



Barrow Borough Council

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2022/2023

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Introduction

Welcome to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for Barrow Borough Council. The report sets out the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee between May 2022 and the end of March 2023, being the final year as Barrow Borough Council comes to a close.

The Council has one Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the remit to investigate, scrutinise, monitor, oversee and comment on service delivery mechanisms, policy implementation, or any other issue affecting the Borough or its residents, provided that they have previously been considered by either the Executive Committee or Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the power to review or scrutinise decisions made, or actions taken, in accordance with the discharge of any of the Council's functions. It also has the power to make recommendations to the Council or Executive Committee, and to consider any matters which affect the Council's area or its communities. The Committee also plays an important role in policy development and review and by providing input during the early stages of policy development, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can add real value before a final decision is made.

Overview and Scrutiny is a key tool for promoting the best interests and wellbeing of the area and seeks to ensure that local people receive high quality services that meet their needs. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee does this by acting as a 'critical friend' to the Executive Committee, holding it to account and providing challenge where necessary.



Chair's Foreword

In presenting this Annual Report for 2022-23, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their outstanding contribution to our Council's aims, plans and goals over the last 12 months. The Annual Report shows the work the Committee has undertaken this municipal year and the value for our community.

Owing to changes in political balance, the Committee has seen two changes of chair in this council year. The Committee has responded well to the changes, and progress has not been delayed as a result. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee has developed into a cohesive forum with the sole aim of working together to support, challenge, and maximise the effectiveness of the Council, to listen to our partners but more importantly to listen to our residents.

We have scrutinised a number of issues, receiving reports on the Business Improvement District, our Flood Defences, and we were able to refer recommendations back to the Executive Committee concerning the memorial bench policy which we were pleased to see were accepted by the Executive in the revised adopted policy. All matters for the work programme continue to be progressed (most to conclusion) with sensitivity by the agreed and established Chairs and their groups.

Overview & Scrutiny is a fundamental Committee tasked with ensuring that we are all (Members and Officers) held accountable for our actions and that full trust can be assured to our Borough from all of us.

I would like to thank the committee Members, officers and partners who have contributed and supported scrutiny during the year, this being our final year as Barrow Borough Council.

We have made great progress over the last 12 months, and it is my sincere wish that this continues in the same vein going forward, as we transition into the new unitary authority of Westmorland and Furness, from April. Once again thank you for your support and commitment to our community and to me as Chair.

Cllr Ben Shirley – Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Year in Review: Overview and Scrutiny 2022/2023

Between May 2022 and February 2023 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had met six times. Membership of the Committee changed throughout the year due to the political composition of the Council changing. The Members of the Committee from September 2022 to February 2023 was Councillors:-

- Ben Shirley (Chair);
- Frank Cassidy (Vice Chair);
- Derek Gawne;
- Les Hall;
- Allison Johnston;
- Wendy McClure;
- William McEwan;
- Beverly Morgan;
- Steve Robson;
- Sam Ronson; and
- Colin Thomson.

The Work Programme for 2022/2023 had been agreed by the Committee at their meeting on 24th March 2022 and then later amended at their meetings on 15th September 2022 and 4th November. This had been due to varying demands and priorities and the fact that Barrow Borough Council would no longer be in existence from 31st March 2023 due to Local Government Reorganisation.

The original Work Programme had comprised of:-

- Crellin Street;
- Discretionary Housing Payments;
- Flooding on Walney Promenade;
- Impact of Covid-19 Going Forward;
- Memorial Benches Policy Review;
- Review of Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy;
- Review of Customer Strategy and Action Plan;
- Review of Equality Strategy and Action Plan; and
- Review of the Growing Forward Report and Action Plan.

The revised Work Programme comprised of:-

- Contract Management Assurance;
- Discretionary Housing Payments;
- Flooding on Walney Promenade and the Wider Coast;
- Impact of Covid-19 Going Forward;
- Memorial Benches Policy Review;
- Review of Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy and Action Plan; and
- Review of Barrow Business Improvement District (BID).

