



St. Helens Council

Overview & Scrutiny

Annual Report 2013/14

July 2014

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Chairman's Foreword



Councillor Tom Hargreaves MBE
Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2013/14

As the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for 2013/14, 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.

Scrutiny continues to improve year on year and the Panels have continued to support the work of the Council through their diverse work programmes and have provided opportunities for local people to have their say regarding issues that they feel are important and affect them.

This was a busy year for all in Scrutiny with a significant number of reports completed and an effective new process for ensuring that these were considered in a timely manner by Cabinet. Feedback from Cabinet was good both in terms of the quality of the reports and also in the extent to which our recommendations were put into practice.

I am pleased to report that during the year, Scrutiny at St Helens was recognized by North West Employers Organisation in their publication, Post Regulation Scrutiny – North West Pioneers with the outcomes from a number of reviews being quoted as examples of best practice.

I'd like to thank the Scrutiny Team, the Officers, Scrutiny Members, particularly those who chaired panels, chaired task groups and sat on task groups for making it such a productive year.

Some Questions Answered

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Often referred to as Scrutiny, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function looks closely at services and issues that affect local people and ways to improve them.

Scrutiny Councillors have a responsibility as community leaders to involve local people in identifying issues of concern. They can then review these concerns by gathering information and making recommendations based on what they've found out. They are 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 2013/14 the following councillors and co-opted members have served on the Scrutiny Panels:

Overview and Scrutiny Panel	Remit in Brief	Membership 2013/14
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 Tom Hargreaves (Ch) Cllrs D Banks, D Baines, A Bowden, A Burns, J De'Asha, J Fulham, S Glover, J Jackson, P Lynch, S Robinson, S Seddon, S Topping, T Sims and D Monk. Co-opted Members Rev D Hall and Rev T Neylon,
Health and Adult Social Care	Covers the provision, planning and performance of social and health care in	Cllr Anthony Burns (Ch) Cllrs R Ayres, D Baines, A Bowden, T Hargreaves, J

	services for older people and vulnerable adults across the borough.	Jackson, P McQuade, T Shields, S Topping and R Nichols Co-opted Members Brenda Smith - Healthwatch
Audit and Financial Monitoring	Scrutinises internal and external audit activity and monitors and scrutinises the financial performance of the Council.	Cllr Teresa Sims (Ch) Cllrs G Almond, K Deakin, J Fulham, J Johnson, P McQuade, D McDonnell, and T Sheilds
Children and Young People's Services	Covers the whole range of services relating to the provision of children and young people's services.	Cllr Sheila Seddon (Ch) Cllrs G Almond, J Banks, D Baines, P Ireland, J Johnson D McDonnell and N Taylor Co-opted Members Rev D Hall, Rev T Neylon and Rachel Summerskill
Safer Communities	Considers items relating to crime and disorder issues.	Cllr Paul Lynch (Ch) Cllrs A Cunliffe, C A Gill, S Glover, P Ireland, S Seddon, J Willmitt and A Jones Co-opted Members Chris Case – Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service Chief Inspector Martin Woosey – Merseyside Police
Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure	Considers items relating to borough wide economic development, regeneration, housing, culture, leisure and libraries.	Cllr Joe De'Asha (Ch) Cllrs B Anderton, D Banks, A Cunliffe, S Dyer, J Jackson, K Roberts and A Jones

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 Anthony Burns

Review of Retirement Villages

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Anthony Burns - Chair Andy Bowden, Joe De'Asha, Jimmy Jackson, Allan Jones and Linda Maloney. Brenda Smith

What we wanted to do

During the Summer 2013, the Panel completed a review of the 4 Retirement Villages in the Borough. We wanted to establish the facilities / activities provided by the Retirement Villages and review the provision of onsite management.

How we did it

- We undertook desktop research to find out information about our and other Local Authorities Retirement Village provision.
- We meet with Council Officers to obtain background information.
- We obtained the publicity brochures from the four Retirement Villages in the borough.
- We visited each of the settings to consult with the residents and obtain their views.
- We issued questionnaires to the Retirement Village residents to obtain their opinions.
- We invited the Activities Coordinators and Management of the Retirement Villages to meet with the Task Group.
- We enlisted the assistance of Samantha Murray – Housing Strategy and Policy Development Manager, St.Helens Council and David Harrison-Howard - Supporting People Service Inclusion Officer.

