

# **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**21 May 2008**

## **SCRUTINY BOARD**

### **STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN**

The Scrutiny Board met on 29 April 2008.

#### Corporate strategic issues

The Leader, County Councillor John Weighell and John Marsden, the Chief Executive, joined the Board to discuss a range of strategic priorities facing the County Council over the next twelve months.

Issues covered in the discussion included:

- Implications of the Sub-National Review and the role of Yorkshire Forward
- Recognition of the important role of the region but also to ensure that the rural voice is heard
- Leeds City Region issues
- The budget and medium term financial strategy including the importance of delivering the efficiency programme
- Continued emphasis on service improvement and customer focus
- Recognition of good positive partnership working across the board with particular emphasis on waste, transport and customer access
- Comprehensive Area Assessment(CAA) replacing CPA from next year and the recent appointment of the Audit Commission's CAA Lead for this area, Michael Newbury.

#### Corporate services issues

County Councillor Carl Les joined the Board together with Justine Brooksbank, Assistant Chief Executive (Human Resources and Organisational Development) and Carole Dunn, Head of Legal Services to discuss key corporate services issues for the next year. These included:

- Increasing managers' capability in order to improve service outcomes
- Improved staff communication and engagement
- Supporting the transformation/changing and improving agenda
- A proactive approach to the health and well-being of staff
- The merger of Legal and Committee Services
- Governance, ethics and standards and the role of Monitoring Officer
- Training issues for Members
- Provision of services to external bodies

### Annual Report on Overview and Scrutiny

The Board approved the Annual Report on Overview and Scrutiny for 2007/08 and it is attached to this statement. It provides a very positive account of the role that Overview and Scrutiny plays at the County Council and I would like to thank all Members for their enthusiasm and hard work that have made this such a success. I would also like to thank the Scrutiny officers for their invaluable support.

### Annual Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

The Board agreed to present the 'at a glance' summaries of each committee's annual work programme to the Executive at its next quarterly performance monitoring meeting in June.

### Local Involvement Network (LINK) for North Yorkshire

The Board was informed that the North Bank Forum for Voluntary Organisations has been appointed as the 'host' organisation and has started work to set up and support the LINK for North Yorkshire. This follows a joint procurement with the City of York Council and the same organisation has been appointed to support the LINK for York.

### Workshop with District Scrutiny Members

The Board is planning a workshop on 26 June for O & S Chairmen and Vice Chairmen with leading Scrutiny Members from district councils to explore ways of improving cooperation in scrutiny of the outcomes of partnership working and the Local Area Agreement. I will be meeting soon with the IDEA who are going to facilitate the event.

**County Councillor Paul Richardson**  
**Chairman of Scrutiny Board**  
**12 May 2008**

# Overview and Scrutiny

## Annual Report

### April 2007 to March 2008



**County Councillor Paul Richardson**  
**Chairman of the Scrutiny Board**  
**May 2008**

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## **Overview and Scrutiny = Accountability & Policy Development.**

In North Yorkshire, as in other Local Authorities, we are inevitably affected by external influences such as, the effects of global warming, central and European government and legislation, and the economic recession. The way in which we face these and other future challenges in our communities is vital. The decisions the Executive take need to be based on sound, objective information. To make sure that this is the case Overview and Scrutiny at North Yorkshire County Council acts as the conscience and the impetus for those decision makers to be able to reach those right and workable solutions. Scrutiny's contribution to policy development and its role as 'critical friend' to the Executive helps keep North Yorkshire a 4 star authority.

The past year has seen us focusing our minds on essential partnership working, as we continue to look for ways to provide efficient and cost effective services for the people of North Yorkshire. As a County Authority we work closely with many external partners on the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and quite rightly Overview and Scrutiny is involved in ensuring they are also held accountable.

Good scrutiny is of the essence and to this end the Scrutiny Board this year has revised and substantially improved the Scrutiny Guidance. Our focus is on whether services provide the outcomes that local people and localities want so we continue to work hard to give the public a voice through scrutiny. As we strive to engage with the public it is heartening to note that there has already been a positive response from the public to our recently revised scrutiny leaflet. This is encouraging because good scrutiny should be proposed and given impetus by members of the public.

