

Overview & Scrutiny

Annual Report 2012/13



June 2013

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Chairman's Foreword



Councillor Jeff Fletcher
Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2012/13

As the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for 2012/13, I am pleased to introduce our 2012/13 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.

During the year we had a major training/review event of the work of Scrutiny with Ann Reeder. This led to a number of positive developments in our way of working, which will continue to be worked on in the coming year.

There were two new departures for Scrutiny this year:

- We had our first "pre-decision" scrutiny of the plans to change the Recycling and Refuse Collection system. This ensured that the new -proposals were fully tested and challenged before being put into practice.
- We also had a Commission Task Group looking at the very wide ranging issue of the "Digital Divide", how to ensure that nobody is left behind as councils and others make ever more use of online services.

I'd like to thank all the Scrutiny Team, the Officers and the Members, particularly those who chaired panels, chaired task groups and sat on task groups for making it such a productive and enjoyable (fun even) 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 Committees 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 2012/13 the following councillors and co-opted members have served on the Scrutiny Panels:

| Overview and Scrutiny Committee | Remit in Brief | Membership 2012/13 |
|---|---|---|
| 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 Jeff Fletcher (Ch) Cllrs B Anderton, D Banks, A Burns, J Fulham, L Glover, S Glover, T Hargreaves, J Jackson, A Johnson, S Robinson, S Seddon, Steph Topping, T Sims and D Monk. Co-opted Members Rev D Hall, Rev T Neylon, R Summerskill and E O'Donnell |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Adult Social Care and Health</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 Anthony Burns (Ch)</p> <p>Cllrs A Bowden, J Fletcher, T Hargreaves, L Maloney, P McQuade, T Shields Steph Topping</p> <p>Co-opted Members</p> <p>Brenda Smith St Helens LINKs</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 Teresa Sims (Ch)</p> <p>K Deakin, J Fletcher, J Fulham, P McQuade, L Maloney, S Seddon and T Sheilds</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 Tom Hargreaves (Ch)</p> <p>Cllrs J Banks, S Dyer, L Glover, P Ireland J Jackson J Johnson and Neil Taylor</p> <p>Co-opted Members</p> <p>Rev D Hall, Rev T Neylon, R Summerskill and E O'Donnell</p> |
| <p>Environment and Safer Communities</p> | <p>Considers items relating to waste management, parks and open spaces, highways and crime and disorder issues.</p> | <p>Cllr Dave Banks (Ch)</p> <p>Cllrs A Burns, A Cunliffe, J De'Asha, S Dyer, P Lynch, K Roberts and R Nichols</p> |
| <p>Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure</p> | <p>Considers items relating to borough wide economic development, regeneration, housing, culture, leisure and libraries.</p> | <p>Cllr Sheila Seddon (Ch)</p> <p>Cllrs A Cunliffe, K Deakin, C A Gill, S Glover, P Ireland and A Jones</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 Years Scrutiny Reviews

Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Anthony Burns

5 Boroughs Partnership Trust Acute Care Pathway – New Model of Care

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors: Anthony Burns, Jeff Fletcher, Lyn Glover and Steph Topping.

What we wanted to do

Late last summer, the 5 Borough's Trust announced 2 major reviews, One of Later Life and Memory Services (referred to as LLAMS which was undertaken last year) and the other of the Adult Care Pathway (referred to as ACP).

In December 2011 the Council received details of the approach the Trust was taking to review the Adult Care Pathway. Elements of the proposals were due to be implemented on 1st June with other key elements in December 2012. The council expressed concern about the timescales therefore a small Task Group made up of Scrutiny members was established to consider these issues in detail and report back to both the Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet.

By undertaking the review we wanted to ensure that there would be no adverse impact or reduction in other services not affected by the proposals. We also felt it would be a good opportunity to hear how 5 Boroughs had addressed the issues raised in the previous scrutiny action plan relating to Later Life and Memory Services.

