



St. Helens Council

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11

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Chairman's Foreword

I am pleased to introduce our 2010/11 Overview and 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. The Scrutiny 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 affect them.

Looking back over the year our work was varied and wide ranging from the review of St Mary's Market, to working with our partners looking at how we can improve mental health services in times of crisis. We have delivered a full work programme, covering a wide range of issues.

I would like to place on record our gratitude to the councillors, co-opted members and officers - from both within the council and from partner organisations that have helped us to complete these reviews. There is no doubt that the work of the various panels can be time consuming, because it not only requires attendance at meetings but also there are site visits and a great deal of research to be undertaken. My thanks go to those councillors who took up these challenges of not only collecting evidence but separating fact from fiction. I would also like to recognise the constructive 'critical friend' relationship that has developed over time between the Scrutiny Panels and the Cabinet, which I feel will lead to further positive outcomes for the Council and local people.

Scrutiny members get out and about in the borough and look thoroughly at the quality of services provided by the Council and how other service providers affect the lives of the people of St Helens. This report sets out work conducted and achievements for each of the scrutiny panels in 2010/11.



Councillor Brian Spencer

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2010/2011

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 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 2010/11 the following councillors and co-opted members have served on the Scrutiny Panels:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Remit in Brief	Membership 2009/10
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 Brian Spencer (Ch) Cllrs R Ayres, D Banks, G Cross, K Deakin, J Fletcher, L Maloney, L McGuire K Roberts, D Kent, S Knight, T Sims, Cllr Steph Topping, W Ashcroft and B Lowe Co-opted Members Rev D Hall, Rev T Neylon, A Wellens-Heron,

<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 Leon McGuire (Ch)</p> <p>Cllrs P Martinez-Williams, P McQuade, M Quinn, P Astbury, S Knight, J Sheldon and B Lowe</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 Steph Topping (Ch)</p> <p>Cllrs R Ayres/A Bacon J Fletcher, S Glover, P Martinez-Williams, M Quinn, B Spencer and D Monk</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 S Knight (Ch)</p> <p>Cllrs J Fletcher, L Glover, P Martinez-Williams, R McCauley, S Seddon, S Evans, S Knight and N Ashcroft.</p> <p>Co-opted Members</p> <p>Rev D Hall, Rev T Neylon, A Welland-Heron,</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 D Banks (Ch)</p> <p>Cllrs R Ayres, K Deakin, L Maloney, J Beirne, K Knowles, T Sims and D Grice</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 W Ashcroft (Ch)</p> <p>Cllrs B Anderton, G Cross, C Gill, S Glover, K Roberts, D Kent and Stephen Topping</p>

How do we decide what work to do?

Each Committee develops its own work programme for the year which is then agreed 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, the Primary Care Trust, 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



Councillor Leon McGuire (Chairman 2010/11)

Care of People with Mental Health Issues in Times of Crisis

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors

Suzanne Knight
Patricia Martinez-Williams
Janet Sheldon

Co-opted members

Roman Babij – St Helens Local Involvement Network (LINK)

What we wanted to do

Most of us have had some experience of mental health problems through family, community or work and because of this we wanted to look at how people who are suffering from mental health issues are helped in times of crisis.

The Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Panel appointed a task and finish group who wanted to find out if crisis services were meeting the needs of the people and if they were easily accessible and effective.

How we did it

We carried out the review by meeting with various parties involved in working with mental health users and those same users with mental health issues.

We interviewed staff and managers from key agencies such as Primary Care Trust, 5 Boroughs Partnership, Knowsley and St Helens Hospital Trust, Police and Adult Social Care.

We spoke with service users and representatives such as St Helens Mental Health Forum.

We received and considered briefing papers and details of health legislation and various case studies that were brought to the group.

What we found out

There is still confusion as to individual definitions of crisis. Service users and carers have their own view of what they believe constitutes a crisis whilst the different agencies who deal with these can only work within their own definitions. Whilst we appreciate the complexity we believe that clearer explanations will go some way towards improving the communication gap between service users and mental health services.

We heard that there was sometimes confusion and poor communication about how people get to where they want to be and access the right information. This was particularly noticeable in cases where a person was previously unknown to mental health services.

