helens.

During April we re-visited three sites across St Helens;

- Milton Street / Bell Lane, Sutton
- Griffin Close, Eccleston
- Sankey Valley / Blackbrook & Westend Road, Blackbrook

Milton Street / Bell Lane, Sutton

This area had been an issue for a number of years, with highway, property and agricultural flooding causing major problems. Following the weather events in 2012 there was substantial flooding in the area caused by a couple of factors.

A third party study was undertaken by JBA to identify the best option to reduce potential future flooding at this location and improvements to the existing ditch course, bank protection work and to increase the culvert capacity underneath Bell Lane. Parties included in the works were St Helens Council, local farmer, residents, allotment holders and Environment Agency.

The task group were very impressed with the works undertaken at this location and spoke to local residents who also said the work had made a great difference to the area. Although it was noted that the parts of the new wooden fence around the area are repeatedly being stolen and that the matting protection / seed put down to stabilise the bank and promote plant growth has recently been set on fire.

Further work is required to stabilise bank downstream of the Milton Street Culvert.

Griffin Close, Eccleston

This flood area was identified following the extreme weather in 2012, there was a substantial bank collapse to the water course which included part of a rights of way footpath and residential garden fencing to a bordering property.

Once it was established who's responsibility it was to undertake the work it was duly undertaken and included liaison with St Helens Council, local farmer, residents, United Utilities and the Environment Agency. The result is a much safer, cleaner and functional site that will decrease the risk of future flooding incidents.

Sankey Valley / Blackbrook & Westend Road, Blackbrook

The flooding events at Blackbrook in September 2012 were one of the worst incidents during that period of intense weather in September 2012. Flooding to several residential properties, The Ship Inn and garage caused tens of thousands of pounds worth of damage. The flood had been caused by several factors all of which had to be investigated.

The task group learnt that a number of scheme ideas and proposals have been identified which will reduce the risk of flooding in this area again. These schemes are being evaluated as a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with parities including St Helens Council, Environment Agency, Natural England, Healthy Waterways Trust, United Utilities, Residents, National Flood Forum and the Canals and Rivers Trust being involved.

The Environment Agency has supplied properties with level protection such as flood doors. The partnership has also developed a small trial scheme of debris dams at the back of the old slitting mill in Sankey Valley park and is considering using further land to attenuate water along Black Brook and Clispley Brook. There are also ongoing highways investigations into further property protection.

The task group was again pleased to see that the Council and its partners are working together and that residents will feel that progress is being made to tackle these issues.

We can report that work will continue to be undertaken and the longer term plans will require many years of investigations, partnership working and planning to ensure the best outcomes can be achieved for the future of St Helens.

Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Charlie Preston

Review of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Shared Public Spaces

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Charlie Preston (Chair), Alan Cunliffe, Joe De'Asha, Jimmy Jackson, Pat Jackson, Lisa Preston and Sheila Seddon

What we wanted to do

The general issue of ASB in shared public areas was raised by several Councillors and members of the public during the consultation for the 2014/2015 Scrutiny work programme. Concerns raised included fly tipping, gangs of youths in alley ways, lack of alley gates, ASB in parks in certain areas and football being played in shared garden areas and against the side of houses/street.

The task group met with relevant officers to discuss what the Council and its partners were currently doing and what can be undertaken to improve the situation.

What we found out

- We all agreed that we had numerous problems in our wards in respect of litter and fly tipping. The dumping of rubbish on streets and in alley ways is not only unpleasant to look at, it is environmentally damaging and erodes pride residents have in their own areas. We heard that a team of four enforcement officers commenced on 25th August and will issue a £75 Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) for dropping litter, dog fouling and dumping rubbish on private property. This initiative will be run on a 12 month pilot scheme. A FPN of £300 can also be issued by the cleansing team for fly tipping and rubbish on private properties.
- It was clear, some residents needed to be re-educated with regards to recycling. Residents moving to new properties where there was a lack of refuse and recycling facilities were either reluctant or unable to pay the £17.50 replacement charge. This resulted in rubbish being dumped in alley ways and on the streets.
- We heard that the number of Warning Notices for fly tipping had risen considerably in the past 12 months however there had not yet been any prosecutions. We would like to see that any appropriate enforcement action is effective in reducing the number of incidents throughout the borough.
- We heard that notices are in the process of being placed on all alley gates in targeted areas. These notices remind residents of the collection day together with a reminder that that particular area is regularly monitored. We welcome this action and hope that it goes some way towards reducing the build-up of litter in alley ways which is of grave concern.
- Considering the evidence we believed it would be useful for residents who live with alley gates to be reminded of the conditions of use, particularly privately rented properties which have a high turnover of tenants. We suggested that letters be sent to those new tenants and the possibility of these being delivered by PCSO's could be investigated.

