



Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda

Wyre Borough Council
Date of Publication: 19 April 2021
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Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Monday, 26 April 2021 at 6.00 pm, remote access via WebEx.

Members of the public will be able to view the meeting on Wyre Council's YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/user/WyreCouncil/>)

1. Apologies for absence

2. Declarations of interest

To receive any declarations of interest from any councillor on any item on this agenda.

3. Confirmation of minutes

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 March 2021.

4. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22 – update and planning (Pages 3 - 18)

The Corporate Director Resources (and Section 151 Officer), Clare James, has submitted a report updating the committee about the delivery of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22.

5. Citizens Advice Lancashire West Task Group - draft report (Pages 19 - 32)

The Chairman of the Citizens Advice Lancashire West Task Group, Councillor Howard Ballard, submitted the task group's draft report and recommendations. Members of the committee will have an opportunity to comment and ask questions.

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Report of:	Meeting	Date
Clare James, Corporate Director Resources	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	26 April 2021

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/2022 – Update report

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee about the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/2022.

2. Recommendation/s

- 3.1 That the committee considers their desired focus/areas of work for the remainder of the 2021/2022 period.
- 3.2 That the report be noted.

3. Current, Paused, and Requested Work

3.1 Review of the Citizens Advice Lancashire West

Following a suggestion at the O&S Committee meeting held on 27 January 2020, and a discussion at the meeting held on 18 January 2021, it was agreed that a task group would be set up to review the service provisions provided by Citizens Advice Lancashire West Service.

The task group's final meeting was held on 22 March 2021. The group has put forward three recommendations and they have agreed that a draft report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their 26 April 2021 meeting, and subsequently, the final report will go to Cabinet at their 2 June meeting for consideration.

3.2 Review of Wyre's Call-in procedures

It was agreed at the committee's 18 January 2021 meeting that a small review group would be set up to look into how a Call-in meeting should be structured and chaired, taking into account lessons learned from previous Call-in meetings, whether different procedures are needed for Portfolio

Holder decisions and Cabinet decisions, and interviewing Cabinet members, other councillors etc.

This work had been paused at the request of the Monitoring Officer. At the last meeting, it was agreed by the committee that the work was able to resume.

Since this meeting, the Chairman of this task group, Councillor Matthew Vincent, has asked for it to be suspended. The committee needs to discuss and decide whether to proceed with this task group.

3.2 Review of District Enforcement Task Group

The pilot enforcement scheme was extended, which would have given the task group more time to complete its detailed work. The period of consultation with residents had also been extended, for a further month, and the task group planned to meet on 31 March 2020 to consider the responses.

Unfortunately, owing to the pandemic, the Task Group's work was halted and is currently incomplete.

On 4 March 2021 a Portfolio Holder decision was made that extended the pilot with District Enforcement until March 2022.

Members declared an interest, at the last O&S meeting, to reconvene the District Enforcement Task Group as soon as is possible. The Chairman echoed this request and expressed that at the next Overview and Scrutiny meeting this task group will commence.

Please see the attached original scoping document for this task group at appendix 2.

4. Other Future Planned Work

4.1 Review of Wyre's contract with the YMCA

Following the last meeting, the committee expressed their interest in commissioning a future task group to review the YMCA contract. Members agreed that this work be postponed and then revisited once the consultant's report has been completed.

4.2 Review of Wyre's Scrutiny Function

The CfGS (Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) review is now completed and a report has been sent to the Chief Executive, Garry Payne with no further comments. The final report has now been issued and distributed to all O&S members via email. The report is attached at appendix 3.

There are arrangements in place to set up a workshop session with Ian Parry (CfGS) and members of Cabinet, members of Overview and Scrutiny, the Corporate Management Team and Democratic Services. More information will be provided to confirm the date and time.

The next steps for this task group will need to be discussed.

5. Work Programme

5.1 The O&S Work Programme for 2021/22 is attached at Appendix 1.

The layout of the Work Programme has been examined and subsequently renewed in order to allow the document to be fully accessible for people with impairments and disabilities.

An attempt has been made to prioritise those projects where work has already commenced and been presented to O&S and where there are strong links to the Business Plan.

Next steps for these areas should now be formulated and the work programme tailored accordingly to ensure it remains focused.