What our report recommended

- That clarity be sought over the extent of the Health & Safety regulations in place at each scheme.
- That residents be consulted when a proposed change or new rule / regulation put in place.
- That detailed breakdowns of how service charges and sinking funds are utilised are made available to residents.
- That consideration be given to establishing a Residents Association at Heald Farm Court.
- That consideration with regards to transport routes be given at the planning stages for any future Retirement Villages / schemes to ensure residents have full access to local transport systems.
- That consideration be given to ensuring that activity events are organised to ensure all levels of mobility / fitness are included.
- That schemes continue to share amongst themselves activity / trips, to ensure that residents obtain value for money and a wide range of trip options.
- That the Supporting People Team review the results from the questionnaires and follow up any issues arising.
- That Ward Councillors visit the Retirement Villages on a regular basis.
- That the Council continues to work in close partnership with the providers to ensure best service

Page 22 of the report sets out progress on these recommendations.

Reducing Alcohol Related Harm

What we wanted to do

As a Panel we wanted to look at what the Council and its partners are doing to reduce alcohol related harm.

How we did it

- We enlisted the help of the Public Health Commissioning, Addaction and members of the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- We studied the recently agreed Alcohol Action Plan and the Guide to Alcohol for Councillors published by Alcohol Concern.
- We heard about the alcohol project undertaken in Thatto Heath – Conversations about Alcohol and how this will be taken forward.

- The whole panel attended a special meeting listen to evidence from the different agencies involved.

What we found out

- Alcohol is everywhere. It's cheap, readily available and an intrinsic part of the fabric of social life in England. Whether we are celebrating, commiserating, at home having a glass of wine with friends or out having dinner, for many of us alcohol plays a key role in the way we organise our free time. It is therefore a dual role for the council to create a thriving community but one which also prevents and deals with the consequences of alcohol misuse.
- Alcohol costs England approximately £21bn per year in healthcare, crime and lost productivity costs. There were approximately 1.2 million alcohol-related hospital admissions in England in 2011/12 and in half of all violent incidents the victims believed the offenders to be under the influence of alcohol. This was a 135% increase since 2002/03.
- From April 2013 all local authorities have had a statutory obligation to commission alcohol prevention and treatment services. As well as treatment for alcohol dependence, the Council and St Helens Clinical Commissioning Group are taking a lead on prevention services.
- Since the re-commissioning of the Alcohol and Drug Treatments Services in April 2012, St Helens now provides an improved integrated treatment offer for adults seeking support for alcohol problems.
- An Alcohol Nursing Scheme has been established at Whiston Hospital which is open seven days a week and provides twilight cover on Thurs/Fri/Sat. The four experienced Alcohol Nurses work closely with Addaction to ensure that people who attend for alcohol related harm receive expert care and are linked to longer term support.
- In patient detoxification is no longer offered as a stand-alone treatment. Patients are referred to the alcohol detoxification pathway into the Windsor Clinic Alcohol Inpatient detoxification Unit run by Merseycare NHS Trust.
- Addaction, in partnership with Public Health, have submitted a successful bid to the Department of Health Innovation, Excellence and Strategic Development Fund in assist in tackling alcohol and drug related harm in St Helens. The bid has secured 3 years funding (£247k) to facilitate the delivery of breaking the cycle - Addactions programme of support for families affected by parental substance misuse.

What happens next?

The Panel will receive regular updates on the progress of the Alcohol Action Plan as part of its future work programme .

Review of Tobacco Control

What we wanted to do

As a Panel we wanted to look at what the Council and its partners are doing to help residents of the borough stop smoking and discuss the growth in the e-cigarettes market.

How we did it

- We met with representatives of St Helens Stop Smoking Service, the Principal Environmental Health Officer, the Principal Trading Standards Officer and the Assistant Director of Public Health.
- We held a special meeting of the Panel to receive a presentation by the Assistant Director, Public Health.
- We looked at smoking figures within individual wards in St Helens and problems with hospitals and other public places with regard to smoking near entrances or community areas.
- We discussed the use of E-Cigarettes in public places and the need for research into the health implications and possible effects on users and the lack of guidance with regard to their use and safety.
- We examined the Local Authority Declaration on Tobacco Action Plan 2013-15 and heard what progress had been made.

What we found out

- In March 2011, the Government published Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England. This strategy has set the agenda for tobacco policy both nationally and locally.
- There are 6 recognised strands for tackling smoking. These are:
 - Stopping the promotion of tobacco
 - Making tobacco less affordable
 - Effective regulation of tobacco products
 - Helping tobacco users to quit
 - Reducing exposure to secondhand smoke
 - Effective communications
- The most important local tobacco control objectives for St Helens are:
 - Denormalise tobacco smoking to prevent young people from starting smoking – reduce availability, desirability etc.
 - Support people to stop smoking
 - Protect children from the effects of secondhand smoke
- A Smoking Declaration Plan has been approved by the Health and Wellbeing Board and Full Council.

