

Notice of Meeting

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Councillor Pickering (Chair),
Councillor Welch (Vice-Chair),
Councillors Barnard, C Eberle, Egglestone, M Forster, Haffegge,
McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, C Thompson, Watts and Webb



Also Invited:

Victoria Hill, Parent Governor Representative

Thursday 6 July 2023, 6.30 pm

**Council Chamber - Time Square, Market Street, Bracknell,
RG12 1JD**

Agenda

*All councillors at this meeting have adopted the Mayor's Charter
which fosters constructive and respectful debate.*

Item	Description	Page
1.	Apologies for Absence	
	To receive apologies for absence and to note the attendance of any substitute Members.	
2.	Minutes of previous meeting	3 - 4
	To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 16 March 2023.	
3.	Declarations of Interest and Party Whip	
	<p>Members are asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary or affected interests and the nature of that interest, including the existence and nature of the party whip, in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.</p> <p>Any Member with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in a matter should withdraw from the meeting when the matter is under consideration and should notify the Democratic Services Officer in attendance that they are withdrawing as they have such an interest. If the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest is not entered on the register of Members interests the Monitoring Officer must be notified of the interest within 28 days.</p> <p>Any Member with an Affected Interest in a matter must disclose the interest to the meeting. There is no requirement to withdraw from the meeting when the interest is only an affected interest, but the Monitoring Officer should be notified of the interest, if not previously notified of it, within 28 days of the meeting.</p>	
4.	Urgent Items of Business	
	Any other items which, pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman decides are urgent.	

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5.	Public Participation	
	To receive submissions from members of the public which have been submitted in advance in accordance with the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.	
6.	Statutory Scrutiny Officer Report	5 - 28
	Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission are asked to consider the Statutory Scrutiny Report and agree the recommendations. Reporting: Kevin Gibbs, Executive Director: Delivery	
7.	Overview and Scrutiny Review Reports - Enforcement Strategy and Child Criminal Exploitation	29 - 46
	To consider two Overview and Scrutiny reports to be presented to the Executive on 19 September 2023. Reporting: Ann Moore, Assistant Director: Delivery	

Date of next meeting

The next Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting is scheduled for Thursday 31 August 2023.

Forward plan and decisions taken

Commission members are able to view upcoming decisions by looking at [Browse forward plans | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](#) and consider decisions taken since the last Commission meeting by using this link [What's newly published | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](#) and altering the date range.

Draft Council Plan Discussion

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission are invited to stay for a briefing on the draft Council Plan once the meeting has finished.

Sound recording, photographing, filming and use of social media is permitted. Please contact, Louise Connelly, Tel: 01344 354047 louise.connelly@bracknell-forest.gov.uk, so that any special arrangements can be made.

Published: 28 June 2023

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
24 MAY 2023
8.42 - 8.44 PM



Present:

Councillors Pickering (Chair), Welch (Vice-Chair), Barnard, Eberle, Forster, Haffeggee, McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, C Thompson, Watts, Webb and Brown (Substitute)

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Egglestone

1. **Election of Chair**

RESOLVED that Councillor Pickering be elected Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for the municipal year 2023-24.

2. **Appointment of Vice-Chair**

RESOLVED that Councillor Welch be appointed Vice-Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission for the municipal year 2023-24.

3. **Appointment of Overview & Scrutiny Panels**

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Panels be agreed as below:

Education, Skills & Growth Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Core membership of 8 Councillors)	
Labour (5) Ejaz Penfold C Thompson - Chair-elect Watts – Vice-chair-elect Webb	Conservative (2) Barnard Gaw
Liberal Democrat (1) Smith	
Parent Governor Representatives (2) Victoria Hill (voting) <i>(four year term of office from November 2022 until November 2026)</i> Vacancy (voting)	
Substitute Members	
Labour (3) Brown Cochrane Frewer	Conservative (3) Allen Robertson Virgo
Liberal Democrat (0)	

Environment & Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Core membership of 10 Councillors)	
Labour (5) Brown Cochrane Ejaz O'Regan Watts	Conservative (2) Hayes McKenzie-Boyle
Liberal Democrat (2) C Eberle – Chair-elect M Forster – Vice-chair-elect	Green (1) Haffegée
Labour (3) Frewer Penfold Welch	Substitute Members Conservative (3) Barnard Gaw Virgo
Liberal Democrat (0)	Green (1) Collings

Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Core membership of 9 Councillors)	
Labour (5) Cochrane Egglesstone – Chair-elect Watts Webb Welch - Vice-chair-elect	Conservative (2) Harrison Virgo
Liberal Democrat (1) S Forster	Green (1) Collings
Labour (3) Frewer Penfold Thompson	Substitute Members Conservative (3) Allen Barnard Hayes
Liberal Democrat (0)	Green (1) Haffegée

