

# **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 Welcome to this Council's Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report. Overview and Scrutiny plays a large part in the governance of Cheshire East and involves a significant proportion of the Council's 82 elected Members. It is our job to ensure that the Council's decision makers and our partner organisations are held to account for their decisions. By doing so, we strive to ensure that we achieve the best value possible from those who provide services to the residents of Cheshire East.
- 1.2 This is the first annual report since the Council reintroduced a formal Overview and Scrutiny Committee structure comprising 6 committees in May 2014. The new structure was implemented following a review of the Council's arrangements by Professors Steve Leach and Colin Copus of De Montfort University.
- 1.3 Local Authorities are facing unprecedented reductions in central funding which means that the way in which Council's now carry out their business has changed dramatically since the introduction of Overview and Scrutiny in 2000. In addition to the dramatic changes to the national landscape, Cheshire East's transition to a commissioning Council has led us to re-think how Overview and Scrutiny operates in Cheshire East. We are focussed on improving performance and achieving value for money, but we are equally concerned to ensure that what we do as a scrutiny function adds value to the work of the Council. For this reason, there has been a deliberate shift from retrospective 'scrutiny' activity to more forward thinking overview work. This is not to say that we ignore our responsibility to challenge the work of the Cabinet. Where it is necessary we still do that, but we are consciously moving to a more collaborative approach in order to engage with partner organisations whether they be one of the Council's own Alternative Service Delivery Vehicles (ASDV's) or our many external partners. With co-operation of our partners, we are able to bring a very important democratic dimension to the work of these organisations and thereby become the eyes and ears of the residents of Cheshire East.
- 1.4 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee together with the five themed Committees have undertaken a number of in- depth reviews on a wide range of topics such as High Growth City, Assistive Technology and Carers. Further details of these reviews and others can be found in section 2 of this report.
- 1.5 Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee had started an in- depth investigation into the Council's arrangements to protect

## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

young people from sexual exploitation. This work had been led with great enthusiasm by the late Councillor Phil Hoyland and this report cannot pass without paying tribute to Councillor Hoyland whose untimely death was a shock to us all.

- 1.6 Our thanks is extended to all those who have taken part in the work of Overview and Scrutiny over the past year. The process would not be possible without the co-operation and support of Cabinet Members, co-opted members, officers, public and partners.

I hope you find this report informative and wish the Council every success in the future.

Councillor Steve Wilkinson

## **2. The work of Overview and Scrutiny Committees**

### **2.1 Corporate**

Councillors:Chairman: Cllr Steve Wilkinson  
Vice Chairman: Cllr Brendan Murphy

Committee Membership: G Baxendale, K Edwards, M Grant P Groves, P Hoyland, F Keegan, W Livesley, A Moran, D Neilson, J Saunders and M Simon.

### **2.2 Committee work**

2.3 Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which comprises the Chairmen and Vice Chairman of all six Overview and Scrutiny Committees, now has two distinct roles. As an Overview and Scrutiny Committee it is responsible for reviewing the Council's corporate activity delivered by its central support services. The Committee now has an additional role to co-ordinate and oversee the activities of all committees. This is to ensure that there is consistency and to promote a clear understanding of areas of common interest across all Overview and Scrutiny Committees especially in relation to new legislation and best practice.

2.4 The Committee is mainly concerned with the internal operation of the Council, its budget setting, risk management, governance and human resources functions/arrangements.

2.5 The Committee has spent most of its efforts monitoring the progress of the budget and overall performance of the Council, both of which are vital to check the health of a complex organisation.

2.6 In particular, the Committee was formally consulted on the draft budget throughout 2014/15 having first considered a draft outline of the proposals in July 2014. The process culminated in final comments being submitted to Cabinet in February 2015.

2.7 The Committee considered quarterly performance reports. This process has been well supported by Cabinet Members and Heads of Service which has enabled the committee to appropriately challenge Cabinet and Corporate Leadership Board on the financial and overall performance of activities of the Council.

## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

2.8 The Committee recently agreed to take the lead to review the Council's arrangements regarding the local plan following the recent suspension of the examination in public.

2.9 A recent decision by Cabinet to improve and enhance the Council's digital offer to enable customer contact across all services to be primarily delivered through digital channels, gave the Committee an opportunity to be involved. Firstly in reviewing the business case and subsequently in testing some of the new innovations that will result from this piece of work.

