



# **Barrow Borough Council**

## **Overview & Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2021/2022**

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## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chair’s Foreward.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Year in Review: Overview and Scrutiny 2021/2022.....</b>	<b>3-10</b>
<b>Looking Ahead to 2022/2023.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Scrutiny Contact Details.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Work Planning Aid.....</b>	<b>12</b>

## **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 2021 and April 2022.

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 Foreward**

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. Notwithstanding the Covid 19 pandemic and the huge workload each of you have had in your normal daily activities for our community is commendable.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is a non-political Member led group (rightly so) which 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 addressed a number of issues, some of which have been very emotive, these have been 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.

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. Once again thank you for your support and commitment to our community and to myself as Chair.

Cllr Martin McLeavy – Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **Year in Review: Overview and Scrutiny 2021/2022**

Between May 2021 and April 2022 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had met eight times. Membership of the Committee was Councillors:-

- ❑ Martin McLeavy (Chair);
- ❑ Frank Cassidy (Vice Chair);
- ❑ Derek Gawne;
- ❑ Allison Johnston;
- ❑ Wendy McClure;
- ❑ William McEwan;
- ❑ Beverly Morgan;
- ❑ Hayley Preston;
- ❑ Steve Robson;
- ❑ Colin Thomson;
- ❑ Ann Thomson; and
- ❑ Roy Worthington.

The Work Programme for 2021/2022 had been agreed by the Committee at their meetings on 3<sup>rd</sup> June and 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2021 as follows:-

- ❑ Flooding on Walney Promenade;
- ❑ Discretionary Housing Payments;
- ❑ Tenancy of Piel Island; and
- ❑ Memorial Benches

An additional item for consideration was agreed at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2022 which involved looking into ongoing issues in the Crellin Street vicinity emanating from food takeaway delivery services.

### **Paused Reviews**

The review into Street Cleanliness had been paused throughout 2020/2021 and had not yet resumed. The review had been paused whilst discussions had been ongoing between Council Officers and FCC Environment.

### **Ongoing Reviews**

The following reviews from 2020/2021 had been ongoing and had been carried forward into 2021/2022:-

- ❑ Membership of Outside Bodies; and
- ❑ Impact of Covid-19 going Forward.

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

## **Flooding on Walney Promenade**

<b>Membership of Work Group</b>	Cllrs Cassidy (Lead), Gawne, McEwan and C. Thomson
<b>Key Priority</b>	Place
<b>Review Status</b>	Paused December 2021

### 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.

The Committee had welcomed the information and the offer from United Utilities to provide updates to the Committee in the future as the works progressed.

## Discretionary Housing Payments

<b>Membership of Work Group</b>	Cllrs M. A. Thomson (Lead), McEwan and Morgan
<b>Key Priority</b>	People/Prosperity
<b>Review Status</b>	Paused December 2021

### Details of the review

The Work Group had met on 9th November with the Revenues and Benefits Service Manager who had provided information to the Group regarding the number of people in receipt of discretionary housing and supported housing payments, as well as the number of claims and the number of claims refused and for what reason. The Work Group were considering a 'Deep Dive' into the support 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 November 2021, the work was paused and further discussion is taking place as to the scope of the review.

## Tenancy of Piel Island

<b>Membership of Work Group</b>	Cllrs McClure (Lead), Gawne, McEwan and M. A. Thomson
<b>Key Priority</b>	Place/Prosperity
<b>Review Status</b>	Concluded March 2022

### Background

Barrow Borough Council are the custodian of Piel Island and until late May 2021, the management of Piel Island, including the running of the Ship Inn, maintaining the toilet block and the Island grounds was undertaken by the holders of a lease from the Council. The Leaseholders had decided before the end of their lease that they wished to terminate the arrangement.

Ensuring that Piel Island could be shown to its best advantage, the Council needed to fully understand its full potential for the future. To enable the Ship Inn to re-open after a period of closure and early termination of the lease had taken considerable effort from a team of Council Officers who had volunteered to go over to Piel Island and repaint it, organise deep cleaning and deal with a range of other issues. This had been done within a couple of weeks to then enable the Council to show prospective interested partners around the premises.