- We discussed at length the concerns of residents around the increase in ASB and once PCSO's finished their shift at 9 p.m. Although the number of ASB incidents reported at 10 p.m. is at a higher level during 2014 it would appear that this is following the trend of increased calls in general rather than being associated solely with the times that PCSO's complete their afternoon/evening patrol duties. We believe there may also be a correlation with the general restructure of Neighbourhood Police in November 2013

What we recommended

1. That a report on progress made by the newly established Environmental Wardens Team be brought to the April 2015 meeting of the Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel.
2. That consideration by Cabinet be given to the following suggestions:
 - Increased learning on successful integrated collections for problem locations.
 - Examine the best practice evidence for the introduction of Euro bins at problem alleyways.
 - Examine the possibility of recruiting additional recycling staff via the council's apprentice scheme to help with door to door education and public relations.
 - That Housing Association's and private landlords continue to work with their tenants in respect of reinforcing the messages around recycling and litter.
 - Examine the effectiveness of wheelie bin replacement policy.
 - Consider the potential of the Bulky Rubbish Service working with charitable organisations for the collection of some reusable items and these charitable organisation collection services be promoted through the Contact Centre, Council Magazine, Press Releases and Private Landlords.
3. That in the more serious cases of fly tipping, consideration be given to escalating the prosecution process and that the use of appropriate and effective enforcement action be further encouraged throughout the borough.
4. That residents who live with alley gates are reminded of the conditions of use, particularly privately rented properties which have a high turnover of tenants and that letters be sent to those new tenants with the possibility of these being delivered by PCSO's .

What happens next

Our findings and recommendations were submitted to Cabinet in March. A number of them require further monitoring which is being undertaken by the Panel.

Review of CCTV

We heard that there is currently a review of CCTV being undertaken and Scrutiny has had an input into this. A short report outlining our findings is being prepared and this will be presented to the next meeting of the Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel in the Autumn.

Audit and Financial Monitoring Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Marie Rimmer

The Audit and Financial Monitoring Scrutiny Panel, chaired by Councillor Rimmer has scrutinised the Budget Monitoring reports and the Corporate Financial reports on a frequent basis and sought information and explanations in respect of any issues of concern identified. The Panel has also reviewed and scrutinised all Internal Audit reports and requested explanations in respect of outstanding Audit recommendations and internal control weaknesses. Progress on outstanding actions are checked at regular intervals.

The Panel regularly requests supplementary reports and calls in officers to explain areas of underperformance. A feedback loop to the Executive is provided via a standing item on the cabinet agenda to address issues arising from scrutiny. There is also a standing item on the Audit and Governance Committee agenda to consider the Panel Chair's report on items scrutinised, highlighting issues the Panel wishes to draw to the committee's attention.

Review of Budget Monitoring and Performance Children and Young People's Services

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Marie Rimmer (Chair) Geoff Almond, Terry Shields and Teresa Sims

What we wanted to do

As set out in the terms of reference, the Audit and Financial Monitoring Scrutiny Panel has a significant role to play in scrutinising the financial performance of the Council. The leader of the Council requested that the Chair of the Audit and Financial Monitoring Scrutiny Panel consider conducting a review into the overspend /budget pressures in the Looked After Children budget.