Further details of each of the reviews are provided overleaf:-

Contract Management Assurance

Membership of Work Group	No Work Group set up – All addressed at Committee level
Key Priority	People/Place/Prosperity
Review Status	Noted

Background

Statutory Recommendations had been made by External Audit in relation to contract management and ensuring Members and Officers had robust assurance and reporting arrangements in place for managing all ongoing contracts and to enable appropriate and timely action to remediate any non-compliance or wider deficiencies.

Scope of the Review

The Director of Resources had proposed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee oversee the performance management and service delivery of significant contracts which would provide assurance and transparency of contract management.

Details of the Review

Members had sight of the Council's contract register and selected a number of contracts to review in priority order as follows:-

- Grounds Maintenance and Playground Inspections/Maintenance;
- Building Cleaning (Offices and Housing Common Areas);
- Cleaning of Public Conveniences, Bus Shelters and Stairwells; and
- Catering and Cleaning of Venues (Forum and Dock Museum).
- PR, Communications and Social Media Services
- Delivery Partner Agreement with Art Gene – Low Carbon Barrow Programme
- High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) Cultural Consortium Project Lead

Relevant Senior Officers had produced reports and presented them to the Committee responding to questions from Members. The reports covered details of the contracts, their procurement and subsequent management and delivery, etc.

The Committee were able to ask questions of Officers in order to gain assurance of the arrangements in place and had the opportunity to make any recommendations before noting the reports received.

Whilst the review has concluded for Barrow Borough Council the statutory recommendations from External Audit and the improvements made through the year will be fed into Westmorland and Furness Council for them to consider moving forward.

Discretionary Housing Payments

Membership of Work Group	Cllrs M. A. Thomson (Lead), McEwan and Morgan
Key Priority	People/Prosperity
Review Status	Will conclude March 2023

Details of the review

The Work Group had met in November 2021 with the Revenues and Benefits Service Manager who had provided details of Supported Housing and Discretionary Housing Payments.

Supported Housing in the Borough comes in three parts:-

- Fully supported housing where there is 24-hour care for extremely vulnerable residents;
- Supported Housing in houses and flats where the support is graded by need; and
- Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's) where people live in houses either with shared rooms or flats with various levels of support.

The Council itself does not have any supported housing; it is all provided by private companies.

The Work Group had wished to undertake a Deep Dive into what support was available to vulnerable residents in HMOs and Supported Housing Accommodation, looking at both the needs of the residents as well as the financial aspect to the Council.

In July 2022 the Executive Committee considered a report from the Director of Resources concerning Supported Accommodation matters.

In September 2022 the Committee had agreed to change the focus of the review to cover looking into national legislation and potential loopholes and asked that the Director of Resources presented an update report.

In November 2022 the Director of Resources presented a Supported Accommodation report to the Committee and it was resolved to agree to recommend that the Executive Committee, on behalf of the Council, should send a letter to the Secretary of State, the Chief Executive of Westmorland and Furness Shadow Authority and the local MP (cc'd to the Leader of Westmorland and Furness Shadow Authority), requesting that consistent Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates be applied across the three areas of Barrow South Lakeland and Eden.

The Director of Resources undertook further research in order to inform the report to the Executive Committee and determined that the LHA rate is a product and it is the underlying private sector rent that influences the allowances. Instead the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to consider making a recommendation to the Executive Committee which requests that the need for an Accommodation Policy is raised with Westmorland and Furness Council.

Commented [PW2]: In view of this being on the O&S Agenda on 2nd Feb and going to Exec in March this will need to be updated with the conclusion follow March's Executive Committee before Annual Report goes to Council on 28th March.