How we did it

- We enlisted the help of Mike Wyatt, St Helens Council's Director of Adult Social Care and Health, and Barry Fitzgerald, Assistant Director, Care Management, to provide us with the information and expertise that we needed.
- The Task Group invited a selection of stakeholders and service users to attend a series of meetings. A number of documents/reports prepared by 5 Boroughs Trust were also submitted to the Task Group for their consideration

- Over the course of a number of weeks we spoke to the following stakeholders:

5 Boroughs Trust
St Helens Clinical Commissioning Group
St Helens MIND
Halton and St Helens PCT
St Helens Carers
Bridgewater Community Health Care
Out of Hours Emergency Duty Team
NHS Merseyside
LINKs

What we found out

- Witnesses to the Scrutiny Panel exercise consistently raised a number of concerns about the nature of the consultation relating to the ACP Model.
- A number of witnesses to the Panel felt that the model had a very clinical focus and it had therefore missed an opportunity to consider the role that non-clinical issues and services could play in promoting positive mental health.
- We were concerned about the potential for confusion and potential dual pathways that exist from primary care. This seemed to be compounded by some confusion in relation to referrals through the Open Mind Service and the 5 Boroughs Trust Assessment Services. However we were pleased to receive reassurance from the Trust that this had already been identified as an issue and the Trust was in active negotiations with Bridgewater Community NHS Trust to address this issue and ensure clear and appropriate referral routes for all service users.
- We heard a number of contrasting views about the adequacy of the Home Treatment Service and were reassured by the 5 Boroughs Trust that they would carefully monitor this.
- We were pleased to hear that the Trust were reviewing their recovery element of the model and we asked the Trust to report back to the Council prior to implementation of the Recovery element in St. Helens.

What happened next

Our final report was submitted to Cabinet and in turn forwarded to the 5 Boroughs Trust. We set out a number of recommendations and asked 5 Boroughs to report back to the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Panel on the action they had taken to address our concerns. This was undertaken in April and 5 Boroughs gave us assurance as to how they intended to move forward with the implementation of the new model.

Joint Scrutiny Review (with Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel) of Support for Young Carers

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors: Linda Maloney (Chairman) Tom Hargreaves, Sandra Dyer, Jimmy Jackson, Allan Jones, Lynn Glover and Terry Shields. Rev T Naylor and Brenda Smith

What we wanted to do

Not unlike most other local authorities, we did not know exactly how many young carers there were in St Helens but we did know that there were a large number and this was set to rise.

The aim of the review was to investigate the role of young carers, look at the impact on them and assess what provisions the Council had in place to assist with their needs.

How we did it

- We carried out desktop research which was fed into the review process.
- We held an initial background information session from the Commissioning Manager (ASC&H) and the Family Support & Parenting Commissioner (CYPS).
- We gathered and considered all relevant written evidence including best practice information.
- We undertook site visits to external organisations that support young carers.
- We met with Personal Services Society (PSS) St Helens Young Carers.
- We visited the new Carers Centre - Princess Royal Trust at Fishwick House in St Helens and met with the staff.
- We visited Rectory Primary School in Garswood and spoke to the Head Teacher about how the school identified young carers and worked with PSS.

What we found out

- There was no accurate figure for the number of young carers in St Helens and this makes it very difficult to assess the true scale of their needs. It is universally acknowledged that the majority of young carers are hidden therefore we wanted to encourage better identification of young carers in all settings.
- We felt it was vital that young carers had the opportunity to take part in fun activities away from their home responsibilities and had the chance to meet other young carers who would understand their situation and help them realise they are not alone. We were consistently impressed by the excellent

services provided by the PSS and the Princess Royal Trust and the high esteem it is held in by the young carers it supports and their families.

- To improve support for young carers in St Helens, there needed to be a multi-agency approach. This was not an issue that could be improved through one organisation alone. We saw that young carers and their families came into contact with a range of public agencies and these organisations needed to work together to provide better support. Adult Social Services and adult services in general, for example, housing services, adult treatment providers and adult mental health services, in addition to assessing parental social care needs, had a key role in identifying young carers, as they would often be the first point of contact. Overall we felt that young carer referrals to PSS from all agencies could be improved.
- We felt it was important that primary schools passed on information about young carers onto secondary schools when they transferred to their new school. This would ensure that the secondary school understood the young carers home situation and additional responsibilities and could put any necessary support in place when they start at their new school.

What happened next

Our findings were submitted to Cabinet in April and we are waiting to receive their response to our recommendations.