Financial and legal implications	
Finance	
Legal	

Other risks/implications: checklist

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with a x.

risks/implications	✓ / x
community safety	
equality and diversity	
sustainability	
health and safety	

risks/implications	✓ / x
asset management	
climate change	
ICT	
data protection	

Processing Personal Data

In addition to considering data protection along with the other risks/ implications, the report author will need to decide if a 'privacy impact assessment (PIA)' is also required. If the decision(s) recommended in this report will result in the collection and processing of personal data for the first time (i.e. purchase of a new system, a new working arrangement with a third party) a PIA will need to have been completed and signed off by Data Protection Officer before the decision is taken in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

report author	telephone no.	email	date
Marianne Unwin	01253 887326	marianne.unwin@wyre.gov.uk	09/04/2021

List of background papers:		
name of document	date	where available for inspection

List of appendices

- Appendix 1 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021/2022
- Appendix 2 – District Enforcement task group scoping document 2020
- Appendix 3 - Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Report

Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Work Programme: 2021/22

Committee Meetings-

Monday 26 April 2021 at 6pm: Work Programme planning and review

- O&S Work Programme 2020/21 – update
- O&S Work Programme 2021/22- planning
- Citizens Advice Bureau Review Task Group report

Invited attendees: None.

Monday 07 June 2021 at 6pm: Update on Scrutiny review implementations

- Election of Chairman for the municipal year 2021/22
- Election of Vice Chairman for the municipal year 2021/22
- O&S Work Programme 2021/22 – update and planning
- Review of the implementations of the recommendations of Public Conveniences Task Group report
- Planned Maintenance and Investment Projects Schedule - 2021/22 (provisional)
- Business Plan 2020/21, Quarterly Performance Statement (Quarter 4: January – March)

Invited attendees: Councillor Bridge (Street Scene, Parks and Open Spaces Portfolio Holder) and Ruth Hunter (Head of Public Realm and Environmental Sustainability).
Maria Blundy (Head of Built Environment) and Mark Billington (Corporate Director Environment).

Monday 19 July 2021 at 6pm: Health and Wellbeing theme

- O&S Work Programme 2021/22 – update
- Annual update regarding the work of Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee
- Annual update from the Fylde and Wyre Clinical Commissioning Group

Invited attendees: Councillor Julie Robinson (Co-opted Member of the Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee), County Councillor (To be confirmed) (Chair of the Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee), Dr Amanda Doyle OBE (Chief Clinical Officer for Blackpool and Fylde and Wyre Clinical Commissioning Groups), and Dr Adam Janjua (Elected Clinical Member and Chair for Fylde and Wyre Clinical Commissioning Group).

Monday 06 September 2021 at 6pm: Corporate and Finance theme

- O&S Work Programme 2021/22 – update
- An update on Wyre’s Covid-19 response
- Business Review of the implementations of the recommendations of the Residents Parking Permit Scheme Task Group report
- Review of the implementations of the recommendations of the Domestic Abuse Task Group: 5 years on
- ss Plan 2021/22 – Quarterly Performance Statement (Quarter 1: April – June)

Invited attendees: Councillor David Henderson (Leader of the Council), Garry Payne (Chief Executive).

Councillor Berry (Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety Portfolio Holder), Carl Green (Head of Engineering Services) and Neil Greenwood (Head of Environmental Health and Community Safety).

Monday 18 October 2021 at 6pm: (No theme allocated)

- O&S Work Programme 2021/22 – update

Invited attendees: None.

Monday 22 November 2021 at 6pm: Resources and Finance theme

- O&S Work Programme 2021/22 – update
- Cost profiles- benchmarking results 2021/22
- Fees and Charges- draft
- Business Plan – Quarterly Performance Statement (Quarter 2: July – September)

Invited attendees: Councillor Alan Vincent (Resources Portfolio Holder and Deputy Leader) and Clare James (Corporate Director Resources and Section 151 Officer).

Monday 17 January 2022 at 6pm: Corporate theme

- O&S Work Programme 2020/21 – update and planning
- Business Plan 2022/23
- Planned Maintenance and Investment Projects Schedule - 2022/23

Invited attendees: Councillor David Henderson (Leader of the Council) and Garry Payne (Chief Executive), Marianne Hesketh (Corporate Director Communities), Mark Billington (Corporate Director Environment) and Maria Blundy (Head of Built Environment).

Monday 28 February 2022 at 6pm: Police and Community Safety theme

- O&S Work Programme 2021/22 – update
- Wyre Community Safety Partnership – annual scrutiny review

- Business Plan – Quarterly Performance Statement (Quarter 3: October – December)

Invited attendees: Kevin Lister (Wyre Neighbourhood Inspector), Neil Greenwood (Head of Environmental Health & Community Safety) and Councillor Roger Berry (Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety Portfolio Holder).

Monday 25 April 2022 at 6pm: Work Programme Planning and Review

- O&S Work Programme 2021/22 – update
- O&S Work Programme 2022/23 – planning

Invited attendees: None.