### **2.10 Looking Ahead to 2015/2016**

The Committee will continue to take the lead on budget consultation, and performance monitoring in 2015/16. Clearly, the Local Plan, a vitally important strategy for the Council as it will determine how decisions will be made in future on the number of new homes that are needed and where they should be located; the amount and location of new employment land; protection and improvement of important open areas and provision of new ones; provision of new infrastructure and improvement of town centres and community facilities in the Borough and the Committee will oversee its progress. The project to redesign the Council's digital offer to customers will provide the Committee with opportunities to trail new developments and may lead to some opportunities to undertake some 'mystery shopping' Finally, the Committee will be tackling a long standing matter in the work programme to review the Council's financial management system ORACLE .

### **2.11 Children and Families**

Chairman: Cllr P Hoyland  
Vice Chairman: Cllr A Moran

Committee Membership:

Councillors: C Andrew, R M Domleo, I Faseyi, D Flude, G Merry, J Saunders

Statutory Co-opted Members: John McCann, Jill Kelly,

Youth Council representative: Zoe Van Cauter

### **2.12 Committee work**

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee deals with the scrutiny of Education, Children's Social Care, Early Years Provision, Looked after Children and Youth Services. These services

## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

are often complex, resulting in a large budget allocation and are responsible for the most vulnerable residents in Cheshire East.

- 2.13 The Committee embraced the Council's ambition to involve the public in the work of Overview and Scrutiny by inviting two members of the Youth Council to take an active part in meetings. This is in addition to the two statutory faith representatives on the Committee.
- 2.14 Following the Ofsted inspection of 2013, Corporate Scrutiny, the body then responsible for scrutinising children's services gave a strong commitment to overseeing safeguarding arrangements by ensuring that there was a standing item on agendas. This commitment was taken up by the new Children and Families Committee when it took over the responsibility in May 2014. The Committee has received regular updates on the improvement plan, met with the Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Ian Rush and has reviewed and made recommendations to improve the terms and conditions of children's social workers.
- 2.15 The Committee is committed to improving and strengthening its relationship with the LSCB. The Committee invited Ian Rush to one of its meetings early in 2015 to gain an understanding of the role of the LSCB, its relationship with the Council, its responsibilities and lines of accountability. Following that meeting, it was agreed that the annual report of the LSCB would in future be considered by the Committee.
- 2.16 Elsewhere, the Committee is supporting the Head of Children's Services in the production of a Special Education Needs (SEN) policy, which has significant implications for the Council in respect of the provision of special education needs. In March 2015, the Committee enthusiastically took up an offer to be involved with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) on a pilot project to increase member involvement in school attainment. This project will form a significant part of the Committee's work programme in 2015/16.
- 2.17 Task and Finish Group Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**
- Met between December 2014 and January 2015  
Membership:  
Phil Hoyland, Arthur Moran, Gill Merry \*Jos Saunders
- 2.18 In light of a number of high profile cases nationally, and in line with the Committee's long term commitment to seeking assurances about the Council's safeguarding arrangements, the Committee created a Task and Finish Group to review the Council's safeguarding arrangements in relation to CSE.

## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

- 2.19 Between December 2014 and January 2015, the task group undertook an intense piece of work and met 10 key individuals who are involved in CSE at a strategic level within the Council and partner organisations, and questioned them about their respective roles to safeguard young people. This was in the context of a number of high profile reports published in the wake of the Rotherham and Rochdale sex grooming cases and in regard to the latest national guidance.
- 2.20 Members of the task group were confident that the procedures and policies in place in Cheshire East were good and that there was no evidence of large scale systematic CSE taking place in Cheshire East. However, although there was evidence of isolated cases of CSE in the borough, the group was satisfied that when cases came to light, all agencies acted swiftly. The training programmes in place for schools and partner agencies in health etc. were considered vital to ensure that not only staff within these fields understand and recognise the signs of CSE, but are encouraged to take action when they have suspicions, or when matters are brought to their attention.
- 2.21 The work of the task group is ongoing and will continue in the summer of 2015. An interim report was produced by the task group and received by the parent committee in February 2015. A formal report is expected to be submitted to Cabinet when the review is fully completed.

**\* assisted with part of the review**

### **2.22 Looking Ahead to 2015/2016**

- 2.23 As mentioned above, school attainment will feature prominently in the work programme next year. The work on the CSE investigation will be picked up again in early summer and it is expected that a draft SEN policy will also be considered by the Committee in the summer.
- 2.24 The annual LSCB report is pencilled in for July 2015 and there are outstanding pieces of work to complete in relation to early years and the terms and conditions of children's social workers. There will be progress reports on Care Leavers and the Council's responsibilities in relation to the health of 5-19 year olds.
- 2.25 Finally, during its review of safeguarding arrangements, the Committee felt that there was a gap in its knowledge in relation to those parents who elect to educate their children at home. The Committee has therefore earmarked an item in its work programme to examine how the Council identifies children who are educated at home and who may be at risk.

