

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
17 NOVEMBER 2016
7.30 - 8.58 PM**



Present:

Councillors Leake (Chairman), Angell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Angell, Mrs Birch, Brossard, Harrison, Mrs McCracken, Phillips and Tullett

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Allen, Finnie and Mrs Temperton

In Attendance:

David Cook, Chairman of ESDP
Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview and Scrutiny
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services

24. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

Apologies were received from Councillors Allen, Finnie and Mrs Temperton.

25. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on the 22 September 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

26. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor Mrs Birch declared a personal interest as the spouse of the Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Heath and Housing.

Councillor Mrs McCracken declared a personal interest as the spouse of the Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection.

27. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

28. Public Participation

There were no submissions from the public in accordance with the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

29. Economic and Skills Development

The Commission received an update from David Cook, Economic and Skills Development Partnership (ESDP) Chairman and Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive, in respect of the work of the ESDP.

David congratulated Bracknell Forest for being number three in the Country for Technology Employment behind Manchester and Reading and praised Bracknell Forest Council for bringing new ideas on board and being a delight to work with.

David informed the Commission that he had been the Chairman of the ESDP for six years and that membership of the ESDP had become much stronger with more businesses represented and involved. These included Transport Research Laboratory (TRL), 3M, Hitachi, The Knowledge Academy and Simon Fryer (who was a member of the Sub Committee). The ESDP also had a very strong working relationship with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and had worked very closely with Campbell Christie since he had become the director in January 2016. Bracknell Forest was the only Borough out of the six in Berkshire that had a Business Community Forum. The LEP were trying to encourage the other Authorities in Berkshire to follow suit. The ESDP also had a strong dialogue and a similar agenda with Bracknell Forest Council which enabled work to not be duplicated. He envisaged the ESDP becoming more business-led, with the Council as a partner organisation.

David updated the Commission on some of the key developments within the Borough.

There had been concerns raised by companies in the Borough about the reduction of resources and the lack of available skills and talent within the area to match the businesses needs, especially in regards to the “young bright” executives and future leaders. Significant skill gaps had been identified predominantly in the ICT, life science and construction sectors. Careers events and the Elevate programme had been successfully working closely with schools, in particular 6th Forms, to introduce students to business techniques, improve CV writing and develop skills to enable students to “stand out from the crowd”.

There was a Business Improvement District (BID) event planned for November 2016 which would be aimed at all businesses within the western and southern industrial areas to generate interest and discuss the concept of a BID. The former director of Reds had been brought on board to divulge his expertise and knowledge in order to develop the project and BID infrastructure.

The Borough had achieved 96.2% of premises covered with superfast broadband.

The Town Centre regeneration was a very important asset for businesses within Bracknell as it would enable socialising and networking opportunities outside of the workplace which had been identified currently as a missing link within Bracknell Town Centre.

Over the past eighteen months and going forward, the ESDP would be raising their concerns with housing developers about the lack of affordable housing for professionals to purchase within the Borough. This was becoming increasingly difficult. As many companies had found that the lack of affordable housing was an important factor that many professionals were taking into consideration when applying for jobs.

In response to Members’ questions the following points were made:

- A clear Careers Strategy and Structure needed to be put into place at schools to help students with continuity after working with a Careers Advisor. Often

the school will need to have drive and an enthusiastic Head Teacher and governors to connect with local businesses.

- Schools often don't like businesses dipping in and out to provide careers advice as this is often detrimental to the students as continuity is not achieved. The preferred option is a Careers Advisor as a constant business contact.
- University drop out rates were still high and Apprenticeships were better for offering some students a different style of learning. The 2.5% Government Levy on organisations with wages bills over £3 million annually meant that more money would be put in to Apprenticeships going forward.
- There were currently fourteen people allocated from the ESDP to work within local Schools. On Friday 25 November there was a recruitment session scheduled at Edgbarrow School, which had been driven through the LEP.
- Entrepreneurship had been the second most asked question at recent career events with many students wanting to know how they could set up their own business, access finance and premises. The ESDP were looking at getting small business owners and young entrepreneurs to talk to the students about the positives and difficulties that can be encountered when owning your own business.
- Microbusinesses had the biggest growth in Thames Valley in the last fifteen years.
- Much of the office spaces within the Town Centre were not suitable for incubation hubs and the council was working closely with property agents to find adequate premises.
- The EU referendum had brought uncertainty to businesses. The ESDP had written to the Government and local MPs about their concerns and what they wanted to happen moving forward. Many businesses currently had their heads down and major investment in business had not seemed to have happened since the Brexit vote.
- The ESDP were keeping a close eye on global companies especially those with European headquarters with much seeming to be reliant on whether the Government decided on a soft or hard Brexit. A hard Brexit could see the need for many companies to relocate within Europe to allow free movement of people and the global movement of talent.
- Trade Movement and tariffs were also an unknown with lots of businesses formulating 'what if' scenarios and plans.
- The Government were also unable to guarantee student finance past 2017/18 for overseas student with many universities reliant upon these fees to heavily support their finances.
- The ESDPs agenda had changed – six years ago affordable housing would not have been a priority. Over the past 18 months the ESDP had been reaching out to Housing Developers to provide ready built, affordable housing for Young Executives but with no success so far. The proposed Government Policy of Starter Homes many prove to be a way out of the current problem.
- The partnership measured success on how many companies were still located within Bracknell Forest. If companies had moved out of the area they were asked why. For example BMW had moved out due to expansion requirements and Honda had moved to the area as the rail infrastructure in and out of Waterloo suited their needs.
- The ESDP defined a Young Executive as someone who was a university graduate on a graduate scheme for fast track career progression. They would be aged 24/25 and be a potential highflyer.
- The key sectors that needed more encouragement within the Borough were Digital Space, Transportation, Hospitality, Infrastructure Support, Retail and Health and Social Services.