How we did it

The Panel considered a report which discussed the following areas:

- The Looked After Children Strategy
- The budget position for 2013/14.
- Looked After Children – On-going Budget Position as a result of Impact of Pre-Proceedings Protocol (Judge De Haas and Munby)
- A Breakdown of Court Related Costs

This was presented at a meeting of the Panel which was attended by the Chief Executive and the Director of Children's Services.

In addition, the Task Group invited a number of witnesses to attend a series of meetings. A set of questions were shared with each witness prior to the meeting for their consideration. All meetings were recorded and notes were produced.

What we recommended

From the findings the Panel made the following recommendations:

1. That regular meetings be scheduled between CYPS Portfolio Holders, Finance and Corporate Services Portfolio Holder and relevant Chief Officers to discuss budget pressures/position.
2. That any serious variances within portfolios must be communicated within Council.
3. That Chief Officers ensure that all Cabinet Members are made aware and fully understand implications of any changes whether legislative or otherwise which affect their budget service area.
4. That all legislative or other changes be thoroughly evaluated and given due consideration as part of the budget setting process.
5. That all Cabinet Members assure themselves that they are equipped to undertake their role and that they fully understand and are confident in challenging the financial aspects of portfolio performance. Where necessary, additional financial training be undertaken.
6. That clarity on the allocation of portfolio responsibilities and lines of accountability within Children and Young People's Services and Financial and Corporate Services is required.
7. That the revised suite of Performance Indicators for Children and Young People's Service be submitted to a future meeting of the Audit and Financial Monitoring Scrutiny Panel.
8. That all future budget monitoring information commentary enables robust challenge and includes details of all budget pressures and how these are to be addressed.
9. That all Chief Officers ensure each portfolio holder is fully briefed and provided with the necessary information to ensure Cabinet is making informed budgetary decisions.

What happens next

We are pleased to report that Cabinet accepted our recommendations and has begun to implement the necessary changes.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Review of Whistleblowing

In April 2015, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission requested that a small task and finish group be formed to look at the Council's Whistleblowing Policy. The issue of whistleblowing was originally raised at the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel following a presentation by the Director on the findings of the Winterbourne and Mid Staffordshire Reports. The aim of the exercise was to clarify the arrangements that are in place to support whistleblowing and whistle blowers and to examine employee's awareness of the policy.

Members who took part in the exercise were Councillors Joe De'Asha, Jimmy Jackson and Pat Jackson. The group met with Brendan Farrell, Head of Human Resources and Jan Bakewell, Head of Legal Services and discussed the policy and associated issues.

What we found

- An established Whistleblowing Policy known as the 'Confidential Reporting Policy' is located on both the Councils' website and Intranet. This policy explains how to raise a concern and how the Council will respond. It also documents how it will protect those employees who raise concerns and assures confidentiality, until the point of an investigation where witnesses may be required, and sets out names and contact details of chief officers should employees feel unable to approach their direct line manager.
- There are also several other related policies/documents to help guide employees which are located on both the Councils website and the internal intranet.
 - Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy,
 - What to do if you suspect fraud, Bribery or Corruption, and
 - Guidance for Managers – Reporting Suspected Fraud, Bribery or Corruption.
- We agreed that employees should be reminded of the Whistleblowing Policy during regular team meetings and that this be highlighted as part of the induction process when they first start their employment with the Council.
- Following the task groups initial meeting an advertising banner has been placed on the Councils intranet. This has helped to raise awareness and signpost employees to the policy in order to remind them of the procedure.
- We noted that several neighbouring Local Authorities including Warrington, Halton and Liverpool had an on-line reporting facility for both employees and

members of the public. This enabled data to be centrally held. There is currently no central database at the council and each department is responsible for holding their own records.

- The Policy demonstrates the Council's commitment to whistleblowing; however the policy and arrangements have not been subjected to member challenge and scrutiny in recent times.
- Training on whistleblowing is available, but further clarity is needed on how widespread the training is and how it is made available to staff and members. Whilst we have made the Policy available on the intranet, reaching those staff without computer access continues to remain a challenge.