- The growth in the e-cigarettes market has become one of the hottest and most contentious topics in tobacco control in the UK. There are many arguments for and against their use. E-Cigarettes are being extensively marketed as both an aid to smoking cessation and an alternative to smoking tobacco, particularly in areas where smoking is prohibited. Some countries including Australia, Brazil and Singapore have banned them but these products are currently legally available in the UK.
- E-Cigarettes are a relatively new and currently unregulated product. There are many unanswered questions about these products so it's crucial that they're properly explored to understand their benefits and risks.
- The Council has concerns about the way e-cigarettes are being marketed in ways that glamorise and normalize smoking, especially for young people.

What happens next?

The Panel will receive regular future updates on the Declaration Action Plan and have requested that in the meantime partner organisations be asked to inform the Panel as to progress made since their agreement to sign up to the declaration.

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 year 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.

Health Checks for People with Learning Disabilities

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Anthony Burns, Robbie Ayres, Rupert Nichols, Marlene Quinn and Alan Griffiths (Healthwatch)

The Panel is currently undertaking a review of health checks for people with learning disabilities. Work is on-going and a summary of the findings will be available shortly.

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Sheila Seddon

Review of NEET (Not In Education, Employment or Training)

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors: Pat Ireland - Chair Sheila Seddon, Janet Johnson, Jeanette Banks, David Baines and Rev T Neylon.

What we wanted to do

As part of this year's work programme, the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel wanted to look at how, as a Council, we were performing with young people in the Borough who were NEET. Not in Education, Employment or Training.

The aim of the review was to investigate what services the Council has in place to meet its statutory duties with regards to young people who are NEET and how this results in successful participation in line with the Council's requirements in Raising the Participation Age.

How we did it

- We enlisted the help of Joh Ellis Sheldon the Post 16 Advisor.
- We had a number of presentations, information sessions on the performance and background information to NEET in St Helens.
- We undertook desktop research and studied various related articles.
- We carried out a deep dive exercise looking at anonymous cases of young people from Thatto Heath and Town Centre Wards.
- We met with local partners who provide services for young NEET people.
- We visited local establishments to witness services / provision provided to young NEET people.
- We talked to young people about their experiences.
- We met the Council's young apprentices and spoke with them about their experiences working at the Council.

What we found out

- The current Information Advice and Guidance Service (IAG), additional national programmes such as the Youth Contract and forums such as the NEET Task Force are making a valuable contribution towards engaging young people and continually improving the NEET performance in St Helens.
- Early intervention is crucial whether pre or post 16 in tackling the issues that prevent young people from reaching their full potential. We heard throughout the sessions, the range of issues are immense and in many cases a multi-faceted approach is required.
- Poor educational achievement is only one factor as to why a young person may become NEET, but it would appear to be one of the most significant. It was evident during the course of the review that educational attainment has a significant impact on opportunities available to a young person at 16 years old and their progression route into the Post 16 landscape. The current economic climate is doing little to help those who are unable to secure qualifications, such as GCSE's, particularly English and Maths at Key Stage 4. The low levels of recruitment and fewer apprenticeship opportunities by employers coupled with an increased competition for low skilled jobs means it has to be recognised that the recession has made it significantly more challenging to reduce further the level of NEET young people in St Helens.
- Apprenticeships are an increasingly important way of addressing the skills gaps in the current labour market, stimulating additional employment and matching the needs of businesses with the aspirations of our young people. We were pleased to see the range of apprenticeship training providers in St Helens which in addition to the Council Programme includes St Helens College, St Helens Chamber and private sector specialist training companies, who operate across boroughs.
- Whilst Post 16 Providers have responded well in providing flexible provision to meet the needs of the young people who are NEET future changes to post 16 funding and ever decreasing external funding is likely to impact on suitable provision always being available in the future. It was apparent during the course of the review that whilst there are many post 16 training courses available many young people did not want further education and struggled to access the job market, not only because of their lack of qualifications but also their lack of work experience or readiness to work.
- The ability to share data amongst key organisations and agencies is vital to achieve effective tracking and monitoring of young people who are NEET and those who are not known. The review illustrated the very transient nature of some NEET young people and ongoing improvement of sharing intelligence, between providers such as Job Centre Plus and Helena Housing, is crucial.

What happened next?

Our report setting out our recommendations was submitted to Cabinet and we received a full response in June.