Flooding on Walney Promenade

Membership of Work Group	Cllrs Cassidy (Lead), Gawne, McEwan and C. Thomson
Key Priority	Place
Review Status	Concluded December 2022

Background

The Promenade on Walney was intermittently affected by flooding when high Spring tides coincided with severe adverse weather conditions such as heavy rainfall and storm surges. Typically this occurred once or twice per year when the capacity of waste treatment storage arrangements was challenged by the prevailing conditions.

Scope of the Review

To liaise with the relevant responsible Authorities to ensure that everything possible was being done to address the flooding issues.

Details of the Review

Contact had been made with Cumbria County Council to ascertain whether their Overview and Scrutiny Committee had looked at this matter in the past, as flooding sat with the upper tier Authority. It had since been confirmed that they had not looked into this matter in the recent past.

An Officer from the Council's Public Protection Services represented the Council on the Making Space for Water Group in Cumbria. He had previously supplied some technical information to the Work Group.

Following the request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, arrangements had been made for two representatives from United Utilities to address the Committee to discuss this issue. An update had been provided on the plans being made for the sewer network to prevent flooding on Walney Promenade as follows:

It had been noted that a micro tunnel runs from North Scale to Mill Lane which was most likely subject to tidal infiltration as it runs under the channel. In order to conduct investigatory works, with the area being a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), permits would be required from Natural England and the Marine Maritime Industry. There was an approximate lead time of 6-9 months for the permits to be obtained.

With narrow windows of opportunity to conduct investigatory works due to tides, it was anticipated that the investigatory works would take approximately one month. A Business Case would then need to be developed with a view to completing the works within a further six months (subject to permits).

Overall, it was anticipated that the works could be completed within a time frame of 12-18 months maximum. The representatives from United Utilities had confirmed that they would be happy to provide regular updates to the Committee as appropriate.

In November 2022 United Utilities representatives had attended the meeting to provide an update regarding their investigatory works on the Walney Sewer network. The Maritime permits had taken eight months which was why the investigatory work had taken some time.

Investigations had indicated that some of the manhole covers had been subject to tidal water infiltration. Some had been easily remedied by replacing the marine gaskets. However, one manhole north of Teasdale Road had been letting water in and the plan was to remove that. Additional permits would be required to undertake those works, which again, would take some time to process.

The Committee had welcomed the information and the offer from United Utilities to provide updates to the Committee upon completion of the works.

Conclusion

In December 2022, the Committee had agreed that they were happy to conclude this review. The scope of the review had been to liaise with the relevant responsible authorities to ensure that everything possible was being done to address flooding issues and that had been carried out satisfactorily.

Flooding on the Wider Coast

Membership of Work Group	Cllrs Cassidy (Lead), Gawne, McEwan and C. Thomson
Key Priority	Place
Review Status	Concluded December 2022

Background

The scope of the review into Flooding on Walney Promenade had been extended in September 2022 to look at a wider flooding of the entire coast.

Scope of the Review

To liaise with the relevant responsible Authorities to ensure that everything possible was being done to address the flooding issues.

Details of the Review

The Work Group met with the Head of Programme Management and Climate change in October 2022 to understand the duties and responsibilities, along with the different organisations involved and their obligations with regards to flooding.

The Head of Programme Management and Climate Change had provided a briefing note to the Committee on 2nd November. A query had been raised as to why South Walney had been recorded in the Coastal Strategy as 'No Active Intervention' as there was well established coastal erosion problems on South Walney and the sea cuts right across the Nature Reserve. The Committee had been advised that both the Walney Island Strategy and the Cumbria Coastal Strategy agree with the Shoreline Management Plan policy that South Walney (from Haw Will on the west coast, anticlockwise to Creepshaw Marsh on the east coast) is recorded as 'No Active Intervention'. This was mainly due to the fact that very few properties were at risk of flooding or erosion over the Strategy's 100-year timescale. The 'No Active Intervention' policy did not however preclude private defences being constructed, subject to the necessary permissions/licences.