I believe the County Council is ahead of the current thinking on overview and scrutiny. Government guidelines are awaited on Councillor Calls for Action two years after North Yorkshire County Council scrutiny developed the theory of the 'circle of scrutiny' which involves the public at every level of the scrutineer's task. We are already forging better relationships with all our partners. We are encouraging a 'mind-set' within the administration of more cross Directorate working. We are continuing a fruitful and constructive dialogue while also acting as the monitoring conscience of the Executive. Finally we are instilling the belief that all manner of business has to be accountable to the public.

**County Councillor Paul Richardson  
Chairman of the Scrutiny Board**

### **Learning from the past....**

Scrutiny has continued to make a significant contribution to Executive decisions and improving services. Scrutiny Committees have undertaken 13 Reviews over the year. The topics have been varied and the list shows the range of issues looked at:

- Access to Services
- A Sporting Chance
- Credit Union for North Yorkshire
- Diversification in Agriculture
- Hard to reach groups
- Learning in the wet and mud!
- Let's get on the bus!
- Maternity Services closure at Community Hospitals
- Older Peoples' Strategy
- School Meals Service
- Succession Planning
- Use of Agency & Relief staff
- Winter Maintenance

In all cases the Executive has welcomed the Review and its ensuing report and either agreed the recommendations or proposed alternative follow up actions based on the direction of travel indicated in the Review.

I am sure the Executive is also encouraged to see that we are not reaching our conclusions sat at a desk but many of the scrutiny reviews have seen Councillors getting out and about to see things for ourselves.



County Councillors visiting East Barnby

### **Accountability is key**

Our last annual report saw six Executive decisions being called in this year we have seen three decisions called in.

The decisions called in were:

- School meals
- School clothing allowance
- Highways Depot review

After close examination of the issues and engaging debate at the Call-In meetings it was decided in each of these cases to support the decision taken.

### **An eye on performance**

The relationship between Scrutiny and Executive Members has continued to develop positively. Portfolio holders the Chief Executive and the Leader have attended the Scrutiny Board to share information about current and future strategic and policy issues and to discuss where Scrutiny can add value and make a difference to the work of the Council.

Good progress has been made in ensuring that Scrutiny is involved at the right time to have a positive input to policy decisions. We need to continue to work together to maintain this progress and share a common objective of delivering excellent, responsive and improving services to our local communities.

An essential role for Overview and Scrutiny as we drive forward continuous improvement in the County Council is performance monitoring. Scrutiny Committees regularly undertake this in their day to day business but the quarterly Performance Monitoring Executive meetings have proved a useful way for us in our role as 'critical friend'.

### **Looking to the future**

As ever Overview and Scrutiny at North Yorkshire continues to look for opportunities for closer working with our partners through scrutiny of external partners and being involved in meeting with scrutiny officers from across the region.

It is early days for this scrutiny officer group but we hope to see both County and District making the best of the opportunity to work

closer together especially as scrutiny looks at the Local Area Agreement.

Members of the Scrutiny Board have reviewed our scrutiny guidance and scrutiny leaflet and by now you should have received your copy of these publications. They will be used to continue to promote the role of overview and scrutiny at North Yorkshire County Council



The **Scrutiny of Health Committee** has the right to refer a proposal to change an NHS service to the Secretary of State for Health if it considers it is not in the interest of local people. This power is only expected to be used very sparingly – its real strength lies in the threat that it might be used - and in its 4 years the Committee has only used it once with regard to the proposal to close the midwife led maternity units at Whitby, Malton and Bridlington Community Hospitals.

Public consultation on this proposal commenced in December 2006, there followed local negotiation to see if a solution could be found, and our actual referral, a 24 page report and 200 pages of evidence, was submitted in January 2008. News that our referral has led to a full review was announced in April 2008. Hardly a speedy process but importantly the 3 units had to remain open and will do so until the review reports in July 2008.

The arguments in our referral were adjudged to be very sound so there is every possibility that the review will direct that the units must remain open permanently. The Committee considered the case for closure

was not properly evidenced, the National Choice Agenda for maternity supported a community setting and midwife led care, and local people made it very clear that they held the units in high esteem and valued highly access to them at their local Community Hospital.