We asked Cabinet to ensure apprenticeship schemes continued to be promoted and made widely available and were informed that the Council currently had 20

apprentices working in various areas and were looking to recruit up to 40. Work placement opportunities were also being planned for young people from YOS, Care Leavers and the Young People's Team to support progression into apprenticeship programmes.

We also recommended the review and improvement of intelligence sharing between partners. Cabinet have agreed to identify any current gaps and barriers and new appropriate procedures to support better transition will be in place from September 2014.

Review of School Breakfast Club Provision

Who sat on the Task Group?

Sheila Seddon – Chair, Stephen Glover, Janet Johnson, Teresa Sims and Rev D Hall

What we wanted to do

The aim of the review was to investigate which schools in St Helens provide breakfast provision, how to maintain their sustainability, and how the Council can assist those who have the need but don't currently have one.

Establish which schools in the borough currently had breakfast clubs/provided breakfast/snacks and how these were funded. What constituted a good, consistent provision and what help/guidelines/funding was available to schools to assist with the setting up of a breakfast club.

How we did it

- We enlisted the support of Helen Williams – Head of Public Health Programmes and Diane Bolton-Maggs – Speciality Registrar Public Health.
- We re-issued a Breakfast Club survey that Public Health had sent out to all of the borough's schools earlier in the year, to those schools that had not responded.
- We asked the borough's schools some additional fact finding questions via e-mail.
- We analysed and discussed the data gathered from the returned school surveys.
- We visited several schools within the borough to talk to Head teachers, staff and pupils to gain their opinions.
- We reviewed the School Food Plan document to ensure the Council is doing everything it can to assist schools with breakfast provision.

What we found out

- School survey results highlighted that the majority of schools in St. Helens provided good breakfast provision in one form or another.

- One model did not fit all schools - some schools provided a totally free service whilst others were charging all pupils to attend; this is very much led by ward location. Broad Oak Primary School has an excellent model of a 'free for all' breakfast provision, and whilst this suited the area the school was situated in, it would not necessarily work for all of our schools.
- The provision of breakfast clubs can improve attendance, punctuality, classroom behaviour, social skills and attainment. We noted that schools are using this time to identify and deal with any pastoral issues that may arise. This is a great opportunity for staff to engage with pupils as the atmosphere is relaxed and pupils do not strictly think of Breakfast Clubs as school.
- A majority of schools charged all pupils to attend the breakfast provision at their school, and in some of the borough's wards this was sometimes clearly used as childcare for working parents, which is perfectly acceptable. If schools are charging for Breakfast Clubs then it is clear that they have to be financial viable, however, Pupil Premium funding could be used to support the FSM children in attending the breakfast provision at these schools.
- In other areas in the borough Breakfast Clubs are used to feed the vulnerable children the School has identified that desperately need something to eat before they start the school day.
- Breakfast is a key meal and children should not be starting the school day on an empty stomach. The problem isn't just in St.Helens, it's across the country, in some areas the majority of school pupils are entitled to FSM. National and local figures are showing that more and more families are accessing food banks and we can foresee that these figures will only rise before they begin to fall.
- Schools need to become much more active in identifying children that are attending school having had no breakfast, maybe not even anything to eat from the previous evening. Breakfast clubs not only offer the opportunity for children to have a healthy breakfast but can also provide a safe environment for children to catch up with homework, gain support with any issues they may have and/or socialise with their friends.

What happens next?

A report setting out our findings has been produced and these were submitted to Cabinet in June. We have recommended that the findings from this report also be sent to each School Chair of Governors, and shared with the Senior Leadership Team and presented to the Governing Body. A copy will also be sent to any relevant private providers.

We also asked Schools, via the Chair of Governors, be encouraged to investigate if they meet the criteria for additional funding for Breakfast provision from schemes such as *The School Food Plan* or *Magic Breakfast* charity.

Cabinet have agreed to develop best practice guidance on breakfast to support schools in setting up and/or improving current breakfast provision. The guidance will include various best practice models to assist schools with this process.

Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Joe De'Asha

Review of Local Shopping Centres and the Closure of Shops

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillor(s) Joe De'Asha – Chair, Bill Anderton, Sandra Dyer, Tom Hargreaves, Jimmy Jackson, Allan Jones and Keith Roberts

What we wanted to do

The aim of the review was to examine the economic impact the recession has had on local shopping areas and by working together, what the Council, Parish Council and local retailers could do to alleviate the effects.