Task Group Reviews-

Current Reviews:

- Citizens Advice Bureau Review Task Group
- Wyre’s Call-in procedures Review Group (18.01.2021)

Paused Work:

- Scrutiny Function Review Group.
This work is on hold as we await the recommendations report from CfGS (Centre for Governance and Scrutiny).
- District Environmental Enforcement Pilot Task Group.
The contract has been extended until March 2022 to allow the task group to reconvene and finalise their recommendations.
- Poulton to Fleetwood Link Task Group
The Task Group will re-instate once the stakeholders and authorities have created a feasibility study.

Possible review focuses for 2021/22:

- YMCA Fylde Coast contract (O&S 16.03.2020)
- Town centres (O&S 16.03.2020)
- Wyre’s assistance in the response to Covid-19 through policies and procedures (O&S 16.03.2020)
- Tourism (O&S 18.01.2021)
- Anti-Social behaviour (see O&S 27.01.2020- minute number 3&6)
- Caravan holiday site occupancy and residential status

Looking further ahead:

- Lancashire ‘Super Hospital’ (due to the announcement by Government 02.10.2020) – the public consultation is expected late in 2021.
- Marsh Mill (extension to the lease that is due to end in mid-2024)

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District Enforcement Task Group – Final Scoping Document

Review Topic	District Environmental Enforcement Pilot	
Chairman	Councillor Tom Ingham	
Deputy Chairman	Councillor Emma Ellison	
Other Members	1. I Amos 2. R Amos 3. D Atkins 4. Fail 5. Collette Fairbanks 6. O'Neill 7. Orme 8. Stirzaker 9. Swales 10. L Walmsley	
Officer Support	Emma Keany, Democratic Services Officer Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer	
Purpose of the Review	Evaluate the effectiveness of the environmental enforcement pilot to tackle cleaner and greener issues	
Role of Overview and Scrutiny in this Review (mark all that apply)	Holding Executive to account – decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Existing budget and policy framework <input type="checkbox"/> Contribution to policy development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Holding Executive to account – performance <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community champion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Statutory duties / compliance with codes of practice <input type="checkbox"/>	
Aims of Review	1) Evaluate the effectiveness of the environmental enforcement pilot. 2) Make recommendations regarding future service provision. 3) Consider opportunities to expand on the offences covered by the pilot within any future services 4) Review the Council's approach for under 18's (Currently the Council policy is not to issue Fixed Penalty Notices to under 18 year olds; the task group could look at the issues related to reducing the age limit or consider other means of addressing littering / environmental offences by minors)	

Methodology	Interview witnesses at task group meetings Benchmarking with other local authorities Consider relevant reports and documentation
Scope of Review	The review will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offences covered • Results across offence types / areas (Numbers issued / payment rates) • Location of offenders – proportion of borough residents offending/regional/national • Approach taken • Added value • Improvement on cleanliness
Potential Witnesses	Street Scene, Parks and Open Spaces Portfolio Holder Service Director People and Places District Enforcement Manager Waste Management Officer Legal Services Manager Head of Finance Town and Parish Council representative(s)
Documents to be considered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview and Scrutiny Report
Risks	None
Level of Publicity	Medium
Indicators of a Successful Review	Clear recommendations to the Cabinet about the way forward
Intended Outcomes	A cleaner greener Wyre
Approximate Timeframe	3 months
Projected Start Date	October 2019

Chief Executive
Wyre District Council
March 2021

Dear Mr Payne,

Short Scrutiny Improvement Review – CfGS consultancy support

I am writing to thank you for inviting the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to carry out an evaluation of the Council's scrutiny function. This letter provides feedback on our review findings and offers suggestions on how the Council could develop its scrutiny process. We would like the opportunity as part of this process to facilitate a workshop with Members and Officers, to reflect on this review and to discuss options for improvement.

Background

The purpose of the review was to give the Council an external perspective on how well the current model of scrutiny is functioning, and fulfilling its essential role of policy shaping, holding the Cabinet to account and reviewing issues of importance to local communities.

CfGS undertook a review of the current scrutiny arrangements, involving two days of evidence gathering through conversations with Members and Officers on 25th and 26th January 2021. In addition, we observed an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, reviewed key documents, and created and analysed a Member survey. [results in appendix 1]

CfGS met with 13 Members and 8 Officers, including the Council Leader, Deputy Leader, members of Cabinet, Group Leaders, Scrutiny Chair, Members of the Scrutiny Committee, the Council's Chief Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team as well as Governance and Democratic Services Officers.

The review was conducted by CfGS staff:

- Ian Parry – Head of Consultancy - Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
- Kate Grigg – Senior Research Officer – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

The findings and recommendations presented in this letter are intended to advise Wyre Council in strengthening the quality of scrutiny activities, increasing the impact of its outputs, and through its Members, develop a strong and shared understanding of the role and capability of the scrutiny function.