Watch this space!!

County Councillor John Blackie

It has been a busy year for the **Environment and Heritage Overview and Scrutiny Committee**. We have completed a scrutiny review on Fairtrade, and looked at the important issues of oil depletion and the use of biofuels, which we will be hosting a members' seminar on later in the year.

The task group on reducing corporate waste has produced its interim report on reducing waste in schools and is going on to look at Council premise

We have also kept a watching brief on sustainable procurement and implementation of the WEEE Directive.

Over the coming year we look forward to examining the actions that we and others are taking to adapt to climate change.

County Councillor John Blackburn



**Eskdale School Waste Audit**



The **Corporate Affairs Overview and Scrutiny Committee** has taken the last year to look more closely at various Human Resources (HR) issues within the County Council. We were pleased that the Assistant Director HR and Organisational Development agreed with us that this was an area where the involvement of Members could really add value. Each of the Task Groups has worked well with officers in the HR team and has seen many of their recommendations taken forward by the Executive.



Our current Task group is looking more closely at the induction process for members. I am sure your views will be sought in the near future so please take this opportunity to feed into a worthwhile review.

County Councillor Margaret-Ann de Courcey-Bayley

The **Economic Development and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee** has had a busy and varied year looking at a range of topics important to our local economy.

The Committee contributed to the work of the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly on the "Scrutiny of the Rural Economy" and the work undertaken by Yorkshire Forward on this. Members were able to raise specific issues relevant to the rural communities of North Yorkshire and a formal response was submitted.

The Committee has also looked at the issue of diversification in agriculture and the crisis that has surrounded livestock farming following disease outbreaks in 2007 and the rising costs of feed and fuel. We have met with farmers, visited a number of projects including the Central Science Laboratory at York to learn about the development of biomass fuels and the potential for local farmers to diversify. A special meeting was held in April 2008 where representatives of local farming organisations including the

NFU and Farm Crisis Network spoke to the committee and explored how NYCC could contribute. As a result of this we will be exploring issues around procurement, training and development for new skills and promoting farming and local food to young people.

County Councillor John Savage

The **Communications Overview and Scrutiny Committee** has looked at a broad range of issues throughout the year.

We have kept a watching brief on the continuing development of the NY Times and are pleased to see the positive feedback on this publication.



We have contributed to the strategies to develop the website and intranet facilities and are leading work with members to identify how the intranet can be developed as a tool to keep them informed of issues in their area. We jointly hosted a members IT seminar, with Transport and Telecommunications, looking at the future of e-democracy and the opportunities this offers to engage with the public. We hope to take forward some innovative ideas from this over coming months.

The 'Access to Services' strategy continues to progress at a pace with significant developments being made in relation to telephone contact through the customer service centre, face to face contacts through the public access points and with the launch of the new website. A cross scrutiny review has been established to look at the progress of implementation on this. To date we have visited the Customer Service Centre and the joint working arrangements with Scarborough District Council. The review group has been impressed by the services it has seen and looks forward to contributing to the ongoing developments in this important area.

County Councillor Ron Haigh



**The Transport and Telecommunications Overview and Scrutiny Committee** has once again decided to scrutinise a major and crucial topic. This topic is a review of the North Yorkshire County Winter Maintenance Service that we provide here in our rural and urban areas.

The cost of providing this important service is now in the region of £6.8 million per year and is certainly a lot more compared to other similar Counties.

In order to recommend any changes and improvements to the service the committee have set up a Scrutiny Task Group who are visiting Parish Council meetings and also doing a road-show to all County Area meetings to seek the views of the communities on the proposals developed by the task group.

The proposals range from the improved spread of the salt to having a look at which routes need special priority and the best times to grit routes.

These meetings are all well attended by the public and they certainly appreciate the consultation process that we are going through with them. All their concerns are being noted and will be taken into consideration when the Committee report back to the Executive with their recommendations and findings in July.