How we did it

- We received a presentation by Steve Littler, the Council's Estates and Asset Manager on background information to local shopping centres.
- We carried out online research, news articles, published reports etc. to gain a national view.
- We visited a selection of local shopping centres in the St.Helens borough and out of borough to observe the differences between centres.
- We spoke to local shop proprietors at each centre we visited.
- We met with Conal Devitt from TGL (Teaching, Learning and Giving) to talk about his plans to set up a scheme to reward people for actively engaging with the voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector.

What we found

- The way people shop has changed over the past five decades. Customers are demanding first class goods at rock bottom prices and this is increasingly pushing even some larger traders out of business, let alone small independent shops. People are also changing the way they shop, increasingly shopping on line where best value can be sought in half the time of visiting many shops to compare prices.

- St.Helens has various types of local shopping areas ranging from a local corner shop to a small parade of half a dozen shops, to villages with dozens of shops offering a wide variety of choice of goods and services. Each of the shopping areas is unique in many ways and faces particular challenges to where there is no 'one size fits all' solution. However many share a number of common issues and concerns. All face increased competition from other retail and service locations, changing retail trends and the preference towards car-based shopping and are variously susceptible to market pressures.
- Generic concerns facing all of the areas visited are limited parking, increases in the number of A3 uses, particularly take-aways and poor quality environments to varying degrees which would benefit from investments and support from local partnership working.
- The importance of local out of town shopping centres to vulnerable people within communities who may not have access to a car, or who rely on the social interaction of their nearest shopping facilities are further disadvantaged when local centres deteriorate. The challenge for all involved is to halt their future decline, facilitate improvements and secure their future as a key role within sustainable communities.
- Issues were raised at almost all the sites we visited with regards to car parking, be it lack of spaces, shop staff parking in valuable customer spaces all day long or issues with the number of Parking Control Notices being issued.
- It's clearly beneficial for local areas to establish business forums / traders groups which meet regularly and discuss local issues and actions. It's possible that by forming a business forum / traders group that funding streams may be more readily accessed. Promotional events could be discussed and organised and best practice shared amongst local traders.
- The commitment of traders on Earlestown market is tremendous, traders that continue to remain in the St.Helens borough for long periods of time are valuable assets and this should be celebrated at monumental anniversaries.
- St.Helens Chamber offers support, guidance and training to local businesses, it was evident that they undertake great amounts of work and in conjunction with the Council can help to train, expand and support the local businesses in St.Helens.
- Many people commented on the condition of some of the shop frontages, especially empty units. If residents are going to be encouraged to shop in local areas then they will need to be appealing to visit. Keeping a neat and tidy shop frontage can enhance the customers perception of what the store is like inside and encourage them to visit. Washed down woodwork and a clean coat of paint can make all the difference to a shop front, and with the additional use of plants and flowers, areas can be transformed.
- General maintenance of the shopping area is so important to the shopping experience. Pavements and places to cross roads need to be in a safe state of repair, road markings, lighting, and adequate rubbish bins all need to be in place. Benches for resting should be provided, people should feel

comfortable in their surroundings, not feel rushed to leave the area due to it being undesirable.

- Several shop owners said that community events in their area increased sales and boost sales, although comments were made that it was difficult to know where to start, with regards to legislation, when organising events. There is a dedicated web page on the Council's internet site, which allows a request for assistance to be made. Although the task group is fully aware of the staffing reductions being made, we feel that any contribution from the Council with regards to outlying communities gaining support and guidance would be extremely beneficial.

What happens next

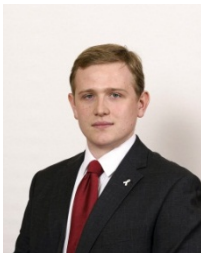
A report setting out our recommendations has been submitted to Cabinet. These include, the provision of assistance / support to ensure that local shopping areas establish and maintain functioning 'Business / Traders Forums' and all Parish Councils be encouraged to work with local traders to review parking facilities within local shopping areas across the borough to identify and implement any alternative solutions where practicable.

A response from Cabinet to our report has been received with positive feedback.

Private Landlords and Welfare Reform

We are currently looking into the impact changes to welfare reform and the direct payment of local housing allowance is having on tenants and their landlords. A report is in the process of being produced and will be submitted to the Panel and Cabinet shortly

Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Paul Lynch

Review of Anti-Social Behaviour and Deliberate Fires

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillor(s) - Jimmy Jackson – Chair, Allan Jones, Alan Cunliffe, Dennis McDonnell, Sandra Dyer and Linda Maloney
Chris Case, Sara Garside and Kate Morris – Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service,
Elaine Collins – Merseyside Police
Peter Mallet, Louise Higgins and Mike Petersen – St Helens Council

What we wanted to do

The aim of the review was to investigate how we can work together to reduce the number of fires associated with Anti-Social Behaviour. We wanted to establish if there are sufficient working links between the Council and its partners with regards to ASB and fires and identify if there are any areas within the borough that have increased numbers of fires associated with ASB.