Conclusion

In December 2022, the Committee had agreed that they were happy to conclude this review. The scope of the review had been to liaise with the relevant responsible authorities to ensure that everything possible was being done to address flooding issues and that had been carried out satisfactorily.

Impact of Covid-19 going Forward

Membership of Work Group	Cllrs McEwan (Lead), Cassidy, McClure and McLeavy
Key Priority	People/Place/Prosperity
Review Status	Noted

Background

The Scrutiny Committee had agreed that Covid-19 had been an unprecedented challenge to the Council and other organisations. It was clear that going forward, the Council would be delivering a lot of its services in different ways. The Committee had agreed that a Work Group should be established to review the way these changes were managed to ensure the impact on local people was considered and the changes were implemented and communicated in the best way possible.

Scope of the Review

It was agreed that the review should include:-

- Understanding the Council's response and what had been learnt and applying that going forward. Sharing best practice across the Borough was essential to ensure maximised benefit of initiatives;
- Ensuring that Officers and Members were equipped to operate on-site and off-site and that equipment could be upgraded remotely with a minimum amount of disruption;
- Ensuring that the Council was clear about its role and that it was transparent to other organisations and to residents; and
- The impact that different ways of working by industry, retail and hospitality may have on the economic future of the Borough.

Details of the Review

In respect of the processing of grants during lockdown, the Work Group had met with the Director of Resources to obtain an overview of the process and to look at individual examples to ensure the process was being applied correctly.

In respect of IT equipment, the Executive Committee had approved an IT project which would improve security and reliability of their systems and provide improved communications for Officers and Members.

The work group monitoring the impact of Covid-19 had focussed on the following:

Issue of Focus	Comments/Progress
The latest business Grants process following the National Lockdown.	The Work Group had an overview of the process and had looked at individual

	examples to ensure the process was being applied.
Availability of Covid-19 testing in the Borough.	The Work Group had been satisfied that there was sufficient provision.
Support provided by the Council for premises in the area to prepare them for re-opening.	Information had been gathered from Public Protection.
Monitoring the provision of and the activities of the Covid Marshalls.	Information had been gathered from Public Protection.
Monitoring published Covid-19 related clinical data including:- case numbers, hospital admissions and fatalities in the area.	The Work Group had received regular updates from Graham Barker, Head of Public Protection and Colin Cox, Director of Public Health for Cumbria County Council.

Conclusions

The Work Group's overview would continue during the remaining quarter for Barrow Borough Council and concludes at the end of March 2023.

Memorial Benches

Membership of Work Group	Cllrs Cassidy (Lead), Gawne, McEwan and McLeavy.
Key Priority	Place
Review Status	Concluded January 2023

Background

The style and number of memorial benches appearing around the Borough had been raised as a concern.

Scope of the Review

The aim of the review was to ensure that some consistency could be applied to the siting and style of memorial benches throughout the Borough.

Details of the review

Following discussions with the Director of People and Place, the Work Group established that a set of guidelines for the installation of memorial benches within the Council Cemeteries existed but there was no equivalent set of guidelines for the installation of memorial benches on Barrow Borough Council owned land outside of Council Cemeteries. This had resulted in an ad hoc approach to the siting of benches and no clear position on quality of installation and maintenance.

A draft policy for Memorial Benches encompassing the siting on Barrow Borough Council owned land as well as Cemeteries had been reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 28th October, 2021. The Committee had been satisfied with the Policy and had recommended that Executive Committee approve the policy which was approved on 10th November, 2021.

At Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24th March, 2022 Members resolved to undertake a review of the Memorial Benches Policy six months following implementation and added this to the Work Programme for 2022/2023.