Summary of findings

1. Positive areas to build upon

1.1. Scrutiny has many conditions for success and can deliver more

Overall, there are no critical issues with scrutiny at Wyre Council and scrutiny works in a largely positive way. Generally, it could be claimed that scrutiny meets its statutory obligations, but there is potential to offer more. It was widely recognised during our review that scrutiny could do much better and improvement was needed to ensure the time and resource dedicated to scrutiny delivered more impact and greater value for the council.

The conditions for successful scrutiny are present; scrutiny enjoys significant support from senior Officers and democratic services, the Cabinet recognises the benefits of scrutiny in terms of good governance and democratic accountability, and Members of scrutiny want to ensure improved outcomes for the council and the communities it serves. There are no single issues that are causing scrutiny's ability to perform.

Wyre Council's long-standing political composition where control rests with a single party group can make scrutiny extra challenging. There is no suggestion that this is in any way wrong or inferior. But where scrutiny has a large majority of its Members which politically support the Cabinet, it requires its Members to be even more mindful of the need to be constructive, independent-minded, objective, impartial and robust, which can sometimes become complex or seem contrived.

Opposition group Members many also feel that at times they are alone in asking difficult questions. A balance of robust public scrutiny and Cabinet accountability that is acknowledged as fair and essential can be developed. In many instances' scrutiny does its best to be challenging, but this is not the norm.

1.2. Officer support

At the senior Officer level there is wide buy-in for scrutiny and it is clear that the Council's corporate management team is committed to supporting scrutiny where it can. For this to work better, scrutiny will need a clear work programme which is more focused on scrutiny of development and progress of strategic corporate objectives and less on operational detail.

1.3. Working groups

When asked about the most successful scrutiny work, many answers suggested that task groups had worked well in the past. It is a common theme in scrutiny that single subject task groups tend to produce a reasonable outcome and a more interesting experience for Members. Wyre may like to consider how this approach could be effective in studying and shaping issues.

However, task groups need to be resourced and supported, so should be used sparingly. They also need clear scoping and proper consultation with Cabinet and Officers to ensure that such activity has wide support and their usefulness maximised. Task groups or other stand-alone scrutiny should not dilute effective scrutiny also happening in committee.

2. Suggested areas of improvement

2.1. Clarity on scrutiny's role and responsibilities

Scrutiny's overall role is to hold the Cabinet to account, to carry out policy development, contribute to improved decision-making, and channel the voice of the public. Generally, this role is well understood, and most Members are able to articulate the purpose and contribution scrutiny should be making. However, it appears that in practice, challenge is not as robust as it ought to be from Members of the administration, and some felt that scrutiny was sometimes being used by the opposition for political purposes.

- Our conversations suggest a need for more clarity on how scrutiny's role is undertaken in a cross-party manner. This is about developing a shared understanding of the particular and unique way for scrutiny to add value to council governance. On a strategic level, there needs to be more of an emphasis on seeing scrutiny as a vital part of council business, with clear ownership regarding its important role in improving policy and holding to account.

2.2. Collaborative approach to scrutiny

Scrutiny is meant to be a forum for the evidence-based discussion of issues affecting local people. Most agreed with the principle that scrutiny is more effective when it is a collaborative approach between Members, with politics left at the door (as much as is practicably possible), and an equal voice given to all. Members recognised this and could give examples of when scrutiny has dealt with contentious matters, and the importance of having strong and productive working relationships within committees.

There is a mixed level of engagement from scrutiny Members, and as indicated, Members of the opposition tend to show greater levels of involvement within committee meetings. Robust challenge from all Members of scrutiny and an active opposition are healthy signs in any democratic body.

- There was a broad agreement that all Members have a duty to uphold their responsibilities as a scrutineer, attend meetings and work towards a shared goal in their committee. This is an aspect that needs further emphasis.

2.3. Scrutiny – Cabinet relationship

It is important to have a culture of trust, transparency and mutual respect between scrutiny and the Cabinet, to enable open and candid exchanges. Without regular communication and information sharing, scrutiny will be unable to act in a supportive capacity to the Cabinet. Positive engagement between the Cabinet and scrutiny, both formal and informal, is vital to the scrutiny process.

We heard that overall, there is limited constructive challenge of Cabinet decisions. To achieve effective democratic accountability scrutiny needs to primarily focus on the Cabinet, ensuring questions are directed to the relevant portfolio holder. There is evidence of Officers in some cases being scrutinised more than Cabinet Members. The experience from elsewhere is that when Cabinet Members attend and are the focus of the questioning, a more strategic exchange takes place and better recommendations achieved.

- The Council may consider reviewing the Cabinet-Scrutiny arrangements to outline and reaffirm expectations, and to improve communication and co-ordination between scrutiny and the Cabinet. A Cabinet-Scrutiny agreement could help with the practical workings of scrutiny as well as the cultural dynamics. It might also be useful for feedback on scrutiny's recommendations to be more formalised and recorded in order for the committee to monitor the progress of their output.