How we did it

- We received a presentation from Fire Service on background information to ASB and Fires across the borough.
- We undertook online research, news articles, published reports etc.
- We held a one day in depth session with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS), Merseyside Police, Environment Protection, Youth Service and Safer Communities to establish what partnership work is currently being undertaken and what could be done to improve.

What we found

- Secondary fires present a particularly difficult problem for MFRS as the service undergoes restructuring due to budgetary restrictions. As with other local services, the operational delivery element of MFRS is changing over the next few years, where in the St Helens area the front line operational delivery of available fire appliances is reducing from three to two. If an appliance is engaged with a secondary fire, it is then unavailable, or certainly significantly delayed, in attending any primary fire calls (residential property for example). In total, 2013 represents a 51.5% increase in fires due to Anti-Social Behaviour in the St Helens District, compared to the previous year. This remains a key priority for MFRS and the Service will continue to engage with partners in their aim to reduce these incidences.
- One identified cause of a number of the deliberate fires which occurred during Spring 2013 was the misuse of disposable bbq's. We discussed the possibility of asking local retailers to be diligent when selling disposable bbq's and liquid gasses to young people during the longer spring/ summer evenings. It was felt that these products could be included in the Trading Standards initiative, 'Responsible Retailer Scheme'.
- We heard from Merseyside Police that intelligence on previous arsonists from other agencies was not always shared. When young people in care were transferred into the borough from neighbouring authorities, it was important that any previous/possible concerns were shared amongst each division.
- Residents are asked to put wheelie bins out at your collection point for 6.30 am, on the day of collection and take their bin back into their property as soon as possible after collection. The Fire Service expressed their concerns about wheelie Bins being left out overnight, sometimes this was because residents naturally put the bins out last thing before they go to bed and sometimes because of missed collections. It was felt that in order to alleviate any misunderstanding over missed collections, hard and fast guidance setting out what to do if a collection is missed and when it will next be collected should

be distributed to all residents. Feedback from the Fire Service was that residents were still unsure what to do with their wheelie bin when collections were missed.

- All bins should be stored away from doors or windows to prevent fire spreading to properties. It was agreed that it would be valuable for the Fire Service to get sight of any new development plans and have to option to comment on the proposed location of bin stores. It was agreed that this could perhaps be a condition of planning.
- Residents living in St Helens can take advantage of the Council's free bulky rubbish collection service. This service is for occasional items of household waste which are too big to fit into a wheelie bin; alternatively it can be taken to the local Household Waste Recycling Centre. Feedback from the Task Group stated that waiting times for the service could sometimes be a number of weeks and there were certain rules as to the condition of the items being collected. Further clarification on this was required.

What happens next?

Our final report was submitted to Cabinet in May 2014. One of our recommendations focused on possibility of developing an 'adopted street' initiative. This could be piloted in areas where deliberate fires have previously occurred and a neighbourhood warden, bin monitor could be nominated to undertake simple checks. A response to our report is expected shortly.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission



Chairman Councillor Tom Hargreaves MBE

Local Support for Ex-Servicemen

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillor(s) Paul Lynch – Chair, Dave Banks and Sophie Robinson

What we wanted to do

During the process of agreeing the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2013/14 the Council's Scrutiny Commission agreed to look at the local support available to Ex-Servicemen when they leave the armed forces

How we did it

- A task group was appointed which met on two occasions, 23rd October and 11th December 2013. Simon Cousins (Equalities Officer) supported the task group and was present at the both meetings. We also invited members of the Armed Forces support groups in St.Helens to speak with the Task Group and hear their views on the support available