- Transportation infrastructure issues in and out of the Borough hadn't been raised by local businesses. However, due to increased congestion because of new housing developments as well as the Town Centre regeneration, travel time around the town had increased.

The Chairman thanked David for his interesting report which was both helpful and refreshing and would hopefully give the Authority ideas to think outside of the silos. The Commission would like to meet David again at a future date.

Victor Nicholls also thanked David for his leadership of the ESDP and emphasised that Bracknell Forest benefitted from being the only Berkshire Authority with a business partnership.

30. **Complaints Against The Council In 2015/16**

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny presented a report to the Commission informing them of complaints made against the Council in 2015/16.

The number of complaints made against the Council was similar to the previous year with only a small number of complaints made against the Council in comparison to the large number of Council interactions with the public.

He also highlighted the changes from the Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO) in the way that they categorised complaints. The maladministration findings had been small and inconsequential.

In response to Members' questions, the following point was made:

- In neither of the cases where the LGO had found Maladministration had there been any financial compensation paid.

The Commission noted the report.

31. **Council Plan Overview Report (CPOR) 2016/17**

The Commission noted the Chief Executive's Council Plan Overview Report for the first quarter of 2016/17 (April to June 2016)

In response to Members' questions, the following points were raised:

- The figure for Ind Ref N16 in Q4 was 2.31 which meant that the Council had performed under its target of 2.33 which had been set for the previous year.
- Details about how to access the webcam for the Coral Reef refurbishment would be provided to members.
- The missing figure on page 47 was 16.
- Clarification would be sought regarding the current figure for NI114. Members also raised concerns that managed moves within schools were not being acknowledged and should be reported.
- Risk 6d on page 57 was not a code but a risk description on the register.

32. **Quarterly Service Reports (QSRs)**

The Commission noted the Quarterly Service Reports for the second quarter of 2016/17 (July to September 2016) relating to the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Services Department.

In response to members' questions, the following points were made:

- There had been a 15% increase in crime, this wasn't just local to Bracknell Forest but across Thames Valley. The Community Safety Partnership and Community Safety Team were working hard with the police to address the issue and identify the source of the increase.
- The current property portfolio had industrial and shop units that were used by small businesses. The Council indicated that purchasing of more sites to generate additional revenue would not be part of the Investment Strategy but could be adopted by the Economic Development Strategy.
- The Plan Phase of the Transformation Projects would show the savings that were achievable and those that are going to be harder to reach. By the end of January it would be known what savings were possible and how they would be delivered.

33. Executive Forward Plan

The Commission noted the forthcoming items on the Executive forward plan of a corporate nature.

The Commission brought to the Officers' attention that Overview and Scrutiny's role was to assist the Executive in their decision making, yet the Commission had little involvement in most of the forthcoming decisions. It was felt that as a result, Overview and Scrutiny were not being used to their best advantage.

34. Work Programme and Panel Activity Update

The Commission noted progress against the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for 2016-17.

Councillor Phillips reported that the Health Overview and Scrutiny Working Group had produced a well researched report on G.P Capacity which had been submitted to go before the Executive. The Group were now awaiting feedback on the report.

Councillor Harrison asked for permission to widen the scope on the Housing Supply: Older People's Accommodation work to include the viability of potential sites within the Borough. The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission requested that the scoping document be submitted to him for approval, to ensure that the approach to the work was still focused.

CHAIRMAN

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