### **2.26 New Delivery Vehicles and Environment**

## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

Chairman Councillor B Livesley  
Vice Chairman Councillor K Edwards  
Committee Members G Barton, H Davenport, R Fletcher, M Hardy, A Martin and B Murphy

The New Delivery Vehicles and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee deals with environmental matters including flood risk management and the following Alternative Service Delivery Vehicles (ASDVs):

- ANSA – waste and recycling, grounds maintenance, fleet and street cleansing.
- Orbitas – cemeteries and crematoria, handyman service.
- Transport Services Solutions – home to school transport, specialised transport, public transport, demand responsive transport and transport associated activities
- Civicance – planning support
- Fairerpower – energy supply

### **Committee Work**

2.27 In connection with ANSA and Orbitas, the Committee has developed good working relations with the companies and the Council's Commissioning Managers which has enabled it to monitor quarterly performance reports on a regular basis. To assist the Committee in its role, Members undertook site visits of the various depots and premises operated by ANSA and Orbitas. This provided Members with an opportunity to gain an understanding of how the companies operate, the working conditions and what improvements they wish to make in the future. The Committee has been satisfied with the progress made by both companies, found the site visits very informative and therefore agreed that they would like to repeat the visits annually to monitor the progress made. The site visits will be particularly useful after the May elections for any new Members of the Committee.

2.28 The Committee is also monitoring the development of Transport Service Solutions, Civicance and Fairerpower.

### **2.29 Committee work**

### **2.30 Waste**

2.31 The Committee assisted in the development of the Waste Management strategy to 2030, which was subsequently approved by Cabinet. Members considered an Assessment of Waste Collection of compliance in accordance with new legislation. Under the revised Waste Framework Directive in respect to the Waste (England and Wales) regulations 2011, the collection of recyclable glass, metal,

## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

paper and plastic now has to be separated from January 2015. The Council collects dry recyclables in one silver bin. It wanted to demonstrate that it would be unnecessary and uneconomical to switch to a separate collection and by demonstrating that the processed recycling streams being produced through the contract with UPM was of the same as if it had been kerbside sorted.

2.32 Members concluded that the report demonstrated that there was no necessity to collect the materials separately and that it was not technically, environmentally and economically practicable (TEEP) to do so and recommended to Cabinet that the TEEP Assessment be accepted.

2.33 The Committee has also been monitoring the development of a proposed single Environmental Services Hub which will enable the delivery of modern facilities, improve business efficiency and rationalise sites across the Borough.

### **2.34 Flood Risk Management**

2.35 In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, this Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of flood risk management within Cheshire East. Members received an annual report outlining the progress made in 2014/2015; joint working arrangements, enforcement activity and future challenges for 2015/2016 and was pleased to note that arrangements in Cheshire East are satisfactory.

### **2.36 Call In**

2.37 In March 2015, a Portfolio Holder decision relating to a Car Parking Consolidation Order for 2015 was called in. The Committee considered the report, questioned the Portfolio Holder and Head of Service on the formal response to the call-in, and considered evidence it had received. In conclusion, the Committee decided it did not wish to make a recommendation to alter the original decision of the Portfolio Holder which meant that the decision to progress the consolidation order could be implemented immediately.

### **2.38 Looking Ahead to 2015/2016**

2.39 As well as continuing to monitor the work of the ASDVs and Flood Risk Management, a Task and Finish Group will be established to implement a Borough Wide Speed Limit Review through the preparation of a Speed Management Policy.

## **2.40 Communities**

Chairman – Councillor G Baxendale



## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

Vice Chairman – Councillor M Grant  
Committee Members – A Barratt, S Davies, P Edwards (from October 2014), H Gaddum, P Hayes, K Hickson and P Whiteley

### **2.41 Committee work**

- 2.42 The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for Community Strategies, localism, communities and regulatory services, visitor economy, Tatton Park Enterprises and crime and disorder matters as provided by Sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act 2006. This year the Committee has concentrated on fact finding and gaining an understanding of the work of the services covered within the remit of the Committee.