CHAIRMAN

To: **The Overview & Scrutiny Commission**
6 July 2023

STATUTORY SCRUTINY OFFICER REPORT

Executive Director: Delivery

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Following the result of the election in May 2023 the new administration appointed members to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission. The Chair and Vice Chair have requested that the first task for the Commission would be to discuss ways of working, including the number of Commission meetings per year, and how to carry out scrutiny reviews by reviewing the following documents:
- Appendix A - Overview and Scrutiny 2019-2023 – report on the four-year term of the previous administration
 - Appendix B - Scrutiny Panel Review Flowchart

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 **That the Commission agrees to reduce the number of O&S Commission meetings from 10 to 5 per year.**
- 2.2 **That the Commission takes account of the work undertaken by the previous Overview & Scrutiny Commission and uses it to discuss how they may focus their work programme in the future.**

3 Reasons for Recommendation(S)

- 3.1 Reducing the number of meetings per year would allow members to review the implementation of recommendations from previous reviews, gain a better understanding of the work the Commission carries out and to carry out some deep dive reviews.
- 3.2 An understanding of scrutiny work undertaken by the previous administration and how scrutiny reviews are conducted will enhance planning for new ways of working and approaches to undertaking scrutiny reviews in the future.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Retaining ten meetings per year is another option but this would not allow a period of time to upskill Commission members about the work of scrutiny or much time to review if recommendations from previous scrutiny reviews have been implemented.
- 4.2 All planned scrutiny reviews were conducted prior to the end of the previous administration, with the exception of the Adult Social Care review, which had a scope agreed by the O&S Commission in January 2023. Commission members could opt to carry out this scrutiny review but it may not reflect the priorities of the new administration.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The significant change in administration of Bracknell Forest Council has presented officers with an unprecedented situation. Members, officers, and the whole Council

are working together to ensure a smooth transition. However, it is recognised that 28 new Councillors out of 41 will require significant training to feel able to carry out their duties. There has also been a change in officer support to the Commission so it is vital everyone feels able to support each other.

- 5.2 One of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission's key roles is to undertake focussed work programming to ensure that scrutiny activity contributes effectively to the Council Plan objectives.
- 5.3 In preparation for Overview and Scrutiny activities to commence Commission members are asked to review the previous four-year work programme report - *Appendix A*. They are also asked to review the flowchart about how topic reviews are chosen and carried out – *Appendix B*. The aim of this agenda item is to discuss:
- Departmental capacity to support review activity preparations from July 2023;
 - New Councillors taking on significant roles and feeling that they have the required training and skillset;
 - A reduction in the number of Overview and Scrutiny Commission meetings per year whilst still enabling Councillors to carry out their statutory responsibilities;
 - How to choose and carry out topics for scrutiny reviews.
- 5.4 It has been suggested that the Commission should reduce the number of meetings which take place a year from 10 to 5. This will allow the new administration time to attend training and ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to complete scrutiny in a meaningful way.
- 5.7 Discussions will be held over the coming months to discuss ways of suggesting and selecting topics for review, endeavouring to make sure they align to the Council Plan.
- 5.8 A Member, officer or member of the public can suggest a topic for inclusion in the work programme. They will be required to complete and submit a proforma to the overview & scrutiny team.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.3 These are included in this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 Not required for this report.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 Effective scrutiny is important to the successful functioning of local democracy by securing the efficient delivery of Council services and driving improvements. A robust work programme is essential in order to ensure that overview and scrutiny activity contributes successfully to the work of the Council. Poor scrutiny can be indicative of wider governance, leadership and/or service failure.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.6 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to:

Reduce emissions of CO₂

The reasons the O&S Commission believes that this will reduce emissions is because scrutiny reviews will hold the Executive to account on its commitments in its Council Plan, which are likely to include manifesto commitments.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

- 6.7 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to consider health and wellbeing issues for residents, with the aim of improving outcomes for residents, by holding the Executive to account on its commitments in its Council Plan, which are likely to include manifesto commitments.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

