



Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2019-2020

Chair's Forward

I would like to start the introduction of the 2019-20 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report by paying tribute and thanking the following people; James Young (Scrutiny Officer), Cllr Fee Wilson (Deputy Chair) and all the councillors and council staff whose dedication and commitment is unquestionable.

The municipal year of 2019/2020 will never be forgotten, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing ongoing pandemic has changed every aspect of our lives and the way Copeland Borough Council operates for the foreseeable future. From our directly elected Mayor, all the councillors and every council employee whose flexibility and adaptability to change is a shining beacon in our community, I thank you.

We held eight Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) meetings from June 2019 until February 2020 when events overtook us. All of the OSC committee members attended a fantastic Scrutiny training course organised by our officer James.

This pandemic and subsequent lockdown has highlighted the importance of one of our ongoing working group on facilities and social well-being for the older persons and we hope to carry on this work whenever that is possible.

Overview and scrutiny will be crucial in ensuring that Copeland's recovery from the pandemic is robust and will continue to ensure transparency and accountability in the decision making process. This will ensure that Copeland and its communities come back better and stronger from this crisis.



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Welcome to the 2019-20 Annual Report on the overview and scrutiny function of Copeland Borough Council (CBC). This report will detail the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC).

1.2 Scrutiny is one of the main checks and balances to the power of the Executive. The key roles of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are:

- **Ensuring the Executive is accountable;** this enables more transparent and effective decision making. This includes the power to 'call-in' a decision made by the Executive that has not yet been implemented.
- **Reviewing and developing policies;** the Committee supports the development of effective policies and initiatives through policy review and development.
- **Ensuring the continuous improvement of Council Services;** receiving quarterly performance and finance reports to ensure that the Council is performing to the best of its abilities for its residents.

1.3 In 2019-20 the members of the Copeland Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee were:

- Cllr John Kane (Chair)
- Cllr Felicity Wilson (Deputy Chair)
- Cllr Charles Maudling
- Cllr Gemma Dinsdale
- Cllr Linda Jones-Bulman
- Cllr Eileen Weir
- Cllr Andy Pratt
- Cllr Jeffrey Hailes
- Cllr Sam Meteer
- Cllr Jeanette Forster
- Cllr Sam Pollen

2.0 2019-2020 Highlights

2.1 Constitution changes - Planning

2.1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked by Council on 25th June 2019 to consider the proposed changes to the Planning Section of the Council's Constitution.

2.1.2 Councillors felt that the constitution changes needed to be fully scrutinised by the Committee to ensure that any member's concerns were fully addressed.

2.1.3 The Committee convened on 19th August 2019 for a Special Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to analyse the changes. To ensure that their scrutiny was fully informed the Council Chief Executive, Solicitor and the Planning and Place Manger attended to provide expert input into the discussion.

2.1.4 During the meeting it was resolved that a specific task and finish group should be established to scrutinise the Member's Protocol of the proposed changes.

2.1.5 Outcome

As a result of the scrutiny by the Committee a number of changes were made to the original proposed changes:

- Ward Councillor or Town/Parish Councillors would still be able to call in planning applications even if they are not considered major planning applications in the Scheme of Delegation.
- The removal of a proposed restriction on the number of speakers in support or opposition on any planning application.
- All changes to the section on member's site visits be left unchanged from the existing constitution.
- The creation of a General Protocol for Planning and Licensing members and a Protocol for Site Visits which set standards of attendance, training and expectation for those committees.

2.2 Constitution Changes – Overview and Scrutiny

2.2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the overview and scrutiny chapter of the constitution on 22nd August 2019.

2.2.2 The Committee reviewed the chapter to ensure that it was easy for the public to understand and updated with current legislation.

2.2.3 Outcome

The Committee made a number of key changes:

- Makes clear that the Party Whip is not permitted in Committee.
- The Call-In procedure was updated to ensure that topics that are brought before the committee are valid.
- A requirement for members to undertake training was added to ensure that Scrutiny was

2.3 Disabled Facilities Grants

2.3.1 The Disabled Facilities Grants 2018/19 update was presented to the Committee in March 2020.

2.3.2 The Strategic Housing and Social Inclusion Manager presented the update to the Committee and presented some potential ways forward for the service to maintain its current excellent level of service.

2.3.4 Outcome

The Committee recommended and supported a number of changes to Disabled Facilities Grants as recommended by the Strategic Housing and Social Inclusion Manager including:

- Raising the officer's discretionary limit from an additional £5,000 to £10,000 on Disabled Facilities Grants where costs are over the statutory £30,000 limit for an adaptation.
- Including a means test for children's Disable Facilities Grants that exceed £30,000.
- Include a management charge of five percent for all Disabled Facilities Grants cases.

2.4 Empty Homes

2.4.1 The Empty Homes Officer presented a review of their work since their appointment to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6th February 2020.

2.4.2 The Committee were please what since the appointment of the Empty Homes Officer 213 empty homes have been brought back into use compared with 33 previously.

2.4.3 Outcome

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the Empty Homes Officer in exploring the use of the enforced sales procedure for the worst empty homes cases through a possible pilot project.

3.0 Conclusion and Next Steps

3.1 The primary purpose of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to hold the Executive to account and act as a critical friend and the committee has fulfilled this role throughout the past year. The Committee has had a positive impact on the community its serves and is excited for the future.

3.2 Overview and scrutiny will be critical during the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.3 The Council and its partners will be engaged in a significant amount of activity relating to the operational emergency response; scrutiny cannot second guess this response or seek to “oversee” it – partners will be moving fast and acting accordingly. However, scrutiny can consider how well partners are working together, overseeing the systems that contribute to smooth, and effective decision-making.

3.4 The committee can maintain oversight on matters relating to council finances and act as a conduit for community experiences. To this end, the committee shall be hoping to engage with a wide array of the public and incorporate their questions and concerns into their work programme.

- 3.5 Covid-19 has brought about much change but this committee feel that, by working together with the Executive, Copeland can emerge from this crisis stronger and closer than before.

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