What we recommended

1. That the Whistleblowing Policy be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure effectiveness of the policy and the arrangements.
2. That Managers place Whistleblowing as a regular agenda item on team meetings and briefings.
3. That consideration be given to developing an electronic Whistleblowing reporting system.
4. That all whistleblowing records be centrally held to avoid duplication and to assist with investigations.
5. That an electronic training module for all staff be developed to enhance knowledge of the Whistleblowing Policy which includes the difference between whistleblowing and other HR policies.
6. That the most effective means of raising awareness of the Whistleblowing Policy to staff that do not have access to a PC be identified and implemented.
7. That methods be identified to check the level of staff awareness.

This report is due to be considered by the Commission and will be forwarded to the relevant body.

Review of Budget Setting Process 2014/15

- In the current economic climate, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission wanted to make sure that the Council could continue to deliver the services which are most important to the Council and St Helens residents.
- We recognised the difficult financial climate against which the spending plans had been developed and acknowledged the detailed work that had been undertaken in order to review all aspects of spending and to identify scope for savings and efficiencies. The Commission, at its meetings, has welcomed the opportunity to discuss these spending plans with the Portfolio Holder for

Finance and Corporate Services and the Assistant Chief Executive (Finance) and to understand the implications for departments and for service delivery.

- It was apparent from the discussions that, whilst clear action was already being taken to ensure that spending plans remained within cash limits, some service reviews were on going and the full implications of such reviews on the financial position, on jobs, and on service delivery remained to be quantified.

As part of the process the Commission made the following recommendations to Cabinet

1. Scrutiny members be informed of future reviews arising from the zero based budgeting initiatives and cessation of any particular service provision in order that they can be advised of and comment on the recommendations of such reviews.
2. Scrutiny panels are kept informed of the outcomes of key initiatives in place to address budgetary pressures, in particular strategies with regard to Children and Young People's Service and Looked After Children. In addition, Scrutiny panels requested to be updated and involved as appropriate, in respect of any key budgetary impacts arising from changes in funding allocations and in particular the implications for Adult Social Care and Health and the Better Care Funding.
3. There is continued recognition of the role of Scrutiny as a valuable resource in reviewing approaches to service delivery. Scrutiny considers that it has a key role to play in promoting effective and efficient service delivery against a backdrop of a continued reduction in funding and, whilst continuing to set its own priorities for review, would welcome the opportunity for dialogues with Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers on how Scrutiny can support any service reviews.

Scrutiny Training and Development 2014/15

- All Members new to the authority or indeed the Scrutiny function have been given the opportunity to be inducted by the Scrutiny Champion and the Scrutiny Manager. Similar sessions have been held with both Co-opted members and Scrutiny Link Officers.
- Scrutiny members have attended a number of general bite size training sessions. These include:

Child Sexual Exploitation
MASH
Corporate Parenting
Universal Credits
- A representative from public health now sits on each of the four Scrutiny Panels.
- Meet the department sessions have been held for each scrutiny panel. These have given panel members an opportunity to meet those officers who cover

areas within the remit of the scrutiny panel they're responsible for overseeing.

- Building on the success of Scrutiny in St Helens, the scrutiny team continue to attend North West Scrutiny Networks and lessons learnt from these sessions are used to inform scrutiny development.
- In addition, there is a clear role for members themselves to contribute and identify their own training and development requirements. Members can discuss this with Scrutiny Chairmen, the Training and Development Section or the Scrutiny Team.
- The recent establishment of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has seen an extended role for scrutiny. The Scrutiny Team support Members elected to achieve greater public accountability over decisions made and services delivered to the whole Liverpool City Region. The Chair of the Commission was nominated as the scrutiny link and acted as a conduit to link sub regional scrutiny with local scrutiny and sharing of work programmes. The LCRCA Scrutiny Committee has recently completed its first piece of work on European Funding which has been accepted by the Combined Authority.
- Scrutiny has continued to work with Portfolio Holders, Chief Officers and partners to identify relevant topics around council priorities that add value to the work of each of the Scrutiny Panels. Meetings have been held with the Chair of the Commission, Panel Chairmen and Portfolio Holders to discuss portfolio performance and possible future scrutiny topic areas. During 2015/16 Scrutiny Chairmen will invite Portfolio Holders to attend Panels to discuss performance relating to individual portfolio areas on a half yearly basis. Portfolio Holders continue to attend Panels to present Cabinet responses to Scrutiny Reviews.