What we found

- According to recent detailed research, there is no shortage of provision for Service Leavers and most do well. A great deal is being done to support Service Leavers by Government Agencies, charities and the private sector as well as the Armed Forces themselves. This includes training opportunities, healthcare provision and welfare support. Most Service Leavers make a successful transition, the great majority who look for work find it and few experience serious problems.
- Preparation by the individual is essential and good information is key. Information is essential to effective planning but we heard that it is often hard to find, sometimes poorly presented and confusing. Ensuring Service Leavers and their families get good information at the right time about transition and civilian life is therefore vital.
- The Service Leavers most likely to struggle get the least help. It is often assumed that the longer a service career, the harder the resettlement into civilian life. According to Lord Ashcroft's research, early Service Leavers who have served up to four years receive only basic support for transition and are the most likely to experience unemployment and other problems. Improving outcomes for this group of personnel is essential.
- We believe that the establishment of the St.Helens Armed Forces Community Covenant is an important step forward in ensuring that the Council and other local service / support groups undertake their roles and responsibilities to their fullest extent.
- From the seven key aims of the Covenant it is evident that the Council is working hard with its Officers, departments and partners to ensure that work progresses to meet the agreed objectives.
- The St.Helens Veterans and Armed Forces Community Centre will provide an important hub which should bring all the services / support available to Armed Forces personnel together in one easy access point.
- Application forms are key documents to establishing information about residents; this would be an ideal opportunity to identify Armed Forces personnel re-locating or returning to the borough and would assist in directing them to the correct and relevant services.

What happens next?

Our report has been submitted to Cabinet for consideration and we expect a response to our recommendations shortly.

Staff ID Badges

Who sat on the Task Group?

Councillors John Fulham - Chair, Pat Ireland, Jimmy Jackson and Shelia Seddon.

What we wanted to do

Employer issued ID cards and badges carry much credibility, particularly so when issued by a Public Authority. Councillors expressed interest in the issue and management of Council issued ID badges, not least considering that following central Government funding cuts of currently £50m to the Borough's budget, that over 1,000 staff, or 25% of the total, left St. Helens Council employment over the last three years.

Councillors were concerned about the return of ID badges from former employees and whether or not they could still be considered valid by currently employed staff and members of the public.

As cards are only issued to staff when they join the Authority, or when reported lost, Councillors were concerned by the absence of an expiration date on cards, which if found by someone outside the Authority would still appear valid, and whether or not staff could still be identified by photographs on their cards which may be several years out of date.

What we found and recommended

- The current system is largely fit for the purpose of managing staff, their identification, time keeping and the associated risks therein. Whilst to adopt further features, such as time-limited badges, may be desirable there is no evidence to suggest this would reduce the risk of misuse however it would increase costs in an extremely cash-limited environment.
- There will always be risks associated with the issue and use of ID badges and the possibility of misuse or even the possibility of counterfeiting identification. The system adopted must, therefore, be the most effective and proportionate way of addressing the potential risks and the probability that they would occur.
- It has been identified, however, that changes could be made to the existing systems/processes to improve the management of those risks, therefore, the Task Group made the following recommendations:
- That the Code of Conduct be revised to strengthen the issue of employee identification. This will express the need for all employees to possess an up to date identification badge (i.e. bearing their correct name and a photograph that is a true likeness, and bearing an up to date valid to and from date where appropriate). It will also emphasise the importance of the ID badge as a tool by which the bearer can be identified as a Council employee, and that its safety and security should be managed in this regard.
- That exceptions from the need to wear ID badges be reviewed and clarified with the staff groups concerned via the revisions proposed to the code of conduct.

- That ID badges for employees who are on time limited temporary contracts be issued bearing an expiry date that reflects the end of the contract in place

What happens next?

A report setting out our recommendations was submitted to Cabinet and we are pleased to report these have been accepted and are in the process of being implemented.

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.
- 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.

Scrutiny Training and Development 2013/14

- 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.
- In consultation with the Chair of the Audit and Financial Monitoring Scrutiny Panel, short bite size informal training sessions have been arranged prior to each Panel to give members an opportunity to clarify any areas they are unclear about. Sessions have been presented on: Budget Monitoring, Internal Audit and the Audit Plan, Financial Instructions Brief, Finance Overview and Performance Monitoring.
- Members of the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel undertook safeguarding training in relation to learning from the Francis Inquiry re the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust and the Winterbourne View Serious Case Review.
- Building on the success of Scrutiny in St Helens, the scrutiny team have attended Scrutiny Panel meetings at a number of neighbouring authorities. Lessons learnt from these visits will be used to inform member training scheduled to take place later in the municipal year.
- 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.

Audit and Financial Monitoring Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Teresa Sims

The Audit and Financial Monitoring Scrutiny Panel, chaired by Councillor Teresa Sims 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.

Bite size informal training sessions continue to be held before each meeting to give councillors an opportunity to improve their understanding of internal financial and audit processes and procedures they are unclear about. During the last 18 months training on the council's Performance Monitoring System has also been provided. The Panel have also continued to hold a series of member briefings on financial monitoring, budget and audit issues. These have been held prior to the Panel meetings and are provided to help members to gain a greater understanding

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.