2.4. Scrutiny's focus

There is a recognition that scrutiny needs to focus more on strategic issues, where it can have influence, and that scrutiny should input into the decision-making process at an earlier stage than it does currently. The overall high quality of scrutiny's task groups is evidence that this part of the system is working well. However, scrutiny work in committee does not always benefit from the same focus.

Scrutiny should focus its attention on cross-cutting issues which affect communities across the district, avoiding parochial issues affecting single wards. There are missed opportunities for scrutiny to add value and to be an integral part of the Council's corporate plans and overall improvement.

- For scrutiny to be more strategic there needs to be change from both scrutiny and the Cabinet. If the Council wants more emphasis on shaping policy, challenging and holding to account, then scrutiny will need earlier access to and involvement with the core policy and decision-making activities of the Cabinet.

Scrutiny would benefit from a clearer focus on where the committee can add value or influence change. For the majority of the substantive items on scrutiny agendas there is not a clearly articulated outcome from scrutiny's consideration of the topic. Many meetings are totally driven by officer reports with less evidence of Members owning the work of the committee. When topics are reviewed the focus tends to be operational rather than strategic or outcome focused. Often, reports do not ask Members to "do" anything other than to note or comment. Recommendations (the real value of scrutiny) are relatively rare and therefore the impact of scrutiny is more difficult to quantify.

- We noted that scrutiny could be more involved in the budget process, and at an earlier stage for any meaningful input. Scrutinising the Council's finances, including the medium-term financial plan, monitoring financial and operational performance, together with the Council's Business Plan could be more thoroughly, robustly and constructively scrutinised.

2.5. Work programming

Work programming is key to ensuring scrutiny stays focussed on strategic issues where it can make an impact, whilst making the best use of time and resources. In this respect prioritisation is essential, and scrutiny could benefit from an agreed methodology to filter and select topics for the work programme. Furthermore, scrutiny will need to organise a work programme that is Member-led in order to have ownership over committee activity.

Members recognise that their committee work programme should be owned and managed by them. However, we detected during the review that work programmes are influenced mainly by Officers. Some Members also felt that the work programme was overly influenced by Officers. There also appears to be an absence of a clear rationale for how topics are selected or excluded, which is Member driven and owned.

- We recommend that process for developing the work programme of the scrutiny committee engages Members, Cabinet, Officers and appropriate partner organisations in considering the topics for review. This will help ensure that Members' work in scrutiny makes the most effective contribution possible on the most important issues to the district. Work programming could take place through a Member workshop, where a shortlist of priority topics for the next 12 months are identified according to an agreed selection criteria and rationale. That topics are then filtered through an agreed scoring system to provide a final shortlist for consideration in the work programme.

It is important to emphasise that work programming is an ongoing process and not just a one-off event. Whilst a workshop will help identify priorities and provide structure to work for the months ahead, there will need to be flexibility in the work programme and time set aside to regularly revisit the relevance of topics as the local context changes.

- Currently the work programme is the last item on the agenda at scrutiny meetings, we would recommend bringing it to the beginning, so it can benefit from more considered discussion rather than being subject to the inevitable end of meeting fatigue.

2.6. Meeting preparation

From our observations of committees, there is little evidence of co-ordinated questions or Members acting as a team with clear lines of inquiry. It has been highlighted that a number of Members do not prepare sufficiently for scrutiny meetings, leading to the presentation of Officer reports that should have been read in advance and a missed opportunity for insightful questioning. It is important the time spent in committee is well spent.

A small number of Members felt that reports were long and make demanding reading, which may prevent some Members from fully engaging. The practice of submitting reports for noting, for information, or inviting speakers only to share information, should be avoided. All of the above measures regarding meeting preparation will result in shorter, sharper meetings.

- The Council could consider introducing pre-meetings before formal committee between all scrutiny Members to provide the space to set common objectives and possibly to reach consensus on lines of enquiry and questioning strategy. This could be easily achieved using Teams or Zoom to reduce time and travel.

2.7. Member development

Scrutiny provides an excellent opportunity for broader Member engagement and to support Members in getting an in-depth understanding of issues. To get the most out of scrutiny, Members need a clear sense of what is required of them as committee Members and the work involved which allows good scrutiny to happen.

We observed that the quality of questioning varies; in some instances, it is probing, but it is often more general and exploratory, and sometimes superficial. The Council is clearly committed to Member development, and training was raised by some Members, who were clearly aware of the gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

- We suggest further 'refresher' scrutiny training, with an update on scrutiny essentials, as well as a focus on good questioning skills and chairing skills. For some Members, a more bespoke approach through coaching, mentoring or one-to-one training may be more effective to achieve the standards desired by Members and the Council.