Review of Retirement Villages

Who sat on the Task Group

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

We are currently undertaking a review of the 4 Retirement Villages in the Borough. We want to establish the facilities / activities provided by the Retirement Villages and review the provision of onsite management. As part of the review we are currently visiting all the sites to obtain the views and thoughts of the residents living at the villages.

A draft report outlining our findings will be produced shortly and will be considered by the Health and Adult Social Care Panel in July.

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Tom Hargreaves

Review of Management of School Exclusions

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors: Rev Dennis Hall (Chairman) Mrs E O'Donnell, Allan Jones, Lynn Glover, and Pat Ireland.

What we wanted to do

As part of the work programme for 2012/13 the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel wanted to look at how, as a Council, we were performing with the management of School Exclusions in our primary and secondary schools.

What we found out

- In terms of fixed term and permanent exclusion from our primary and secondary schools St Helens comes in below national and regional levels. The number of exclusions from our schools has significantly reduced over a number of years.
- The Behaviour and Inclusion Improvement Service (BIIS) offered a number of streams of support to schools, pupils and parents to help prevent a fixed term or permanent exclusion of a pupil from a St. Helens school.
- The Service, following support from the Behaviour Improvement Team arranged for a pupil to transfer schools via a Managed Transfer, offered alternative provision at one of the authority's Pupil Referral Units (PRU's), facilitated the placement of a pupil at an alternative learning provider and offered further support and advice to schools and pupils to help a pupil maintain their place at a school. All of this support was linked to and facilitated by the close partnership work enabled by the agreed Fair Access Protocol. In addition the Service also worked closely with the Admissions, Additional Needs and Educational Psychology Teams.
- Both PRU's had recently been subjected to Ofsted and both had been graded as good with outstanding provision.

What happened next

In light of the excellent work undertaken in the Department and subsequent results, the Task Group was agreed that it was unnecessary to continue with a scrutiny review of managing school exclusions at this time.

Review of Pupil Premium

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors: Jimmy Jackson (Chair) Lynn Glover, Tom Hargreaves, Pat Ireland, Janet Johnson and Shelia Seddon Rev Tom Neylon, and , Rev Dennis Hall

What we wanted to do

We agreed to look at the allocation of pupil premium to schools in St Helens and wanted to investigate how schools were reporting and using pupil premium monies and how as a council we could recommend any good practice.

How we did it

- We received a presentation by the Senior Achievement and Inclusion Advisor on background information to pupil premium.
- We undertook desktop research and looked at a number of publications.
- We carried out an online search for each school in the borough to view what information they had published and collated the findings.
- We contacted all Headteachers and asked how their Governing Bodies were involved in decisions relating to the spend of pupil premium.
- We contacted all Chairs of Governors to ask how pupil premium monies were discussed and subsequently allocated.
- We visited Thatto Heath Primary School and spoke with the Headteacher about what her school did with the pupil premium monies allocated.

What we found out

- Although the schools in the borough have all published some information on their schools website with regards to Pupil Premium, through our investigations we found it difficult to locate this data on numerous sites.
- It was evident that not all of our schools were publishing adequate data with regards to the statutory information required by the Government. The information located on some of our school websites was very poor, did not include budget allocations, or outcomes for the previous years funding.
- With the 'Digital Divide' becoming more apparent, not all households have access to technology and the internet and we felt that schools should ensure that any Pupil Premium information published is also available in other formats to enable all parents / guardians to be engaged in the process.
- Although it was not investigated fully as part of the review, through discussions and documented Ofsted information, the Task and Finish group thought it would be helpful if the Pupil Premium funding was identifiable

separately within schools delegated budgets. This would assist with the monthly budget monitoring process and termly financial reports to Governors.

- The Chairs of Governing Bodies that responded to the Task and Finish groups enquires assured us that they were aware of Pupil Premium funding, what it is intended for and that the Headteacher reports on this to them and the Governing Body. Due to just over half of the Chair's responding to our enquires we felt it was important that this report be issued to all Chairs for information purposes.
- The Task and Finish group felt that the majority of schools were spending the monies as intended, however there needed to be complete clarity with regards to this by way of fully complying with the Governments statutory requirements of publishing adequate data and that Governing Bodies are involved at the appropriate level.