There appears to be confusion around people knowing where to get correct information from. A service user may self refer to the 'Open Mind' service. If a service user is not known to the team or not on their list, they do not always respond themselves and ask the person to contact either their GP or the police, depending on the severity of the situation. It was felt by some that those service users who were 'new' to the crisis team tended to receive a less helpful service.

Information sharing between different agencies continues to be problematic. There were still issues with accessing the 'Otter' System by the Emergency Duty Team which made information sharing between the Local Authority and 5 Boroughs more difficult.

It was acknowledged that some crisis episodes could be avoided by being managed more robustly by agencies picking up early warning signs and intervening and offering support at an earlier stage.

Improvements to services for those with a dual diagnosis (mental disorder with a drug/alcohol programme are required).

We heard that not all service users were aware of what was on their care plan and had not had access to it. Everyone experiencing secondary care should have a care plan which should be signed as per the guidance.

To date there had been little consistent monitoring or auditing processes to ensure the appropriate use and evaluation of Section 136, however we were pleased to hear that this was now to be undertaken by Merseyside Police. Details of how often this would be reported on and to whom was yet to be established.

What happens next

We grouped our findings into three main themes, raising awareness, communication and good practice and came up with a number of recommendations which were submitted to Cabinet and subsequently forwarded to the relevant agencies.

As a result of the recommendations from the scrutiny review a number of areas are being progressed, including a review of the way in which mental health services work and assessment service provision including out of hours, the development of a tier 2 Information Sharing Protocol, the development of a joint protocol in respect of Section 135 and 136 of the Mental Health Act and all service users of the Crisis Resolution Team will have the opportunity to feedback via patient experience questionnaires. We believe that these improvements to services will go a long way in improving mental health services for people in times of crisis.

Review of Dignity in Care Homes

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors

Betty Lowe
Patricia Martinez-Williams
Paul McQuade
Marlene Quinn

Co-opted members

Brenda Smith – St Helens Local Involvement Network (LINK)

What we wanted to do

Look at how older people who reside in care homes in St Helens are treated with dignity and find out if any improvements could be made which would enhance their quality of life.

How we did it

We carried out desktop research to get background information about dignity nationally and locally.

We looked at the Council's contracts with private care home providers, focusing on aspects relating to dignity.

The Council's Safeguarding Unit told us about the work they carry out and the services that they provide.

Visits were carried out to the following care homes; St Helens Hall and Lodge, Victoria Care Home, Broad Oak Manor, Prospect House and Parr Nursing Home.

We spoke with residents, carers and members of staff at each of the homes, to uncover their experiences and views.

The Council's Intelligence and Outcomes Unit provided us with information about the service they deliver and the quality monitoring visits they undertake. .

What we found out

There is a great deal of legislation in place to protect the rights of people who are resident in care and nursing homes. There are also a whole raft of standards that providers have to reach which are based around services and buildings, yet, the issue of treating people with dignity, whilst referred to, is not detailed specifically within the contracts the Council has with providers.

We are very pleased with the development of a Monitoring Toolkit, by the Intelligence and Outcome Team, to formally monitor aspects of dignity in care homes. The standards set-out in the toolkit relating to dignity offer clear practical guidance on how residents in care homes should be treated. We think it would be worthwhile to have these standards incorporated into new contracts.

During our visits we found some excellent examples of how care homes promote the dignity of residents. From the findings of the visits we undertook we feel that there is opportunity to further enhance the experiences of residents in relation to dignity and that these could be monitored via Quality Monitoring Visits undertaken by the Council's Intelligence and Outcome Unit.

The residents we spoke with praised staff who work in the home and we observed some excellent working relationships between staff and residents. In addition, it was obvious that the members of staff we spoke to were passionate about ensuring resident's dignity was constantly maintained and promoted throughout all aspects of the care residents receive. We feel that this good work could be expanded further, by ensuring that each home appoints a dignity champion, to take responsibility for promoting dignity throughout the home.

In the past, a provider forum existed, where health and social care providers could meet, discuss common issues and share best practice. We found that this group had ceased meeting, yet in the past had proved valuable to health and social care providers.

What happens next

The report is due to be submitted to Cabinet in October 2011. We hope that the recommendations we made, particularly in relation to the Council's contracts and monitoring role regarding care homes, will greatly enhance the quality and experiences of older people who reside in care homes in St Helens.