2.8. Chairing

Scrutiny Chairs have an important role in providing leadership, modelling constructive behaviour and ensuring well managed meetings. It is a difficult task to manage meetings and fulfil other key roles such as advocate and leader. It is expected that the Chair leads the overall purpose and objective of each agenda item and ensures that the committee stays on track to achieve their task.

We noted that the Chair is respected and works hard to lead the committee. His task is made more difficult by the weaknesses in the committee and the core skills of members.

- We would also suggest that the Chair would benefit from further skills and leadership training and development

2.9. Committee structure

The single Overview and Scrutiny Committee would appear to be a sensible arrangement, there is no justification for additional committees. The capacity and impact of the committee could be achieved if required through the use of 'one-off' scrutiny events such as task & finish groups, enquiry sessions, or extra single subject meetings.

2.10. External engagement

Regarding public engagement, scrutiny could explore and experiment with ways to allow greater access, openness and involvement. This could include inviting the public to offer ideas for work programmes and greater use of social media channels for resident input and communicating the progress and impact of scrutiny work.

2.11. Member workshop

This review incorporates a Member Workshop to share and discuss the review findings and recommendations to build and improve scrutiny. We would welcome an early date to arrange this.

Thank you and acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Chair, Members of the O&S Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet Members, and Officers who took part in interviews for their time, insights and open views. We would also like to thank Emma Keany for her help and support in organising this review.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Parry
Head of Consultancy



**Citizens Advice Lancashire West
Task Group**

Draft Report

Chairman:

Councillor Howard Ballard

Task Group Members:

Councillor Julie Robinson
Councillor Lorraine Beavers
Councillor Colette Fairbanks
Councillor Rachel George
Councillor Huw Williams
Councillor David Gerrard
Councillor Holly Swales
Councillor Callum Baxter
Councillor Emma Ellison
Councillor Ian Amos
Councillor Rita Amos
Councillor Sue Catterall

**Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Chairman: Councillor John Ibison**

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Introduction

For many years Wyre Council have had a collaborative and effective working relationship with the Citizens Advice Service within the borough. The Citizens Advice Lancashire West service offers free, confidential, impartial and independent advice and information on a wide range of subjects. The service aims to provide the advice people need for the problems they face, and improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

As the current contract for the Citizens Advice Service was coming up for renewal in 2021, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to commission a task group to review the service and current arrangements.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Overview and Scrutiny work, in particular task groups, has been adversely effected. Therefore, the task group was only able to commence in February 2021, some twelve months later than originally planned.

The following report provides a summary of all the evidence that was presented to the task group alongside their conclusions and final recommendations.

Aims of review

The aims of the review, as specified in the scoping document (see Appendix A), were as follows:

- To review the current arrangements that Wyre Council and Citizens Advice have in place and assess the effectiveness.
- To make succinct recommendations to Cabinet regarding the details contained in the current service level agreement.

The review process

For its first meeting, the task group invited Diane Gradwell (Chief Executive at Citizens Advice Lancashire) and Guy Simpson (Advice Services Manager at Citizens Advice Lancashire West). The group subsequently interviewed Marianne Hesketh (Corporate Director Communities) and Mark Broadhurst (Head of Housing and Community Services). Councillor Paul Ellison (Wyre representative on the Citizens Advice Lancashire West board) also attended and answered questions posed by the group.

The group received additional documentation provided by the Citizens Advice Lancashire West on the following:

- The Amount of paid employees in the district of Wyre and the whole of Lancashire West;
- The cost and financial figures of the Lancashire West Senior Management teams;
- The advocacy service they provide;
- Information on where the most need/demand is in the borough;
- The Citizens Advice success stories;
- Additional information on the digital service kiosk idea.

The group viewed the Service Level Agreement and the Citizens Advice Service Task Group Review Report that was submitted to Cabinet in January 2017.

Summary of evidence provided by Diane Gradwell (Chief Executive at Citizens Advice Lancashire) and Guy Simpson (Advice Services Manager at Citizens Advice Lancashire West).

Diane Gradwell (Chief Executive at Citizens Advice Lancashire) and Guy Simpson (Advice Services Manager at Citizens Advice Lancashire West) attended the initial meeting of the scrutiny task group. Ms Gradwell and Mr Simpson presented some information regarding the work that the Citizens Advice Service carries out within Wyre.

Following their presentations, Ms Gradwell and Mr Simpson were asked a number of questions and made some additional comments in order to assist councillors to meet the aims of the review. Following their attendance further information was provided, as requested by members. .