What happens next

A report setting out our findings has been produced and were submitted to Cabinet in June. We have recommended that the findings from this report also be discussed at the Governors Forum.

Environment and Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Dave Banks

Review of the Council's Waste and Recycling Arrangements

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors: Dave Banks (Chair) Alan Cunliffe, Jeff Fletcher, Rupert Nicols and Keith Roberts .

What we wanted to do

The Cabinet asked the Council's Environment and Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel to undertake a piece of pre-decision scrutiny by looking at the future arrangements for the collection, disposal and recycling of household waste.

The aim of the review was to consult on new proposals that would help deliver targets set out in the Merseyside District Action Plan.

How we did it

- We looked in detail at the Council's current arrangements for waste disposal and recycling and considered a future proposal put forward by Environmental Health for the increased collection disposal and recycling of household waste for all properties.
- We enlisted the help of St Helens Council's Environmental Care Manager and Recycling Manager to provide us with the information and expertise that we needed.
- Site-visits were carried out to look at two examples of specialist kerbside vehicles, which collect a wide range of dry recyclables and food waste.
- We met with Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority (MRWA) and asked for their views on our future proposals.
- We wrote to local Housing Associations enclosing a short questionnaire asking for their views on future proposals.
- An on-line questionnaire was developed and made available to residents and members of staff within the Council.
- We invited local tenant and residents associations to attend a focus group where they could tell us about their experiences and views on recycling in an informal atmosphere.



What we found

- Throughout the review we acknowledged the need for the Council to significantly improve recycling rates in St Helens in order to meet the aspirations of residents to recycle more and also to meet the stretching national targets for recycling and waste minimisation. The targets of meeting 50% recycling rates by 2020 were challenging and would require sustained effort, continual service improvement and innovation by the Council. Without

increased participation from householders and businesses in St Helens there was a risk that the Council would not achieve these targets and substantial fines could be passed on.

- Should the new service be introduced, residents will see a number of positive service changes. The main ones being; all the collections will be on the same day each week, so its easier for residents to remember when to put their refuse/recycling containers out at the kerbside. All current dry recyclables (paper, glass, tins, cans and plastic bottles) would be collected weekly by one vehicle and the vehicle would also collect two new materials; food waste and cardboard. Along with this a managed weekly collection would also be introduced, which meant that residents would put their brown bin out one week and their green bin the other.
- We were encouraged that the introduction of alternate weekly collections, once fully implemented, would have a positive effect on levels of participation in kerbside recycling collections. Research undertaken during the review showed that the highest performing Councils in England had all changed to managed weekly collections and many had introduced food waste collections as an additional service.
- Consultation undertaken with the general public during the course of this review indicated that the proposals to introduce weekly recycling collections would offer more opportunity for residents to recycle and felt that the new service would be easier to understand and resident friendly.

What happens next

Cabinet agreed scrutiny's recommendations and as a result all current dry recyclables (paper, glass, tins, cans and plastic bottles) and food waste and cardboard will from Autumn 2013, be collected on a weekly basis.

A managed weekly collection, resulting in residents putting out their brown bin one week and their green bin the next will be implemented together with same day recycling and waste collections for residents.

During Autumn a weekly collection and recycling of food waste will be introduced.

It was also agreed that a marketing plan for implementation of the proposals be developed and delivered and that this would be shared with the Task Group at the earliest opportunity.

Review of Domestic Violence

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors: Paul Lynch (Chair) Alan Cunliffe, Sandra Dyer, Pat Ireland and Jimmy Jackson.

What we wanted to do

The aim of the review was to investigate the Council's provision of services with regards to domestic violence and partnership working. We wanted to consider the development of St Helens's approach to tackling domestic violence and evaluate the impact of the current commissioned service and assess it's performance as to:

- Supporting victims of Domestic Violence
- Supporting victims through the criminal justice system
- Engagement parameters for Priority victims

How we did it

- We enlisted the help of Wendy Wright the Council's Domestic Violence Coordinator and Rod Jones Safer Communities Manager.
- We looked at background information with regards to our Domestic Violence services (DV) and that of partnership organisations.
- We met with representatives from the partnership organisations to discuss their roles.
- The task & finish group visited the Domestic Violence refuge and spoke to a victim of Domestic Violence.
- We reviewed the Council's Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy 2011-2013.
- We considered working practices in other Local Authorities to identify any best practice.