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel



Councillor Suzanne Knight (Chairman 2010/11)

Review of Alternative Education Providers for Disaffected Children

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors

Suzanne Knight (Chairman)
Nancy Ashcroft
Jeff Fletcher
Lynne Glover

What we wanted to do

The Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel set up a Task Group to examine how to improve learning opportunities for all learners enrolled at key stage 4 and improve cohesion of delivery of alternative education across St Helens

How we did it

To assist with the review we enlisted the help of Joh Ellis the 14-19 Strategy Manager and her team, local alternative providers, local schools, and the young people themselves.

We also conducted site visits to St Aelred's Catholic Technology College, St Augustine's Secondary School and St Helens College's Collaborative Skills Centre where we met with learners who had been involved in Alternative Education

We spoke with key workers, teachers and learning mentors to get a feel for their views on how alternative education worked.

What we found out

From the evidence we gathered we saw alternative education as a very valuable asset for those young people who had lost their way in the school. We found that

there was a great deal of hard work taking place in delivering out of school and alternative education across the Borough, by the Council, the schools' themselves, key support workers and the many alternative education providers.

There are probably gaps in certain areas and no doubt some barriers do exist around the cohesion of delivery of alternative education, however we believed that the alternative education team were working extremely hard to put procedures in place to make the provision cohesive, smoother and more equitable.

We were particularly impressed with the intervention methods adopted by most schools and believed that tackling problems at an early stage can go a long way towards preventing disaffection. Many young people had a hard time at home and school was the only outlet for them. Engaging with them early and taking the time to listen and deal with the issues would pay dividends in the future for both the schools and the young people themselves.

All the facilities visited by the task group were of a very high quality and provided excellent facilities and opportunities for disengaged young people. Many different courses were catered for including hair and beauty, woodwork, painting and decorating, engineering and motor vehicle engineering and enabled a smooth transition should they choose to continue with the courses in further education.

Throughout the site visits and whilst talking to the young people themselves it became very clear that the key workers and learning mentors assigned to each young person was a crucial element to the success of the various schemes. Young people in alternative education often felt they had no one to talk to and key workers and learning mentors were able to fulfil this role by providing much needed educational and emotional support.

What Happens Next

A copy of the full report and a list of recommendations was submitted to the Cabinet for consideration. We are pleased to report that learner reviews are being completed 6 weekly and becoming more robust and effective. Also, despite the significant reduction to external funding the Key Worker role is being maintained and developed by CYPS as it was clearly a function valued by schools, providers, learners and parents. In addition to this the Alternative Education Team are developing an appropriate inclusive curriculum offer which will be available to all learners via the referral process or Collaborative programme.

The Task Group will be also be attending the award ceremony in the summer of 2011 to celebrate the success of the young people undertaking alternative education.

Review of Education Provision for Teenage Parents

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors

Suzanne Knight (Chair)
Jeff Fletcher

How we did it

The Scrutiny Panel agreed to look at how the Council and its partners could improve education and training support opportunities offered to pregnant teenagers and teenage parents across St Helens. We did this by enlisting the help of Michelle Davies the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Manager and her team, local providers, local schools, and the young people themselves.

What we found out

We heard from project workers that many young women wanted a better life for their babies than they had experienced and recognised their role in making the right choices to sustain this ambition for their babies.

Teenage mothers need a range of support to enable them to return to education. Access to the right benefits and suitable housing for girls who have had to move out of the family home were essential pre-requisites. Help with transport was also important, but most of all, young women need to be able to access suitable childcare which they feel confident about using.

Because there has not, historically been a standard educational approach, very little data is available to identify measurably successful practice in educational support for teenage mothers

Funding for childcare allowed young mothers to complete courses, attend long-term courses and gain qualifications. Seventy five percent of young parents surveyed in the national evaluation felt that they could not have enrolled on a course without Care to Learn paying for childcare.

The concept of maternity leave, giving women the right to take time off work to recover from the birth, breastfeed and bond with their baby does not exist for young mums who are 16 to 18 years old. They currently have little choice about when they return to education

We were extremely pleased to see all agencies offering flexibility within the courses they provided. Many had flexible and frequent start dates and programmes tailored to learners' needs, which helped vulnerable young people to settle back into education or training in an un-intimidating and timely way. Also taster courses and accredited parenting courses were offered which gave previously disengaged young women the confidence and motivation to give education another go.

There was a continued need to offer young mums a range of opportunities, whilst it was important for them to return to school it was important that alternative provision continued to be provided.