Following a meeting of the Memorial Benches Work Group in November 2022 and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in December 2022, they had recommended that the following changes be made to the policy:-

- Due to the volume of memorial benches already in place, no new benches should be permitted around the coastline of Walney Island;
- When applying for a bench customers would be informed that planting or placing tributes around the bench was not permitted. Any tributes placed around the bench would be removed. Flowers would be permitted and could be placed on the bench subject to the following:-
 - They were not to be wrapped in any paper or plastic coverings;
 - They were only to be placed on the bench for a reasonable period or until the flowers die – whichever is soonest;
 - They should not cover more than a quarter of the seating area of the bench;
 - They should not prevent the bench being used as a seating;
- The bench would be recycled plastic as opposed to hardwood;
- Any unauthorised benches would be removed; and
- The fee would be subject to any annual increase in line with the Council's fees and charges.

Conclusions

At their meeting on 7th December 2022, Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the revised policy and made a recommendation to the Executive Committee that the revised policy be adopted. Executive Committee agreed the revised policy with immediate effect from their meeting on 11th January 2023.

Review of Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy and Action Plan

Membership of Work Group	No Work Group set up – All addressed at Committee level
Key Priority	People/Place/Prosperity
Review Status	Noted

Background

An increase in anti-social behaviour, particularly around the Town Centre shopping area had been of concern.

Scope of the Review

The scope of the review was for the Committee to have sight of the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy and Action Plan and to review and monitor progress against the Action Plan.

Details of the review

The Head of People and Communities had attended a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2022 and provided Members with an update on action being taken by the

Safe and Strong Communities Team, in partnership with other agencies locally, in relation to anti-social behaviour in the Town Centre.

There had been a surge in anti-social behaviour within the Town Centre causing damage to many of the empty shops. A meeting had been held in June with all Partners to establish intelligence gathering. Since then, a targeted approach had been used to tackle anti-social behaviour. Formal interviews had taken place with parents of individuals explaining implications of the anti-social behaviour and since then, Police had confirmed that the number of anti-social behaviour reports had reduced.

A further meeting had taken place with the BID, Public Protection, Safe and Strong Communities Team Manager, Police, Youth Intervention Projects, Drop Zone and Education Welfare to formulate an action plan to work together in a partnership approach.

The Safe and Strong Communities Team had been working with partners in the third sector for proactive removal of offensive graffiti as a priority.

In November it had been reported that the Council had been working with Partners to secure funding to assist with monitoring anti-social behaviour in the Town Centre.

Corporate communications had been issued around Halloween and safety around Bonfire Night, in partnership with the Fire Service and the Police.

An all-Member briefing had been facilitated by the Director of People and Place and the Head of People and Communities in November including an update on anti-social behaviour measures. The ethos and aim of the anti-social behaviour strategy was not all about enforcement, arrests etc it was to work with residents to engage with them to prevent enforcement action. There had been a drop in calls for anti-social behaviour and Enviro Crime across the borough month on month due to the excellent work of Officers being out in the community working with youths, residents and tenants to prevent and stop anti-social behaviour. The local focus hub with the Police working with the Safe and Strong Communities Team had been a positive impact on that work.

In December 2022 the Head of People and Communities and Acting Inspector 1240 Joanne Smith from Cumbria Constabulary had provided the Committee with an update as follows:-

- A new Safe and Strong Communities Team had been created so they were able to work with Residents;
- A Public Space Protection Order was in place and a number of fixed penalty notices had been issued;
- Funding had been secured for CCTV cameras;
- Additional lighting would be installed around the Town Centre and Preston Street; and
- Liaison with the management team at McDonalds had resulted in an improvement in the number of anti-social behaviour incidents.

Conclusions

Whilst the review has concluded for Barrow Borough Council, anything that required continued monitoring would be fed into Westmorland and Furness Council for them to consider moving forward.

Review of Barrow Business Improvement District (BID)

Membership of Work Group	No Work Group set up – All addressed at Committee level
Key Priority	People/Place/Prosperity
Review Status	Concluded December 2022

Background

Barrow BID had been established in 2016 as a result of a democratic vote of the businesses within the defined BID area. 77.5% of the businesses voted for the creation of a Business Improvement District for Barrow town centre.

The levy is used to deliver projects which benefit business in the BID area and during the first term, a range of events and projects had been delivered successfully in the town centre.