What we found

- As with all Council services, funding streams are being reduced and efficiencies are being made across the board. Clarity with regards to funding was required because if there was an expectation that Independent Domestic Violence Advocate provision was to be commissioned from the Community Safety Partnership grant fund this could present considerable pressures on other crime and disorder priorities.
- Although a great number of referrals are made, numbers of male referrals are low. We felt that an awareness campaign aimed at males could be established to encourage male victims to report cases of Domestic Violence and that our partnership agencies could also be encouraged to promote this. This should also be aimed at other minority groups.
- It was evident that the MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) process was central to establishing the safety of the victims and their families and that St. Helens was in a privileged position in having this facility. St. Helens's MARAC process was considered best practice and was an essential service. Our attendance at the MARAC meeting

evidenced that close partnership working was crucial to maintaining the service at its current standard. However, we felt that further improvements could be made to the service by introducing an electronic system / database so that all relevant agencies could be informed and updated on key decisions made, on a more timely and efficient basis.

- The Domestic Violence refuge facility in St.Helens was of an excellent standard, victims could be assured that the refuge was secure and staffed on a 24/7 basis. There was an opportunity for the victims to obtain the help and support they required to help them rebuild their lives. The newly opened building is located in an ideal location to provide security and ease of access to St.Helens facilities.
- Whilst there was a variety of support offered for victims of Domestic Violence, it was noted that most of this was during working hours (9-5) and was not always convenient for those people in full time employment.

What happens next

We have submitted our final report including a number of recommendations to Cabinet and are awaiting feedback.

Review of Flood Defences

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors: Dave Banks (Chair) David Monk, Jimmy Jackson and Joe De'Asha.

We are currently undertaking a review of Flood Defences in the Borough and through this will contribute to the Council's newly developed Flood Defences Strategy.

Work is continuing with this and we hope to have completed this by the end of August 2013.

Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel



Chairman Councillor Sheila Seddon

Review of the Council's Town Centre Car Parking Arrangements

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors: Sheila Seddon (Chairman) Andy Bowden, Carol Anne Gill, Allan Jones and Joanne Willmitt.

What we wanted to do

The Regeneration, Housing, Culture & Leisure Overview & Scrutiny Panel agreed to look at Car Parking facilities in St.Helens town centre.

With increasing numbers of vehicles present on our roads and people demanding value for money we felt it was important that as a Council we offered good value services, which provided a safe and secure environment for our residents and visitors.

How we did it

- We enlisted the help of Steve Littler the Council's Estate's Manager and Bob McAllister Parking Services Manager.
- We looked at background information with regards to our own parking provision and that of neighbouring authorities.
- We visited neighbouring local authorities town centres to compare their car parking facilities, these included Warrington, Widnes and Wigan.
- We spoke to members of the public at two of our car parking sites.

What we found

- St.Helens has a wide variety of car parks available that are located close to the town centre. These are convenient for shopping, leisure and also for business appointments. The car parks are placed evenly around the town centre and are a mix of surface and multi storey. There is also a mix of long and short stay car parks.
- Road traffic signs directing customers to the car parks are not apparent until you are in the heart of the town centre, and don't always give the customer adequate time to choose which car park is more convenient and if there are adequate spaces. There are several electronic signs (Variable Message Signs) around the centre, which could also be utilised to promote car parking and any special offers such as 'free after three'.
- There are allocated disabled parking bays at each car park, however charges do apply. It was noted that at other neighbouring town centres, car parking for Blue Badge holders within car parks was free of charge. Blue Badge holders can also park on the streets of St.Helens in designated areas free of charge.
- It was recognised that there are insufficient parent and child spaces within our car parks. Discussions with the public identified that it can prove difficult to secure children and prams in vehicles when they are parked in normal sized bays.

- It was evident that St.Helens car parks have some of the cheapest rates compared to neighbouring town centres. The ‘free after three’ scheme is popular and free parking on Saturdays on the run up to Christmas will assist the shoppers in St Helens.