Since undertaking the review and following the comprehensive spending review announced by the Coalition Government the AGB funding ceased from 31st March 2011. The Early Intervention Grant replaced this and £149k was allocated to Teenage Pregnancy

What Happens Next

We recommended that funding options be secured to ensure continuation of the supported housing project and that the Teenage Pregnancy coordinator continues to monitor pathways and progression for teen parents via the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and commissioning group.

We believed it was crucial that the tailored support packages for young parents to help them access healthcare, parenting skills, education and childcare and housing be continued to be developed.

Also, in addition to school, it was important that a wide range of options continued to be provided for young mums returning to education.

We look forward to further work being undertaken to explore work based placements for those young mums over the age of 16.

A copy of the full report and associated recommendations is due to be submitted to the Cabinet for their consideration. The Panel is looking forward to their response

Environment and Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel



Councillor Dave Banks (Chairman 2010/11)

Review of Increasing Participation in Recycling of Household Waste

Who sat on the task group

Councillors

Dave Banks (Chair)
Teresa Sims
Ken Knowles

How we did it

The Environment and Safer communities panel appointed a Task Group to review the then current arrangements for recycling of household waste and assess how participation, particularly in the lower performing areas of the borough could be increased.

We conducted site visits to Merseyside Waste Authority in Bidston, Acumen Recycling Operations in Stoke on Trent and Mossborough Hall Farm in St Helens.

We also developed a questionnaire which was distributed widely to residents of St Helens and placed on the Council's Internet pages.

We invited local residents to attend a focus group and a coffee-morning where they could share their experiences and views on recycling whilst in an informal atmosphere.

We considered how other Councils in the country approached recycling and used this information to gauge whether St Helens' current system was the most effective.

What we found out

We found that there was a preference divide amongst residents between Co-mingled and Kerbside Sort. Some residents preferred Co-mingle as it was simpler and didn't require as many bins yet others preferred Kerbside Sort because it allowed a larger range of waste to be recycled as well as providing a 'responsibility' element. It was felt that Co-mingled would perhaps lead to an increase in recycling rates however we

believed that the initial cost to introduce the scheme was inappropriate in the current financial climate.

We felt it was essential for children and young people to be aware of sustainability issues and should be encouraged to value the benefits of recycling from a young age. We were particularly pleased with the work being done in schools to educate children and felt this could be further enhanced by greater governor and school council involvement.

What happens next

As a result of the Panels recommendations, a further review of recycling will be carried out in 2014 when the financial climate may allow for investment in a Co-mingled collection. There will also be a new approach to textile recycling and the offer of cardboard recycling where there is currently no green bin service.

An analysis of the collection round is due to be undertaken by July 2011 which will identify any improvements to service such as special collections for those whose collection day falls on a Bank Holiday and more options for those who have no space for green bins.

We are hopeful that the recommendations made in the review will result in an increase in recycling rates in St Helens now and in the future.

Energy Management and Carbon Reduction in Council Buildings

Who sat on the task group

Councillors

Dave Banks (Chair)
Gareth Cross
Ken Knowles
Teresa Sims

What we wanted to do

The Panel wished to review the current arrangements for energy management and reduction of carbon emissions within Council buildings and to provide an understanding of how the Carbon Reduction Strategy intends to identify the methodology behind the reductions.

In recent years carbon emissions and other environmental issues have become prominent issues within the public eye. Individuals and Organisations alike have been taking the responsibility to reduce their negative impact on the environment more seriously and with more commitment. For St.Helens Council it is important to be seen as a socially responsible authority and reducing energy use and carbon emissions is an area where improvements can have a significant impact of the Council's image. With the introduction of the carbon reduction commitment which currently costs the authority approximately £300,000, as well as rising fuel costs, there was also a financial incentive to reduce carbon emissions within Council buildings.

How we did it and what we found out

The Panel appointed a task and finish group and held meetings with officers within the Council responsible for this area. We also undertook site visits to various council premises.

During the review it was suggested that staff awareness would be more effective than staff training in reducing energy use. We felt that simply telling staff how to reduce energy use would not encourage them to do so whereas making them aware of the benefits could encourage staff to be conscious of reducing their energy use.

We believed that performance data on energy use should also be provided to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel to keep Scrutiny informed on energy performance. This would allow Scrutiny to track performances and hold the Council to account on its commitment to energy management and carbon reduction.