How Scrutiny has made a Difference

Review of Increasing Participation in the Recycling Of Household Waste

Over the years Scrutiny has looked at various issues raised surrounding recycling within the borough. In 2012 as part of the above review, Scrutiny held a focus group made up of local people who suggested that the Council consider introducing a reward scheme, whereby areas that increase their recycling rate receive some form of environmental improvement scheme for that area. We are pleased to report that our recommendation is being taken forward and a reward scheme is currently being devised.

Review of Breakfast Clubs

Breakfast has long been recognised as the most important meal of the day and evidence shows that a healthy breakfast is linked to a healthier lifestyle.

Despite this, there are children across the country starting their day without anything to eat and in some cases had had nothing to eat from the previous evening

Although this is a limited problem, we found that it was happening across St Helens. The 2013 St Helens Schools pupil survey stated 40% of children reported not eating breakfast. Without a nutritional breakfast, these children find it hard to concentrate and can quickly fall behind in lessons and therefore their attainment can suffer, which in turn, affects their future prospects.

We were keen to promote the sharing of good practice and are pleased to report that detailed guidance based on a variety of models has been produced to support schools in setting up or improving current breakfast provision.

We urged Governors of schools to see if they met the criteria to secure extra funding to serve free breakfasts and as a result an additional ** schools have applied for Magic Breakfast funding. This will result in more children having access to a healthy breakfast and improve concentration at school.

Review of Domestic Violence

As a result of feedback from partners in 2013 the Environment and Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel carried out an in-depth review of Domestic Violence Arrangements. We looked at a number of areas in particular the current Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) service and its effectiveness in working towards the aims and objectives of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy.

One of our recommendations was to review the IDVA service with a view to possibly expanding it so to meet the increased demand for the service. We are pleased to report that additional funding has been secured and the number of Advocates has increased to three thus enabling the Council to offer increased support to victims of DV.

We also highlighted the need for further improvements to the sharing of data and recommended the introduction of an electronic system / database so that all relevant agencies could be updated on key decisions in a timely, efficient basis. Again we are pleased to report that improved data sharing has been incorporated into the development of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) workspace. Members receive regular updates on the progress and performance of MASH which is working to provide effective interventions across the key priorities of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy.

Throughout the review we highlighted the need for closer agency working, particularly with the probation service. We have recently been informed that CYPS are working closely with Probation to assist in the delivery of a Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programme. This has improved information sharing with domestic violence services upon proven release.

Key Action Areas 2015/16

As always a key focus remains on ensuring that scrutiny is a worthwhile process for elected Members and adds value to the running of the Council. .

This year we received around 20 suggestions for topics which should be the subject of scrutiny during the coming year. Most of these suggestions came from members representing their communities which were really helpful in making sure that we address the concerns of people in St Helens. Unfortunately, because the work is very time consuming we cannot pursue every suggestion via the scrutiny process so the Scrutiny Commission has prioritised the issues and agreed that the following issues will be looked at during 2015/16. We will allow for flexibility within the programme which will enable us to consider any issues that arise throughout the year.

Overview and Scrutiny Panel	Workplan Topics/Areas
Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Scrutiny • Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Scrutiny • Complaints • 2020 – How the Council may look in the future • The Impact of the Faith and Voluntary Sector using the JSNA report
Audit and Financial Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget and Performance Monitoring – Corporate Financial Report • Internal Audit Plan 15/16 • Internal Audit Reports and Follow Ups
Health and Adult Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective GP Practice Processes • Older people's needs and loneliness
Children and Young People's Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Improvement Offer • Support for Foster Carers
Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take up of Apprenticeships • Homelessness and Rough Sleepers
Safer Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Sexual Exploitation • Effectiveness of Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

For further information about this annual report or about Overview and Scrutiny work in St Helens please contact:

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