What happened next

We were pleased to hear that Variable Message Signs (VMS) have already been used and will continue to be used to display information regarding Town Centre car parks, free after 3 and match day parking. Four additional VMS signs will be erected shortly to increase opportunities to promote Town Centre parking.

A review will be undertaken shortly by the service area which will:

- establish how other authorities address the issue of designated family parking
- provide cost estimates to improve access in and around the pay stations
- Improve payment methods
- Look at motorcycle parking
- Examine payment options for permits

We expect to receive the response to this review in July 2013

Welfare Reform

Who sat on the Task Group Councillors: Andy Bowden (Chairman) Alan Cunliffe and Sheila Seddon

What we wanted to do

On the 8th March 2012 the Welfare Reform Act received Royal Assent. The Act 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 can do to support those affected.

The Task Group produced a short report that provided an overview of the key measures in the Welfare Reform Act and a summary of the written evidence provided.

How we did it

- We wanted to look at how the Council and it’s partners were preparing for the reforms and the possible impacts each service area had identified. Each Portfolio Holder provided the task group with a detailed response.
- We also received a presentation and question/answer session from Helena Partnerships and met with the Citizens Advice Bureau to talk about their experiences to date.

What we found

- National welfare reforms are likely to have a significant impact on St Helens particularly in areas with high concentrations of benefit claimants. Approximately 18% of the working age population claim out of work benefits as at January 2012. These people will be affected by the reassessment of Invalidity Benefit and the introduction of Universal Credit but many are also impacted by changes in other benefits they receive, particularly Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefit.
- The welfare reforms are likely to impact differently on different places. The reforms are likely to have a disproportionate impact on those areas with higher concentrations of benefit claimants with subsequent potential knock on effects for local economies and demography. This is likely to include the potential for loss in individual and family income and decreased spending power.
- From the evidence gathered it is clear that the reforms are also likely to impact upon local services. There is particular potential for increased demand for specialist advice around finance, debt and benefits and emergency everyday living services, in addition to the impact on Adult, Children's and Health Services. The challenge of welfare reform comes at a time when cuts are being made to these same types of services and advice provisions.
- There is a likelihood that disabled people and carers will be affected both through the reassessment for Disability Living Allowance and the move to Personal Independent Payments and through the shift to Universal Credit and the tie in of Carers Allowance. The impact of Work Capability Assessment is likely to be highest on people with mental health problems who may not comply with the reassessment process or whose conditions are difficult to assess by generalists.

What happened next

A steering group was set up led by Cllr Cross, this consisted of council staff from Customer Services, Benefits, Housing Strategy, Marketing, Policy, Public Health, Adult Social Care and Children's Services. Initially this group will be looking to ensure that residents of St.Helens, elected members and council staff are aware of the changes and where residents can be signposted to for advice and support. The Council has also written to all residents that will be affected by the abolition of council tax benefit and Housing Benefit. The key message that this group wants to get across is that residents should seek advice as soon as possible and not wait until they are experiencing difficulties.

Also, additional funding for the Citizen's Advice Bureau has been made available for 1.5 additional posts to provide welfare and financial advice and assistance.

Pedal Power

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| Who sat on the Task Group Councillors Steve Glover (Chairman) Sheila Seddon, Allan Jones, Alan Cunliffe and Jimmy Jackson. |
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What we wanted to do

The Task Group agreed to undertake a short review which would explore the provision for cycles in St.Helens and to look at other methods of sustainable transport within the borough.

What we found out

- In January 2011 the Department for Transport announced a £560 million fund to support the equal goals of creating economic growth and cutting carbon through a package of sustainable transport measures, known as 'The Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF)', the funding is spilt 62.5% revenue and 37.5% capital.
- This funding was spilt into small bids of up to £5 million, which was released in two stages and a major bid up to £50 million. All the LSTF funding is awarded through a competitive bidding process.
- St.Helens was awarded funding through 3 successful bids which will run until the end of March 2015,



What happens next

A short report has been produced and we agreed that the Scrutiny Panel would continue to monitor the progress/outcomes of the work. We asked for the Sustainable Transport Team to continue to promote cycling in St.Helens and ensure that all groups of residents are targeted with promotional work. We also requested that consideration be given to the requirement of specialist cycles at the cycle hubs, to ensure all residents could access the service.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission



Chairman Councillor Jeff Fletcher

Scrutiny Training and Development 2012/13

- All Members new to the authority or indeed the Scrutiny function have been given the opportunity to be personally inducted by the Scrutiny Champion and the Scrutiny Manager.
- Two half day sessions on Getting the Most out of Scrutiny Meetings were held in August 2012 and January 2013. The two sessions were attended by 11 Scrutiny Councillors and 3 Co-opted members.
- Various training sessions on working with the Performance Information database were held in September 2012. These sessions allowed scrutiny members to look at up to date performance information and run off dedicated reports where necessary. Reviewing performance information would assist members with identifying key issues and areas of good and not so good performance and would help inform future Scrutiny Panel agendas.
- Building on the success of Scrutiny in St Helens, further training was commissioned which was delivered by Ann Reeder a Consultant with Frontline Consulting in the form of a workshop event held in October 2012. Frontline was requested to deliver development and training activity for the revised arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny that were introduced in 2012.
- Further to this, the Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Panel held a health scrutiny event during March 2013. This event was facilitated by the Transition Alliance and looked at relationships and responsibilities for our health scrutiny panel. The session brought together health scrutiny members, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the CCG and LINKs/Healthwatch.
- In addition, there is a clear role for members of Scrutiny in St Helens 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.

Review of Budget Setting Process 2013/14

Who sat on the Task Group Councillors Jeff Fletcher (Chairman) David Monk, Lynn Glover, Jimmy Jackson, Teresa Sims and Steph Topping.

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. Each Chairman met with portfolio holders and chief officers and examined the Draft Portfolio Spending Plans as part of its scrutiny of the 2013/14 budget setting process. Meetings were also open to other Scrutiny Members.

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 ongoing and the full implications of such reviews on the financial position, on jobs, and on service delivery remained to be quantified.

During the meetings with Portfolio Holders the role of Scrutiny was recognised as a valuable resource in reviewing approaches to service delivery. We believe that we have a key role to play in promoting effective and efficient service delivery against a backdrop of reduced funding and looked forward to working with the Cabinet in supporting any service reviews allocated to us.

Digital Divide – Technology and the Two Tier Society

Who sat on the Task Group Councillors Anthony Johnson (Chairman) Steve Glover, Jeff Fletcher and Jimmy Jackson.

What we wanted to do

As a task group we wanted to assess the extent of the digital divide in St Helens and how as a council we could overcome the key barriers to connectivity and communications technology for our residents.

How we did it

- We had a background presentation which explained the current council services that are available on line.
- We undertook desktop research – what were the real benefits? - how easy was it to get access and what gaps could be identified.

- We also undertook a Channel analysis in respect of the statistics as to the current use of the Council's website

What we found

- We recognised the need to respond to the challenge set out by Government, with little or no extra resources to enable us to do so. However what we do have is technology, expertise and *some* resources, which would help increase the take up of our online services. It is important that we make the commitment as an authority to do that by releasing the simplest of solutions as digital options.
- The Government are undertaking the project relentlessly, with services that traditionally have been presented face to face, or by paper etc are now becoming a digital experience only. They are aiming for a blended approach, but with an emphasis on digital solutions.
- We have to concede that whilst we can increase our take-up, we are always going to have a factor of our demographic, which is unable or doesn't want to use our services in this way. In order that the digital divide does not become a chasm, we must ensure that our services and our systems can cater for this element of our customer base, as well as encouraging local initiatives to assist in helping realise an increase in take-up and availability of digital services and access to them.
- Although a key point of contact for our customers, the web site is not the only mechanism of contact that should be considered when addressing the digital services conundrum.
- Our customers are from all walks of life and need to address business with the Council on their own time and by their preferred method. This could be the traditional telephone call and the need to speak to someone, or by using the web site presented by their PC or through their mobile device.
- As a Council, we need to recognise the fact that our services need to present their business consistently over any 'mode of transport' in a manner suitable for the needs and sometimes, ability of our customers.
- Whilst considering our approach to delivery, we must understand the different levels of ability, requirements and culture of our Customers, when using our services.
- We have made substantial investments in technology solutions in our local libraries. These are well used and available. The use of such outlets should be promoted to our services, as a mechanism of delivery of the guidance and support required for participating members of our public.
- The future is a challenge, and whilst there are efficiencies in delivering services in this way, the initial costs and resources required to achieve those efficiencies and solutions need to be carefully considered and appraised against the benefits of doing so.