### **2.43 Crime and Disorder Matters**

Prior to holding its first formal meeting in 2014/15 a session was held to train Members on community safety and the role of the Committee in relation to the Safer Cheshire East Partnership and the Police and Crime Panel. The training covered:

- Community safety in a national context
- The purpose, priorities, activities, funding and achievements of the safer Cheshire East Partnership
- A review of the Safer Cheshire East Partnership strategic needs assessment
- The changing landscape of community safety
- The Role and Membership of the Police and Crime Panel (PCP)
- Role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Cheshire and Warrington Community Safety
- Improved processes to ensure information flow between the Committee, Police and Crime Panel and Safer Cheshire East Partnership

- 2.45 The Committee also received training on the content and implications of the Anti Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and in future will be monitoring how and to what effect the new powers are being used.

- 2.46 The Safer Cheshire East Partnership is currently updating its plan as the priorities are out of date as the types of crime now committed have changed dramatically. Following a recommendation from the Committee, rural crime will now feature in the plan and the Committee will be reviewing the final plan in June 2015.

### **2.47 Domestic Homicide Review**

## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

- 2.48 The Committee received a preliminary briefing on a domestic homicide review which took place following a murder case in Cheshire East in June 2014. During the case it transpired that the offender had alcohol related behavioural issues and was known by various agencies, having had interactions with several services prior to the incident. An action plan is being developed in order to address some of the issues which have been raised by the review. The Committee will be reviewing the actions of the partners of the Safer Cheshire East Partnership.

### **2.49 Enforcement Policy**

- 2.50 The Committee decided that the Council's Enforcement Policy needed refreshing to reflect the Council's ambition to be an 'Enforcing Council'. It was agreed that the policy should become an overarching corporate policy which set out what businesses and residents can expect from the Council's regulatory functions and enforcement practice. This would also set out with strong procedures and clear policies, which services it should cover, and to include:

1. An explanation of what the policy covers and what is meant by enforcement, links to the Council's outcomes, legislation relevant to enforcement and equalities and general principles on the approach to enforcement and proposed action.
2. What tools can be used for enforcement from no action-prosecution.
3. How alleged offenders, witnesses and victims would be kept informed.
4. Who would take the decisions on the action
5. Primary Authority relationships and liaison with other agencies
6. When it would be reviewed.

- 2.51 The policy will be subject to consultation with local businesses and residents and submitted to the Cabinet Member for Localism and Enforcement for approval in due course.

### **2.52 Alternative Service Delivery Vehicle (ASDV)**

- 2.53 The Committee is responsible for reviewing Tatton Park Enterprises which deals with the catering at Tatton Park. Members have received a presentation on the work of the ASDV and reviewed its performance.

### **2.54 Looking Ahead to 2015/2016**

- 2.55 A Task and Finish Group will be established to investigate domestic violence, rape and internet safety. The Committee will also be concentrating on the Safer Cheshire East Partnership Plan and its performance.

## **2.56 Health and Adult Social Care**

Chairman: Councillor M Simon  
Vice Chairman: Councillor J Saunders

Members: Councillors C Andrew, RM Domleo, L Jeuda, S Jones, G Merry, A Moran

- 2.57 The Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee deals with the scrutiny of health and social care services by holding the Council and the many healthcare service commissioners and providers to account to ensure that health and wellbeing objectives are achieved. In its statutory health scrutiny role, the Committee has commented on substantial developments and variations proposed by the NHS, and commented on changes to adult social care services. The committee responded to a call in regarding respite care services in Congleton. In terms of policy review, the committee has set up Task and Finish Groups to look in depth at specific service areas. The Committee has also kept up to date with proposed changes in the NHS outlined by the Coalition Government

## **2.58 Carers - Task and Finish Group**

Met between November 2013 – February 2015

Membership  
M Simon (chair), L Jeuda and J Saunders

- 2.59 The task group was originally set up by the Adult Social Care Policy Development Group, following an event jointly held by the Council and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) for carers to provide their views on what services should do to support them in their caring role. The task group continued under the Committee and met several times to review current services and changes to legislation introduced by the Care Act 2014. In March 2015 the task group presented its final report to Cabinet. This included recommendations for the Council and its partners to support carers more and how they could raise the profile of caring and reach more hidden carers who could benefit from support.

## **2.60 Assistive Technology – Task and Finish Group**

March 2014 – February 2015

Membership  
J Saunders (chair), C Andrew and L Jeuda

## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

2.61 This task group was also set up during the Adult Social Care Policy Development Group and continued with new membership under the direction of Committee. The task group conducted several site visits to learn more about assistive technology (AT) and the types of equipment and services that could be used to help keep people independent and safe in their own homes for longer. The task group submitted a report to Cabinet in March 2015 with recommendations for how AT services could be developed and provided to more people in a financially sustainable way.