We also felt that a communications plan encompassing all energy management and carbon reduction issues would help to promote energy efficiency within council buildings and show the residents of St Helens the positive steps being taken to reduce energy use and carbon emissions.

In addition we believed that an Energy Champion amongst governors would help to raise the profile of energy use as an issue for schools.

A copy of the full report is due to be submitted to Cabinet shortly.

Pride in St Helens, a Spot Light Review of Grot Spots in St Helens

Who sat on the task group

Councillors
Linda Maloney (Chair)
John Beirne
Teresa Sims

What we wanted to do

At a meeting of the Environment and Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel a task group was appointed to undertake a short spotlight review to find out what legislation was in place regarding grot spots and what was being done in St Helens to prevent fly-tipping and littering on both public and private land. We were interested to know if there were any Environmental Hot Spots in St Helens and what was being done to target these areas.

How we did it and what we found out

We held a meeting with the Environmental Care Manager to discuss fly-tipping in St Helens and what was or could be done to tackle the issue. Data was provided on the number of fly-tipping incidents dealt with by the Council in 2010/11.

We were informed that fly-tipping levels in St Helens were low compared to the national trends. The Town Centre and West Park were identified as having the most incidents due to the larger number of terraced properties but these levels were still low.

We were pleased to hear about the good work being done by the Probation Team to clear grot spots but felt more needed to be done to promote bulky rubbish collection and proper disposal of residential waste.

As a result of the spotlight exercise we made several recommendations including increased promotion of civic pride and the bulky rubbish collection service. It was also recommended that the Council find a way to provide funding for the Probation Team to enable the continuation of the excellent work. These have been submitted to Cabinet and we are awaiting their response.

Whilst we were pleased with the work being done we felt that there was always room for improvement and would hope to see fly-tipping levels reduced.

A copy of our report and subsequent recommendations has been submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Wally Ashcroft (Chairman 2010/11)

Review of St Mary's Market

Who sat on the Task Group

Councillors

Wally Ashcroft (Chair)

Carol Ann Gill

Stephen Glover

Keith Roberts

What we wanted to do

During the boom in supermarkets there has been a decline in traditional markets across the country due to lower footfall and lower occupancy of market stalls. In recent years St Mary's Market has seen a similar decline in stalls holders and footfall which has resulted in the Market making a loss. However there are lots of examples where markets have managed to thrive in these times and the task group wanted to explore these instances to help develop ideas for improvements to St Mary's Market.

How we did it

We conducted several site visits to Markets that had recently been renovated and were considered good examples of how a market could thrive. We visited Accrington, Windes and Bury markets to speak to their respective market managers.

We also visited St Mary's Market to speak with traders to get their opinions on what they felt was required to improve the market.

We met with Officers from Marketing, Transport and the Chamber of Commerce to discuss the viability of ideas that had been generated, whilst undertaking the review.

What we found out

During various meetings we found that there were many organisations that had an interest in the Market performing well. We believed that as a Council we should take advantage of these interests to build relationships that would benefit the Market.

What happens next

We are pleased to report that as a result of the recommendations made, some changes are already being implemented by the Council such as the removal of empty stalls, regular meetings between markets and St Helens Chamber are being held, a reduction in stall charges and a benchmarking exercise is currently being undertaken to compare rents with other markets in the North West

Links are also being investigated with schools and colleges to encourage young people into the market and work is being undertaken with the council's marketing department to see how the image can be improved to appeal to the younger generation. A Young Enterprise Event is also being considered.

Review of Business Start Up Costs

Who sat on the task group

Councillors

Bill Anderton (Chair)
Gareth Cross
David Kent

Co-opted Member

Simon Skidmore Community Empowerment Network

What we wanted to do

The task group wished to clarify if it was more expensive to start a business in St Helens than in neighbouring authorities, bearing in mind the lack of evidence/clarity in respect of the initial issue raised by the CEN at the Scrutiny Workshop.

How we did it and what we found out

The Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel undertook a spotlight review on costs of business start-ups. The Panel subsequently appointed a Task Group and invited St Helens Chamber to attend their meeting in July where they received a presentation on its role in promoting and supporting new business start-ups. Due to the complexity of the topic area it became apparent that there was a distinct lack of data which would allow for like for like cost comparisons due to the variety of the factors depending on the size or nature of the business concerned. However it was shown that the general costs for start-ups (via the Chamber) were favourable when compared to other areas and survival rates of new businesses.