For the last season and in the light of the impact of Covid, a pilot partnership approach had been put in place with a provider to truly understand what the longer-term management arrangements might look like to make the best of Piel Island for all. The provider was a local company that had experience in running pubs and they subsequently established the Piel Island Pub Company. The arrangement had been that it would be from June to September 2021 and be open book accounting to understand the cost and income from Piel Island.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been looking at the arrangements for the management of Piel Island as part of their Work Programme for the year. The Work Group wished to ensure that any long-term future management arrangements for Piel Island would be considered thoroughly and in an open and transparent manner.

## Scope of the Review

The Work Group wished to ensure that any long-term future management arrangements for Piel Island would be considered thoroughly in an open and transparent manner to ensure that a suitable and experienced operator would be appointed.

## Details of the Review

Members of the Work Group had visited Piel Island and had attended a number of meetings with the Director of People and Place during the review.

The Work Group had concluded the following lessons learnt from the 2021 season:-

- Piel Island was a unique place and any operator needed to appreciate the constraints offered by power, weather, access and its location within an area of Site of Special Scientific Interest;
- Visitors to Piel Island were short stay and wanted a basic meal and drink;
- Camping and paying a small fee for that was popular;
- The relationship with the ferry operator and the management arrangements for Piel Island were really important;
- Alternative access arrangements off the island besides the ferry needed to be in place;
- More outside seating was needed to facilitate visitors;
- The community ownership of Piel Island and its local appeal and natural habitat was really important;
- There were no incidents of anti-social behaviour reported, which was contrary to perception;
- Any operator needed to manage and maintain the Island and its assets to a standard that the Council expects;
- All aspects of the Island except for external urgent repairs to the buildings and jetty maintenance would be the responsibility of the operator;
- Emergency planning for incidents with agencies was an essential part of any future management arrangements;
- There was potential for events and Piel Island is an essential element of any destination marketing. Any operator would need a formal relationship with the Council to enable this;
- Communications about Piel Island and whether buildings are open and food and drink is being served would be the responsibility of the operator; and
- Any operator needed experience in operating a licenced premises and with access to staff, financial sustainability and be prepared to open for a short period of the year whilst retaining responsibility for the premises and the Island all year round.

At the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2021 a detailed report had been presented from the Director of People and Place regarding the future management arrangements of Piel Island. The Committee considered the report and agreed a number of recommendations to the Executive Committee as follows:-

- Agree to the proposed management arrangements as set out in the report and delegate authority to the Director of People and Place, in consultation with the Chair of Executive Committee, to undertake the procurement process and award the new contract;

- Note their appreciation for the work that officers put into getting the Ship Inn ready to be re-opened this season at very short notice;
- Note the lessons learnt from the partnership approach and thank the Piel Island Pub Company for their contribution; and
- Note that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Piel Island Working Group will continue to receive progress updates.

The Committee had welcomed the plan for the future management arrangements of Piel Island but the Work Group needed to understand what had happened in the past, in terms of the selection process for the temporary operator for the 2021 season. A number of questions in that regard had been raised at the meeting which had been taken forward to a meeting of the Work Group in January 2022.

### Conclusions

Following further discussions with the Director of People and Place at the Work Group meeting in January 2022, the Work Group had concluded that they were satisfied that due process had been followed to set up the partnership arrangements for the 2021 season and that the Officers involved had done a fantastic job in the short space of time and other challenges faced, including Covid, to get the Island and the Pub up and running for the start of the season and to make Piel Island and its facilities available as often as possible for visitors during the 2021 season.

In respect of the long-term future management arrangements for Piel Island, it had been noted as per the recommendations to the Executive Committee, that an open and transparent procurement process had been undertaken to award the new contract and the Work Group had welcomed the opportunity for them to oversee the Scoring Panel for the Tender submissions.