### **2.62 Committee Work**

2.63 During the year the Committee has considered a wide range of health and adult social care issues. The Committee followed up the review of the 2013/14 quality accounts of East Cheshire NHS Trust and Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust by the former Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. This was achieved by reviewing the quality accounts of Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust to ensure that the Borough's key health providers were performing effectively and delivering positive outcomes.

2.64 The Committee was consulted on the development of services at Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and the redesign of specialised cancer services commissioned by NHS England in the North West. The Committee was also consulted on the Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy, the Joint Strategy for Carers 2015-18, and changes to stroke services in Eastern Cheshire CCG.

2.65 In January 2015 the Committee hosted a workshop about developing the role of social and private landlords in health and wellbeing. Council officers from housing, adult social care and communities were joined by representatives from Clinical Commissioning Groups, housing associations and private landlords to discuss how they could all work together to improve services and health outcomes for residents. Feedback from the event was positive. The Committee produced a report with recommendations to further build relationships and develop integrated services.

2.66 Throughout the year the Committee has been developing its relationships with its health and care partners. The Committee has reviewed Healthwatch Cheshire East's Annual Report for 2013/14 and considered how the two parties can work together to hold providers and commissioners to account more effectively. The Committee has also worked with members of the Health and Wellbeing Board throughout the year to coordinate work loads and discuss important issues affecting Cheshire East.

2.67 In relation to leisure services, the Committee has been developing its relationship with Everybody Sports and Recreation Trust (ESAR) and

## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

will be reviewing the Trust's first ever annual report in the new municipal year.

- 2.68 Representatives of the Committee have also conducted a piece of work with colleagues from Cheshire West and Chester Council to work on a Joint Committee to review the performance of Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust including how other parts of the health and care system support and impact on the Trust.

### **2.69 Looking Ahead to 2015/2016**

- 2.70 In the new municipal year the Committee will continue to build on the relationships within health and care that it has already developed to assist in joint working and the integration of health and care services. The Committee will also consider hosting further workshops on important issues thanks to the positive feedback on the health and housing workshop; and hold its meetings around the Borough to increase engagement with the public. Key issues that the Committee will give consideration to include: access to GP services, respite care, adult safeguarding and maternity services.

## **2.71 Jobs, Regeneration and Assets**

Chairman: Councillor P Groves  
Vice Chairman: F Keegan

Councillors G Barton, S Corcoran, S Hogben, B Murphy, J Weatherill, J Wray

The Jobs Regeneration and Assets Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for monitoring performance and policy development relating to economic growth and employment, regeneration of the Borough's towns and villages, housing and development management, and asset management: including facilities management, use of assets, disposals of land and buildings. The Committee is also responsible for monitoring the Cheshire East Engine of the North ASDV.

### **2.72 Task and Finish Groups**

### **2.73 High Growth City**

Met between October 2014-December 2015

Membership  
P Groves (chair), S Hogben, F Keegan and J Weatherill

## **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

- 2.74 The task group was set up to consider how a potential decision by Government to locate a hub station for High Speed 2 (HS2) rail network in Crewe would impact on the town and surrounding area and whether the Council was equipped to maximise the benefits of the opportunities HS2 would bring. The task group held several meetings with officers in a short space of time to consider the implications of a hub station for the sub region in relation to planning, infrastructure, business and jobs, and skills. The task group submitted its report with recommendations to Cabinet in February 2015. Recommendations included the need to ensure appropriate resources and structures are in place, the development of a growth strategy followed by a review of the Local Plan, the need to develop an effective communication strategy with the public.
- 2.75 Committee Work**
- 2.76 This year the Committee has considered a variety of areas within its remit. The Committee has been consulted on Business Engagement in the Borough, All Change for Crewe, and the use of WebGIS to monitor planning information.
- 2.77 The Committee has contributed to the development of the Housing Delivery Framework 2015-20 which will help to ensure that the Borough has the right housing in the right places. The Committee also advised on updating several aspects of the Common Allocations Policy following a consultation with members of the public and housing providers.
- 2.78 The Committee has built a positive relationship with Cheshire Neighbours Credit Union. This has helped it to develop initiatives to increase membership and activity as part of the Union's strategy to become financially sustainable and secure its long term future as a valuable source of financial advice and support for many of Cheshire East's residents. The Committee will continue to monitor the progress of the credit union and provide support where needed.
- 2.79 Over the course of several meetings the Committee has given consideration to the development of the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP). Several Members of the Committee held additional meetings with officers to consider the Plan in detail and reported back to the full Committee. The SAMP will contribute to bringing efficiencies to the Council's land and property assets and influence the strategic direction of the Council between 2015 and 2018. The Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of the plan and whether it is effective in helping the Council to achieve its strategic objectives.
- 2.77 Looking Ahead to 2015/2016**

**Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny  
Cheshire East Council 2014/2015**

- 2.78 Examining the economic development of the Borough will continue to be a key area of work for the Committee as well as regeneration of towns and housing deliver. The Committee will look to develop a relationship with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) as this is a key stakeholder in the development of infrastructure and business opportunities in Cheshire and Warrington. The Committee will continue to monitor the progress of Government plans for HS2 and whether the Council can be in a position to maximise potential benefits.

## 3. Lessons Learned

### 3.1 Meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees

3.2 Meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees have taken place in the following forms:

1. **Formal meetings** – in accordance with the statutory deadlines either monthly or bi - monthly
2. **Mid point meetings** – mainly to deal with agenda setting and review of actions from previous meetings
3. **Informal meetings** – to deal with matters not yet in the public domain - awareness sessions

3.3 The Council has decided that in 2015/16 there will be fewer formal meetings with most Committees meeting on a bi-monthly basis. This is subject to a proviso that each Chairman has discretion to vary the schedule of meetings depending on workload. Bi-monthly meetings will enable the Committees to fulfil their formal requirements to meet and to consider matters in public. This will also free up time for the Committees to undertake additional work such as task and finish groups, member briefings and site visits etc.

### 3.4 Scrutiny/Portfolio Holder informal liaison meetings

3.5 Each Committee chairman has held meetings informally with their relevant portfolio holders and heads of service. Some have met more frequently than others, but this is to be expected as the level of input required from the executive varies from Committee to Committee. Whilst it is acknowledged that all Committees should continue to use these meetings for work programming purposes, it should be left to individual Chairmen to decide upon their frequency but that continuous dialogue between Cabinet Members/CLB and Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen is essential to achieve the best from Overview and Scrutiny.

### 3.6 Task and Finish Groups

3.7 It is accepted that certain tasks are best dealt with by Task and Finish Groups. The work of these groups becoming increasingly valued. However, a continuing concern is that only a small cohort of Members has been actively involved in Task and Finish Groups. It would be helpful if those Members who have been involved in task and finish work could 'champion' this kind of activity with fellow members in an attempt to increase the numbers involved. Without exception, those members who have taken part find the experience interesting and rewarding.



## **4 Future Developments**

- 4.1 The landscape for Overview and Scrutiny continues to change. Successful scrutiny relies less upon its formal powers and requires the use of much softer skills to build good relationships within the council and with partner organisations. It needs to have an appreciation of the strategic direction of the Council and partners, to sell its worth to all to ensure that it always adds value.
- 4.2 Partnership work now constitutes a large amount of business transacted in Cheshire East. Overview and Scrutiny Members can play a pivotal role in addressing cross-cutting issues across organisational boundaries.
- 4.3 Although Scrutiny of partnerships by local authorities is enshrined in law, the specific powers are limited. Therefore, softer means of influence such as relationship-building, negotiation, liaison and dialogue are where the opportunities lie for Overview and Scrutiny.
- 4.4 Consequently, scrutiny of partners tends to be less about inquisition and more about collaborative co-operation. Overview and Scrutiny can therefore forge a link between the Council and external agencies.
- 4.5 Overview and Scrutiny must be proactive in selling the benefits of its activity. Partners will better understand that by engaging in the scrutiny process, the partner will be seen to have become more locally accountable, to locally-elected councillors and, to local people. For the partner, engaging with scrutiny will also help them to understand more effectively the local context in which they are making decisions, and will provide them with valuable external assurance in their decision-making systems.
- 4.6 Overview and Scrutiny is in a unique position to bring, a democratic dimension that would otherwise be absent. Therefore Overview and Scrutiny Members can be the eyes and ears of the public.
- 4.7 All of the above applies equally to the Council's own arms length companies. Engine of the North, Orbitas and ANSA have been in existence for some time. Others including Transport Solutions and Civicance are still relatively new. Overview and Scrutiny has a vital role in monitoring the performance of these companies and where appropriate holding the Council's own commissioning managers to account thereby giving the residents of Cheshire East assurance that these matters are being examined in public on their behalf