How Scrutiny Has Made a Difference

Welfare Reform

In 2013 we carried out a review of the effects of Welfare Reform. This review could not have been undertaken at a more timely moment. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 legislates for the biggest change to the welfare system in over 60 years. In response to this, Members of the Regeneration Housing, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel agreed to hold a short review into the effect Welfare Reform might have on people in St Helens and what more the Council and its partners could do to support those affected.

The report made three recommendations including the formation of a Welfare Reform Group to co-ordinate the activities of the Council and partner organisations within this area.

We are pleased to report that since undertaking the review a Welfare Reform Operational Task Group consisting of practitioners from within the Council (Benefits and Customer Services), the Citizen Advice Bureau, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Food Bank (Hope Centre) and Helena Partnerships has been established.

It meets on a monthly basis to discuss operational issues in respect of general welfare reform, in particular the new demands being placed on services as a result of the abolition of crisis loans. The meetings provide an opportunity to review current activity, update attendees on the welfare reform timetable and assess where systems, procedures and communication can be improved between partner organisations in particular around the consistent issue of food bank vouchers and the additional demands on services as a result of the DWP applying more benefit sanctions.

Review of Town Centre Car Parking

As a result of feedback from residents, in 2013 the Housing, Regeneration, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny panel carried out an in depth review into car parking in the town centre. We looked at a number of areas, ranging from residents car parking permits, cleaning of car parks, the use of variable message Signs (VMS) and the upgrading of pay machines at various sites.

Since undertaking the review a number of improvements have been made. We are pleased to report that Variable Message Signs are used to display information regarding Town Centre Car Parks – Four additional VMS signs have recently been erected. In addition an extra 5 parent and child bays have been provided on the Hardshaw Centre Car Park and all pay and display machines for both on and off road parking have been upgraded to accept payments via mobile phones.

Empowering those who live in Retirement Villages

Last year, following feedback from Ward Councillors, a joint scrutiny review was undertaken by the Health and Adult Social Care and Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel looking at the Borough's Retirement Villages.

One of the biggest concerns to residents was the lack of clarity around the utilisation of sinking funds and service charges. We are pleased to report that this issue has now been resolved and providers have agreed to ensure that residents receive better quality and more transparent information.

Trips and activities on offer at the various schemes are plentiful and varied. Those that took part thoroughly enjoyed what was on offer. We were asked if schemes could share details of these amongst themselves to ensure that residents obtained value for money and a wide range of trip options. This has been achieved and activities co-ordinators share future activity plans.

In addition to this, at the request of residents at Heald Farm Court, a residents association has now been established. This will enable any future consultations to changes in rules and regulations. Ward Councillors have also asked if they could be invited to these meetings to provide that link between the Council and the retirement village communities.

Review of the Flood Defences

In response to the flooding incidents in the Borough in 2012, the Environment and Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel wanted to have a look at the council's flood risk management and make sure that the risk of flooding in the borough is dealt with as a whole, joining up the work done by the Council, the Environment Agency and United Utilities and of course our community and individual households.

We asked the Council to seek grant funding from the Environment Agency / NorthWest Regional Flood Defences Committee to undertake detailed flood studies at critical known flooding locations and we are delighted to report that this has been awarded. This crucial work was completed in March 2014. We also requested that a location and condition assessment of drainage assets, particularly culverts be completed and again we can report that this has now been finalised. A database to record and update this information has also been developed.

The Council's website for flood risk management has been substantially enhanced and 'hits' are monitored with a view to continually improving the offer. The Environment Agency has undertaken a flood level raising exercise with those residents who are within flood warning areas. In addition to this the National Flood Forum are working with residents at Blackbrook to develop a flood warden system, results of this pilot will be monitored and consideration will be given to other areas which may benefit from a similar system.

The Year Ahead

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 2014/15. We will allow for flexibility within the programme which will enable us to consider any issues that arise throughout the year.

Scrutiny Work Programme 2014/15

Overview and Scrutiny Panel	Workplan Topics/Areas
Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget Scrutiny Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Scrutiny
Audit and Financial Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget and Performance Monitoring – Corporate Financial Report Internal Audit Plan 14/15 Internal Audit Reports and Follow Ups
Health and Adult Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconfiguration of Cancer Care – Clatterbridge Suicide, self-harm and preventable deaths
Children and Young People’s Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PE Provision and extra- curricular activities. Troubled Families Programme
Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dog Fouling, Fly Tipping and Litter
Safer Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Social Behaviour Child Sexual Exploitation Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

Contact Us

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

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Contact Us

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