The Work Group has made the following recommendations to the Executive Committee in order to conclude the review:-

- Clear, concise and agreed requirements to be set for the tenant who is selected;
- A targeted media campaign to be established to find the most suitably qualified tenant;
- Members of the Piel Island Scrutiny Work Group to be given the opportunity to oversee the scoring process;
- Visibility to Members of profit/loss e.g. performance management information on a regular basis (3 times annually);
- All Members to be kept fully updated on activities, performance and issues etc encountered by the Council and the Tenant at least twice annually or more frequently as necessary;
- Consideration be given to a Piel Island Member Group.

## Memorial Benches

<b>Membership of Work Group</b>	Cllrs Cassidy (Lead), McEwan and McClure.
<b>Key Priority</b>	Place
<b>Review Status</b>	Concluded October 2021

### 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 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2021.

### Conclusions

The Committee had been satisfied with the Policy and had recommended that Executive Committee approve the policy which was approved on 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2021.

## Crellin Street

<b>Membership of Work Group</b>	Cllrs McEwan (Lead), Cassidy, Gawne, McClure and M.A. Thomson
<b>Key Priority</b>	People/Place
<b>Review Status</b>	Ongoing

### Background

The Covid-19 Pandemic had seen a marked increase in the takeaway food delivery business. The Scrutiny Committee had been made aware of ongoing issues in the Crellin Street vicinity emanating from food takeaway delivery services including parking on double yellow lines, obstructing delivery wagons and other road users, as well as reports of residents feeling intimidated walking past crowds of Uber Eats Drivers.

## Scope of the Review

Following the initial meeting of the Work Group, Members of the Work Group had requested for additional representatives to be invited to meet with them including Graham Barker (Head of Public Protection, Barrow Borough Council), as well as a representative from the Police and Cumbria County Council.

## **Membership of Outside Bodies**

<b>Membership of Work Group</b>	N/A
<b>Key Priority</b>	People
<b>Review Status</b>	Concluded May 2021

## Details of the review

The Council allocated resource to offering representation on a significant number of outside bodies. Members had stated that there could be a better understanding of the benefits of the Council being represented on some of these bodies. Members had wanted to rationalise the list so that Member representation was meaningful and agreed that a Scrutiny Work Group should review this.

A Work Group was never established, however a review of Council representation on outside bodies had been undertaken by the Corporate Support Manager and the list of Outside Bodies had been reduced, removing those which had not been active within the last two years.

At full Council in September 2020 it had been agreed that Members on Outside Bodies should be requested to provide an annual report to Council on the work of the body and its contribution to the Borough and the wider area.

The annual reporting process for Lead Members and Members on Outside Bodies is now captured by Democratic Services and reported to the Annual Council meeting.

## **Impact of Covid-19 going Forward**

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

## 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 project was ongoing and would include the issue of new IT equipment for Members.

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

<b>Issue of Focus</b>	<b>Comments/Progress</b>
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.

## **Looking Ahead to 2022/2023**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee are responsible for setting their own Work Programme. They are expected to review at least one major policy issue during the municipal year and must give serious consideration to the number of issues to be reviewed during the year, to ensure that they are able to allocate resources sufficient to facilitate a thorough review of the issues selected.

An efficient and effective Overview and Scrutiny Work Planning process ensures that maximum value can be made of the Council's resources and that the outcome of the work will be closely linked to the Council Plan priorities. To that end the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have the following procedure for work programming:-

- ❑ Annual public consultation exercise to bring forward potential items for consideration;
- ❑ Preliminary prioritisation of submissions conducted by the Chair and Vice Chair and the Council's Senior Management Team using the agreed Work Planning Aid (see page 12);
- ❑ A Work Planning Workshop involving the Committee members to allow discussion of the topics in an informal setting; and
- ❑ The proposed Work Programme to be agreed by the Committee.

At its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified the following items for the Work Programme for 2022/2023:-

- ❑ X
- ❑ Y
- ❑ Z

It is important that all of the reviews are concluded during the municipal year as under the proposals for Local Government Reorganisation, Barrow Borough Council will be abolished come 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2023.

The Committee may have the capacity to undertake additional reviews throughout the year should the need arise. Any additional items for consideration will be considered in conjunction with the Work Planning Aid (see page 12) agreed by the Committee at their meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2021.

## **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](http://www.barrowbc.gov.uk)

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLANNING AID

