

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
8 JULY 2021
6.30 - 7.49 PM**



Present:

Councillors Angell (Chair), Virgo (Vice-Chair), Mrs Birch, Brossard, Gbadebo, Mrs Mattick, Mossom, Porter, Temperton and Tullett
Tracey Wright, Parent Governor representative
Mark Glanville, Parent Governor representative

In Attendance:

Councillor Brown

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs McKenzie-Boyle and McLean

Executive Member present:

Councillor Birch, Executive Member: Adult Services, Health and Housing

Also Present:

Kevin Gibbs, Executive Director: Delivery
Ann Moore, Head of Democratic and Registration Services

11. Minutes of previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 26 May 2021 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

The Chair informed Commission members he had written to Councillor Dale Birch, Executive Member: Adult Services, Health and Housing, as agreed at the previous meeting. A response had been circulated to the Commission in advance of the meeting and the Executive Member had been asked to attend the meeting to provide an update.

Councillor Birch, Executive Member: Adult Services, Health and Housing informed the Commission that Brants Bridge Urgent Care Centre would reopen to the public in July. The date was yet to be confirmed, depending on availability of staff. The service would be open for walk-ins but there would be an emphasis on booked appointments. Members of the public were being asked to phone ahead. Communication about this service to the public would take place next week.

Additional questions were raised about what the service would look like in the future and the Statutory Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Director of East Berkshire Clinical Commissioning Group; the Executive Director: People and the Executive Member: Adult Services, Health and Housing, in his role as Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, had been asked to attend the August Commission meeting to brief the Commission on the current health provision.

12. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor Mrs Birch declared a personal interest in item 11, Minutes of the previous meeting, as the spouse of the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing.

There were no indications that members would be participating while under the party whip.

13. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

14. Public Participation

No submissions had been made by members of the public under the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

15. Wellbeing and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Panel Report: Blue Badges Review

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Panel had followed a good process to conduct this review.

The Chair of the Wellbeing and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Panel introduced the Blue Badges review report and outlined the reasons for the review, which included an Ombudsman investigation; residents' complaints about the blue badge application process and a press report which found Bracknell Forest Council was in the lowest 10% of local authorities (of those that responded) for blue badge applications submissions.

During the review Panel members found:

- Bracknell Forest was the third highest for non-visible disability applications. It was concluded this did not mean there was a greater need than in other local authorities, but it appeared expectations had been increased.
- Panel members found several areas of good practice.
- An internal, wide-reaching review was currently being undertaken by the team in charge of blue badge applications and the findings from this review would feed into that process.
- Refusal decisions letters could be clearer.
- Resident's expectations could be better managed.
- Understanding complex conditions was key as disabilities changed over time.

Members scrutinised the review report. Arising from the discussion the following points were made:

- Non-visual disability was a term defined in statutory legislation.
- Residents had the right of appeal and a review of the process had been undertaken.
- Most local authorities used the same application form as Bracknell Forest Council, but some local authorities had devised their own form to capture local factors too.
- Panel members received representations during the review about the need for improved communications and concluded local guidance about applying for a blue badge would be helpful as national guidance was open to interpretation. It was also noted the local MP had written to the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work asking for a review of the guidance.

- More than 90 local authorities responded to a press enquiry about blue badge applications. This information was used to grade Bracknell Forest Council in the bottom 10% of Councils for approving blue badge applications. The statistic was based on the variation of applications between non-visual disabilities and visual disabilities so, while it appeared the distinction was not happening in Bracknell Forest the report did not compare on demographics or other differences.
- This review had helped to dispel potential reputational damage.
- Members acknowledged the review provided a greater depth of information than before but queried if people with disabilities and carers still required a lot of support to complete applications and what support was available locally. It was noted members had been mindful of that issue during the review and had received contrasting evidence from witnesses, as some found the application process easy, while others did not. The review concluded help was needed at different levels within the application process and that the use of technology; trained customer care staff, a process for learning from mistakes and an empathetic approach would all contribute to a smoother process.
- Panel members were conscious of fraudulent claims and the team were looking at how to deal with these efficiently too.
- Voluntary sector organisations, such as The ARK, raised the issue that support around the process was crucial and said that some medical professionals reported finding the process tricky too. The recommendations included developing local guidance that encapsulated national guidance, but local nuisances too, as that should make the process smoother.

The Commission endorsed the recommendations within the Blue Badges review report for submission to the Executive on 21 September and agreed to review the implementation of these recommendations within a year.

16. **Work Programme Update**

Each Panel Chair provided a verbal update on work programme progress.

Wellbeing and Finance

Work had begun with stakeholders to agree what would be in scope for a review of mental health services as it was recognised this was a vast topic. There was a suggestion the review could focus on how easily customers navigate referral pathways; success rate and self-help as customers move up the chain of support across all providers including statutory, third sector, primary and secondary health settings. It was queried whether Panel members had considered a separate review into the effect of lockdown on residents and the Chair of the Wellbeing and Finance Panel explained the focus on mental health was due to several factors, including looking at the rise in need for mental health support for residents since the pandemic began. It was agreed the final scope would be brought to a future Commission meeting.

Education, Skills and Growth

On 14 June 2021 Panel members held a meeting with lead officers, the Executive Member: Children, Young People and Learning and Care Leavers to review the implementation of recommendations which came out of the Care Leavers scrutiny review. Panel members were pleased to note five of the six recommendations had been implemented in full and significant progress had been made against the final recommendation, which had already led to a positive impact on outcomes for Care Leavers in the borough. As this was the first time any Panel had formally held key personnel to account on the implementation of recommendations arising from a

scrutiny review the final report template was currently being devised. The final review of recommendations report would be available at the next meeting.

Several meetings had already taken place as part of the Panel's current review into Community Infrastructure Levy and a survey to Parish/Town Councils had been circulated. The next meeting would take place on 13 July with parish council representatives attending. Commission members asked if there could be an issue with Parish/Town Councils receiving funding which the borough could allocate to different projects and were informed the review was looking at joint working between the two organisations and if Parish/Town Councils were working together to deliver projects and make best use of resources.

County Lines and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities were topics the Panel were considering as future reviews. The Chair of the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel had attended a County Lines workshop on 6 June and a SEND workshop on 29 June and been able to identify good practice and expert witnesses in preparation for the reviews. Members queried if Panel members had considered looking at how schools had coped with remote learning since the pandemic began. It was noted this was not on the review programme but was an issue that had arisen at the School Improvement Accountability Board, of which the Panel Chair was a member, and could be considered for the future.

Environment and Communities

The Food Waste in Flats and Houses of Multiple Occupation scrutiny review had been completed and was awaiting officer responses and completion of risk assessments. The final report would be presented at the next Commission meeting and, if supported, to the Executive in September.

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission reflected the Commission work programme was continuously being reviewed and considered so requested it would be a separate agenda item at the meeting on 9 September 2021.

CHAIR