The task group has found that despite extensive research, there is no evidence, both statistically or anecdotally to suggest it is more expensive to start up a business in St Helens.

The business density rate of change as at 2009 has remained consistent with Merseyside and the North West (see page 2) at 2%. Up to now there has been an

increasing reliance in St Helens on employment by the public sector from 13.6% to 15.8%. Whilst the 2% increase in business density has been able to bridge the gap, it is doubtful that this rate of change in the private sector will meet the needs of the predicted losses of public sector jobs. Should business density increase at the same rate, current theories suggest that if growth remains the same then it could take up to 20 years to meet this. If the shock of the predicted dramatic cuts reverses this trend, then this could take much longer.

The business environment remains more difficult than assumed when the LEGI programme was drafted. This makes creating new businesses and new jobs harder than anticipated.

The harsher business environment, credit crunch and business cash flow issues (and the knock on effect on business confidence) also make it much harder to get local businesses to make major investments and to engage firms in programmes and projects, especially where the payback (i.e. financial returns) may take some time to emerge.

What happens next

We felt it was important that the Council and Chamber continue to seek out and secure alternative funding streams in light of the cessation of LEGI funding after March 2011 and where applicable, the programme of initiatives undertaken via LEGI funding be mainstreamed into the delivery of plans of other partners. We are pleased to hear that where grants are available they are being applied for and used to continue with these programmes.

We recommended in our report that the Council and the Chamber continue to develop work with local schools and businesses to build on the success of the Enterprising St Helens projects, We are pleased to report that funding has been sourced to continue this programme however, due to the loss of LEGI and other cuts this will be at a reduced level

Overview and Scrutiny Commission



Councillor Brian Spencer (Chairman 2010/11)

Review of Budget Setting Process 2011/12

In the current economic climate members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission wanted to make sure that they 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 2011/12 budget setting process.

We recognised the difficult financial climate against which the spending plans had been developed and acknowledged the detailed work that has 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, 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.

We requested that the outcomes of current key reviews arising from the zero based budgeting initiatives and cessation of grant funding be presented to the appropriate Scrutiny panels to allow them to comment on any recommendations. In particular, Scrutiny was keen to understand the impact on service delivery of reviews into the School Improvement Service, Behaviour Improvement Service, the SureStart Service and Waste Collection Services.

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 service reviews.

Audit and Financial Monitoring Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Stephanie Topping (Chairman 2010/11)

The Audit and Financial Monitoring Panel, chaired by Councillor Steph Topping 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.

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

Developing Scrutiny in St Helens

This annual report highlights the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees. We want to build on this during the forthcoming year, and ensure that Scrutiny continues to recommend improvements to public services and through this, make a real difference to users of those services.

In particular we want to focus on ensuring engagement with the key partners in the borough and with local people and our work programme for 2010/11 will reflect their priorities.

Scrutiny needs to add value in the work it carries out and including the views and experiences of residents is key to this. We will work hard to make sure that anyone has the opportunity to get involved should they wish to.

We will continue to work more effectively with our partners on scrutiny and continue to challenge our Executive members in a constructive way and make recommendations that result in positive outcomes for local people.

We will also continue to build good working relationships with our colleagues from health, police and community organisations.

The Year Ahead

This year we received around 30 suggestions for topics which should be the subject of scrutiny during the coming year. Some of these suggestions came from members of our community 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 2011/12

Scrutiny Work Programme 2011/12

Overview and Scrutiny Panel	Topics Selected for Review
Adult Social Care and Health	Employment of People with Learning Difficulties Caring for Carers (Joint review with CYPS Panel)
Children and Young People's Services	Corporate Parenting/Transition of Young People to Adult Social Care and Health Support for Young Carers (Joint review with ASC&H Panel) Use of School Facilities Outside of School Hours (Joint Review with Regen Panel)
Environment and Safer Communities	Problem Debts and Loan Sharks Allotments
Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure	Contraction of the Night Time Economy Use of Playing Fields (Joint Review with CYPS Panel)

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

If you think there's a service or an issue that is in need of scrutiny, please complete the form below and return it FREEPOST

The following issue/service is in need of scrutiny

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Please state why

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Name

Address.....

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