The following information is relevant to the review's purpose and aims:

- The Citizens Advice Lancashire West (CALW) covers 5 different local authorities. These are Blackburn with Darwen, Chorley, South Ribble, West Lancashire and Wyre.
- They provide a mixture of general services and specialist services.
- The funding in Wyre per head of the population is 27p; this is 50% less, per capita, than the other associated local authorities'.
- There are two paid CALW employees working within the Wyre District.
- They have been able to continue their service at the same rate as prior to the Covid-19 pandemic via switching to phone and digital channels.
- The demand on the local service is around 700 calls a week. Out of the daily phones call that are received, they collate around 50 to 60 per cent of the demand. Outbound calls are aim to be responded to within 48 hours.
- The helpline number is a now a free phone number. The national service has helped CALW to be able to fund this free number.
- CALW has a digital service kiosk in development, which can be placed in remote locations. This requires funding for a pilot experiment.
- The system is screen based and could be set up anywhere that an internet connection can be established, either hard wired or by using a mobile broadband connection. There is no keyboard and the system runs using speech recognition software that can work over multiple languages, it can convert speech to text as well. The client identifies the headline issue, i.e. "Employment." They will then be asked a series of questions that establish some key facts about the issue that enable the system by scoring the responses to either offer access to a waiting room (virtual) where they will be greeted by the next

available adviser. The client will also be given the opportunity to book themselves an appointment for a later date.

- Refernet network – They have secured the licence for the whole of Lancashire and see this as a pan-Lancashire project. There are 78 agencies on board largely in Chorley and South Ribble, almost 1700 secure referrals made and 232 self-referrals from the public
- The cost on the council for Refernet would amount to £10,000.

Summary of evidence provided by Marianne Hesketh (Corporate Director Communities) and Mark Broadhurst (Head of Housing and Community Services).

Marianne Hesketh and Mark Broadhurst attended the second of three meetings of the scrutiny task group where they were interviewed by members.

They both provided an overview of the working relationship between Wyre Council and the Citizens Advice Lancashire West (CALW), and how residents of the borough approached the services being provided and gave examples of the successes of the Citizens Advice Service during the recent and on-going global Covid-19 pandemic.

Both Marianne Hesketh and Mark Broadhurst were asked a number of questions about the quality of the service provided by CALW. The following are relevant to the groups aims.

- **Question 1.**

Is the service that is provided value for money?

Answer: The service is utilised and well used.

The council no longer need to employ two dedicated officers to deal with debt advice as this is provided by the CALW.

- **Question 2.**

Opinions of any improvements of the service in the future, knowing the possible limitations of funding and resources.

Answer: There are no limitations to the service as CALW will not turn individuals away.

There is a good working relationship between Wyre Council and CALW and the services provided by them ultimately save the Council money.

- **Question 3.**

Possibilities for an advocacy service.

Answer: Wyre has not been approached with a formal request for this proposal. This would be discussed during a discussion around funding.

- **Question 4.**

The digital Kiosk trial

Answer: The concept is a good idea but there has been no formal proposal from CALW.

The Corporate Director Communities and the Head of Housing and Community Services provided the group with some addition information about the service in Wyre, in particular financial figures and data.

The key statistics:

- Clients (1,962), quick client contacts (7,903), activities (8,801), cases (2,599).
- The services channel – 52 per cent by phone, 23 per cent by email, 17 per cent by admin and 6 per cent by letter.
- The service's top two benefit issues are; the initial benefit claim and Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
- Debt Relief Order is the top debt issue the service deals with.
- The largest age group for clients is 55-59.
- Clients by ward (top 3) – Pharos Ward makes up 10 per cent of the clients, Mount makes up 8 per cent and Park, Rossall and Bourne make up 7 per cent.

Summary of evidence provided by Councillor Paul Ellison (Wyre representative on the Citizens Advice Lancashire West board)

Councillor Paul Ellison (Wyre representative on the Citizens Advice Lancashire West Board) attended the second scrutiny task group meeting.

Members of the task group then asked questions, and received answers. The following information is relevant to the groups goals:

▪ **Question 1.**

If the service provided is 'Value for Money'

Answer: Even if funding increased, the Council would be receiving value for money from the services provided.

▪ **Question 2.**

Opinions of any improvements of the service in the future, knowing the possible limitations of funding and resources

Answer: The service is well received and as previously stated anything the service can provide is useful and value for money.

▪ **Question 3.**

The Digital Kiosk trial

Answer: The concept would be beneficial, and could possibly be placed within the Fleetwood area.

▪ **Question 4.**

The availability of the service

Answer: The service is accessible 24/7 and if an individual required a phone conversation out of the normal office hours, there was a phone system that created a case to be answered during the new few working days. This ensures that no one is left unable to have their query answered.

▪ **Question 5.**

Trading Standards

Answer: The service would answer queries around issues regarding trading standards, as they were involved in providing advice for quite a variety of topics.

Conclusions and recommendations

After listening to all the evidence that was presented to them, the task group concluded that, the work of Citizens Advice Lancashire West is very much appreciated and vital within the borough of Wyre. The service is well used by residents.