The second term for Barrow BID had commenced on 1st September 2021 following a further ballot process, where businesses voted to continue to BID.

To support the collaborative working relationship between Barrow BID and the Council, regular BID Liaison meetings are held and the BID Liaison Officer (Head of Regeneration and Planning Policy) meets regularly with the BID Manager.

BIDs were first set up throughout the UK in 2005 and there are over 320 active BIDs across the UK and Ireland.

Scope of the Review

The scope of the review was for the Committee to have an oversight of the Barrow BID Business Plan and annual activity to ensure that the BID was operating successfully and meeting its aims and objectives.

Details of the review

In December 2022, the BID Liaison Officer and BID Manager had addressed the Committee and provided the following information. A copy of the BID Business Plan had also been shared:-

BID Liaison/Levy Collection

Regular liaison meetings are held between Barrow Borough Council and Barrow BID which present an opportunity to provide an update on the BID Levy collection, which is undertaken by the Council's Revenues and Benefits Team, as well as any other activities which are relevant to the work of the BID or the Council.

Events, Marketing and Promotion

A number of events and activities had taken place during 2022 which had been a great success and welcomed people back to the town centre. Events included Santa Dash, Dino Day, Soapbox Challenge, Shop Barrow Day, Festival of Transport and Piano Trail to name a few.



The BID and the Council had worked together on numerous occasions publicising events and undertaking joint promotional campaigns.

Welcome Back Fund

Following the Covid 19 Pandemic, Barrow BID and the Council had worked together to deliver a package of activity funded by the Welcome Back and Reopening High Streets Safely Funds. Activity included a promotional campaign through Visit Barrow, promotional material including videos, leaflets and a map/guide to local businesses and attractions, enhanced social media coverage, temporary public realm enhancements on Dalton Road and delivery of a bespoke event to support retailers.

High Streets Heritage Action Zone

Barrow BID had supported the Re:discover Barrow High Streets Heritage Action Zone on Duke Street with match funding in years 1 and 2. The BID sit on the steering group and cultural consortium along with other stakeholders and work in partnership on heritage projects within the town centre.

High Streets Task Force

Barrow BID, along with other town centre stakeholders had been invited to work with High Street experts from the High Streets Task Force who had held two sessions in the town centre; one in 2021 and one in 2022. Following a workshop in October 2022, the BID and the Council have been working collaboratively to deliver some of the suggestions put forward by the experts to revitalise the town centre in the short term, whilst the long-term regeneration plans take place.

Levelling Up Fund

Barrow BID had been working collaboratively with Council Officers to support the successful Levelling Up Fund application for the redevelopment of the Market Hall and surrounding space. A number of BID levy papers, including market traders, are affected by the redevelopment work and the BID were supporting traders through the process and supporting events and activities in the Market, Forum, Town Square and Market Square.

Conclusion

The Committee received the report and had been comfortable that the BID was meeting the aims and objectives outlined in the Business Plan.

The second term of the BID extends into 2026 and therefore past the life of Barrow Borough Council. It had been noted that the relationship with Barrow BID and other Business Improvement Districts within Westmorland and Furness would be established going forward. Officers would continue with the established relationship with Barrow BID as the Council moves into Westmorland and Furness Council in April 2023.



Looking Ahead to 2022/2023

From 1st April 2023 Local Government Reorganisation will take place and Barrow Borough Council will be replaced by Westmorland and Furness Council. Any reviews outstanding at the end of March 2023 will be fed into Westmorland and Furness Council.

Scrutiny Contact Details

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Further information on the Scrutiny function including agendas, minutes and Councillor details can be found on the Council's website:- www.barrowbc.gov.uk

Commented [PW3]: As it stands the practice used for Contract Management Assurance will need to be fed into WAF for them to decide how they will continue with the review etc.

Also, the Committee may wish for the Review of Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy and Action Plan to continue through WAF.