What happens next

A report has been produced setting out a number of recommendations. This will be considered by Cabinet in June.

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.

The Panel regularly reports to the Audit and Governance Committee on its work and highlights, where necessary, any areas of concern.

The Panel have also introduced 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 of internal financial and audit processes and procedures.

How Scrutiny Has Made a Difference

Problem debts and Loan Sharks

In 2012 we carried out a review of Problem Debts and Loan Sharks. This review could not have been undertaken at a more timely moment. In the midst of an economic crisis we were able to consider whether the advice and support services in St Helens were effectively supporting those in financial difficulty and what, if anything we could do as a Council to improve things.

We are pleased to report that Financial Inclusion is well embedded into the St Helens Plan and related Statutory and Service Plans. This means that all future plans and strategies will have a more strategic overview that will set out how as a Council, working with our partners, we are going to deal with the issue of financial inclusion. In addition to this a working group is being set up to develop a school based strategy to address the issue of Financial Literacy within the school curriculum.

St Helens CAB has had a close working relationship with the Local Authority for many years regarding debt recovery. Thanks to this collaborative working, a new referral protocol has been established to assist clients who are experiencing difficulties maintaining Council Tax payments. This goes a long way in promoting joint working between agencies and provides a better service for our residents.

Community Use of School Sports Facilities

Scrutiny were keen to see more high schools in the borough promoting more effective community use of their sports facilities. We recognised that developing effective community use of school facilities involved much more than simply opening the doors. The challenge was to promote and manage community use in ways that would achieve worthwhile results in terms of sport and generate school and community benefits without being in any way detrimental to the financial running of the facility or socially exclusive.

We are pleased to report that since undertaking the review the Council is in negotiations with National Lottery and a Grant of over £100k is to be awarded. This grant will go towards funding a full time post to encourage community use of school sport facilities.

A copy of this report was also considered by the Governors Forum earlier in the year, encouraging Head Teachers to promote better community use of their sport facilities.

Review of the Council's Recycling Arrangements

In 2010/11 the Environment and Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel carried out an in depth review into increasing participation rates in recycling. Following on from this and as requested by Cabinet, members of the Panel undertook a piece of pre-decision scrutiny and looked at the Council's current waste management arrangements. This was our first piece of pre-scrutiny work.

Review of Allotments

Last year we undertook a review of the Council's Allotments and looked at the criteria and take up process of renting an allotment in St Helens. We also wanted to look at self managed allotments and whether we felt it was a suitable way forward for the Council's allotment service.

We are pleased to report that the Council has now revised all Tenancy Agreements and has reviewed the fees and charges for 2013/14. The policy and rules for allotments have also been revised which will result in the Council maximizing the number of smaller plots available. Funding previously used on providing skips to sites will now be used for site improvements

The Year Ahead

This year we received around 30 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 was 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 2013/14. We will allow for flexibility within the programme which will enable us to consider any issues that arise throughout the year.

Scrutiny Work Programme 2013/14

| Overview and Scrutiny Panel | Initial Topics Selected for Review |
|--|--|
| Commission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Scrutiny • Staff ID Badges • Support for Ex-service Personnel |
| Audit and Financial Monitoring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget and Performance Monitoring – Corporate Financial Report • Internal Audit Plan 13/14 • Internal Audit Reports and Follow Ups |
| Health and Adult Social Care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A&E why do people present themselves? • Health Provision for people with Autism • Tobacco |
| Children and Young People's Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEET • Adoption Services (joint review) • Physical Activity in Children • Breakfast and After school clubs |
| Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Demise of Local Shopping Centres • Emerging Housing Needs |
| Safer Communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti Social Behaviour and Delinquent Youth Groups • Probation Trust and re-offending and the use of Restorative Justice |

Contact Us

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

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