They additionally concluded that the concept of a digital service should be explored by the council especially in the more rural areas of the borough. This will give even more residents access.

The group concluded that Wyre, compared to the some of its neighbouring authorities, have less funding per head of the population (27p).

The group also suggested that the possible fall out of the pandemic might cause more of the borough to find themselves in socio-economic hardship. Therefore, the task group concluded that there is the possibility of more demand on the service in the coming months.

Following on from their conclusions, the task group proposed the following recommendations be made to the Cabinet:

RECOMMENDATION ONE:

That Cabinet wholeheartedly support the continuation of Wyre working with the Citizens Advice Lancashire West (CALW).

RECOMMENDATION TWO:

Wyre Council should look more into the feasibility of a trial into the Digital Service Hub proposed by CALW. The group asks that this be included in any negotiations with the CALW and that they believe the best place for such a service would be at Knott End.

RECOMMENDATION THREE:

That Cabinet look into the possibility of reviewing the current level of funding provided to CALW.

The task group believe that there may be more of a demand on the service in the coming months, therefore requiring an increase to the current level of funding. The possible increase in service users may be caused by the impacts of the recent, and on-going, COVID-19 pandemic. Wyre residents may have a higher risk of hardship, homelessness, loss of employment, etc. when the Government Furlough Scheme ends.

If the required services are not delivered by Citizens Advice Lancashire West, or by Wyre Council, in the first instance, this could result in greater financial impact on the Borough longer term.

Councillors' attendances

There were three meetings of the task group.

Name	Meetings attended (maximum 3)
Councillor Howard Ballard	3
Councillor Julie Robinson	2
Councillor Ian Amos	3
Councillor Rita Amos	3
Councillor Callum Baxter	2
Councillor Lorraine Beavers	2
Councillor Sue Catterall	3
Councillor Emma Ellison	2
Councillor Colette Fairbanks	3
Councillor Rachel George	2
Councillor David Gerrard	3
Councillor Holly Swales	2
Huw Williams	1

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Citizens Advice Review Task Group – Scoping Document – FINAL

**Task Group
Scoping Document - FINAL**

Citizens Advice - Scrutiny Task Group

Scoping Document

Review Topic	Citizens Advice (formerly Citizens Advice Bureau)	
Chair and Vice-Chair	Councillor Ballard and Councillor Robinson	
Group Membership	Councillors Ballard, Baxter, Beavers, E Ellison, Fairbanks, George, Gerrard, Robinson, Swales and Williams.	
Officer Support	Marianne Unwin (Democratic Services Officer) Peter Foulsham (Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager)	
Purpose of the Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To assess and review the effectiveness and performance of the partnership and Service Level Agreement between Wyre Council and the Citizens Advice service. - To make recommendations to Cabinet on the agreement and as to whether it should be extended beyond May 2021. 	
Role of Overview and Scrutiny in this Review (mark all that apply)	Holding Executive to account – decisions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Existing budget and policy framework	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Contribution to policy development	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Holding Executive to account – performance	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Community champion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Statutory duties / compliance with codes of practice	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aims of Review	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To review the current arrangements that Wyre Council and Citizens Advice have in place and assess the effectiveness. 2. To make succinct recommendations to Cabinet regarding the details contained in the current service level agreement. 	
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review previous reports and documentation (see below) - Review performance data 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compare arrangements with other Local Authorities in the area - Interview witnesses
Scope of Review	The review will focus on the service level agreement between Wyre Council and Citizens Advice and not on wider issues surrounding debt, etc.
Potential Witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Councillor Paul Ellison (in his role as the council's nominated representative on the CAB Board) - Wyre Council officers (could include Corporate Director Communities, Head of Contact Centre, Head of Housing and Community Services, Senior Engagement Officer etc.) - Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Lancashire West - Service users - Community Groups
Documents to be considered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Service Level Agreement - Scrutiny review report to Cabinet on 18 January 2017 - CAB performance reports - Comparison between the arrangements with different local councils - Internal statistics
Risks	Unnecessarily prolonging what is intended to be a very short review of the outputs provided by the current funding arrangement with the Citizens Advice service.
Level of Publicity	Unknown.
Indicators of a Successful Review	A clear recommendation to Cabinet influencing their decision about whether or not to continue the agreement beyond 31 May 2021.
Intended Outcomes	To recommend whether or not the service provided is meeting expectations and is value for money for Wyre Council's Tax payers.
Approximate Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two months (two/three meetings) <p>The task group's work should be concluded before the Cabinet makes a decision on whether or not to continue funding Citizens Advice (Lancashire West) beyond the end of the current agreement in May 2021.</p>
Start Date	04.02.2021 at 6pm