Out and about with the Task Group



The Committee feel that the practice of consulting with communities in both rural and urban areas of North Yorkshire and listening to their aspirations has to be the best way forward for enhancing Scrutiny work here in our County.

County Councillor Eric Broadbent

**Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee** has enjoyed another busy, interesting and enjoyable year. We have covered a wide range of topic areas including Integrated Services in Localities; the development of a North Yorkshire Parenting Strategy; Health Improvement Issues, the North Yorkshire Police Youth Strategy, the SEN Review and supporting and encouraging Youth Participation. These are but a few of the topics considered by the committee over the last year or so.

As a committee, we have achieved some great outcomes from our three in depth scrutiny reviews which were Sports Participation and Provision, the Outdoor Education Service and the School Meals Service.



A bonus of undertaking reviews is the opportunity it gives committee members to get out and about (undeterred by snow) to meet with and listen to the views of children and young people and to talk to adults working with them.

Keeping pace with the many developments and changes in provision within the Children & Young Peoples Service and our partner organisations continues not only to improve members' knowledge but keeps us well and truly tuned into what is happening.

The committee welcomed several new external members last year whose knowledge and experience in the field has added to our highly effective team. We look forward to contributing further to the development of services in North Yorkshire as the Children and Young People's plan continues to unfold. An especial challenge will be the new responsibilities given to the committee to scrutinise the LAA targets.

County Councillor Heather Garnett

For the **Care & Independence Overview and Scrutiny Committee**, the Government's release of the concordat 'Putting People First' confirms that rather than demographic change being seen as a problem; it presents so many opportunities for constructive change.

This Committee's work illustrates that we recognised to meet our hopes and ambitions for social care and independent living we must look to non-traditional areas, such as leisure, employment, transport and environmental services. The Scrutiny Committee has shown it can take the lead, reflected in our study of direct payments, where we assisted in bringing about increased take up and reaching out to more people. This was the first piece of work undertaken where we interviewed users. I hope this will continue to be part of our method of finding out. This work continued when we looked at the transformation towards self directed care, which brings a level of personalisation of social care unthinkable a generation ago. It is important that the Committee continues to be at the forefront of that, to help shape services.

The Older People's Strategy Review demonstrated that by integrating services we, as Members, can bring about positive change for older people. This year's review was very 'local' when we took the strategy through area committees and encouraged a local community perspective. The necessary change in social care can only be achieved by a shared approach and joint endeavour between all agencies and groups. This was central to how we worked with older people's representative groups to assess the Partnerships for Older People's Project. An approach we will follow again as we work with the voluntary sector, particularly disablement action groups, in establishing Centres for Independent Living.

I believe that Centres for Independent Living will provide the most exciting opportunities to change the way services are provided in the future, since the Council moved from residential care provision to Extra Care accommodation. This will also help to give greater understanding of the aims in our Strategic Commissioning document.

I continued with the work of co-ordinating the Council's response to the post office closure programme and we invited Post office limited to County Hall to express our concerns that some inaccurate data which we had identified had been left unacknowledged. I was pleased that an agreement to work and communicate effectively with each other in the future was reached.

So we have considered people first in all the work we have done, both in our aims and in our method.

As I move to be a formally appointed Older People's Champion, with a job description! Councillor Tony Hall takes over as Chair, but I look forward to continuing to work as a member of this Scrutiny Committee.

County Councillor Shelagh Marshall

*"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success".* Henry Ford's words describe what lies behind an action packed year for the **Safe and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**, but I will focus on two projects. By listening and working with people and sheer stubbornness we have strengthened the case for a credit union in North Yorkshire. When it seemed this wouldn't get off the ground, we fostered partnership working with the existing Credit Union in York, pressed successfully for the Executive to conduct a business case and as a result now we look forward, with impatience, to establishing something in North Yorkshire many thought unthinkable.

It is a similar story regarding counselling for problem gamblers. The Committee has been instrumental in bringing partners to the table both nationally and locally, so there is every prospect now of an accessible countywide counselling service.

Our ambitions have been high, but by harnessing resources from outside the Authority we have brought new services and support to people. This simply would not have happened without the creativity and dogged determination of Members.

County Councillor Paul Richardson