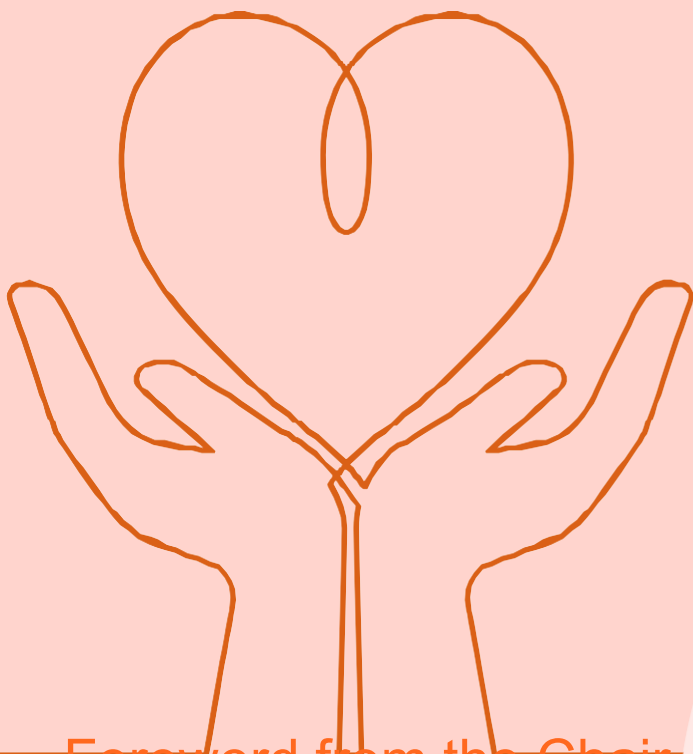
Kevin Gibbs, Executive Director: Delivery - 01344 355621

Kevin. gibbbs@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Ann Moore, Assistant Director: Delivery – 01344 352260

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Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Review



Foreword from the Chair
of the Overview and



Scrutiny Commission

Overview and Scrutiny Commission Chair: Councillor Robert Angell
Overview and Scrutiny Commission Vice Chair: Councillor Tony Virgo

This report covers April 2022 to March 2023, as well as providing an overview of the work undertaken by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission over the past four years. As our current term of office comes to an end, we wanted to take this opportunity to reflect on the changes which have been implemented during this whole period to understand what has worked well, and where we can make improvements.

2022-2023

Building on our successful programme of work in 2021-2022 we carried out a further four reviews and reviewed how the recommendations from a previous review had been implemented. We felt this was important to measure the impact our work has on the lives of residents and are committed to this way of working.

In addition to the Panel's scrutiny review work the Commission sat as the Strategic Health Scrutiny Commission for the first time and scrutinised how well current health provisions met existing and emerging needs within the borough. Witnesses from Healthwatch were invited to address the Commission. By doing so, the Commission was able to gain a stronger understanding of the issues facing residents.

In September, witnesses from Public Health provided an update on the progress they have

In October the Commission considered the performance of the Community Safety Partnership and the priorities in the Community Safety Plan for the coming year.

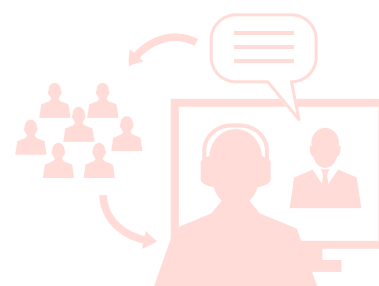
In January the Commission considered the



council's draft budget proposals for 2022/23 before deciding whether they supported the recommendations which were open for public consultation.

Overview and Scrutiny has a vital role in performance management by linking the planning and delivery of services to the experiences of and impact upon local people. The Council Plan sets out the key objectives for 2019 to 2023. At the end of each quarter, the Chief Executive provides a high-level summary report of performance across all services to the Executive, known as the Corporate Performance Overview Report (CPOR), to identify achievements, as well as areas of concern. While the report is useful, there is a future role Overview and Scrutiny could play if data received was timelier.

And last, but not least, coming out of pandemic restrictions we have moved to hybrid meetings!



Past four years

A major success over the past four years has been the Panels and how they conduct their scrutiny reviews. Originally, there was an overarching Commission and three sub-Commissions which each met quarterly. Task and Finish groups would be commissioned to investigate an issue which had been highlighted as warranting closer scrutiny, but it was felt these took too long, and sub-Commission meetings detracted from review work. We reorganised scrutiny in 2019 into a Commission responsible for oversight of cross-cutting issues, such as Climate Change strategy

development, and three distinct Panels which would lead on scrutiny reviews. However, we were forced to suspend Panel review work, for around 6 months, during the Covid-19 pandemic and only three reviews were undertaken during the first half of our tenure.

A renewed sense of purpose in September 2020 meant our work programme was planned to ensure we made the best use of our resources and allowed us to complete a total of 16 reviews, each with a report stating recommendations for the Executive to consider. Some of these reviews took were completed in one day and others took five months, depending on the work involved. Some attracted much media attention, others very little, but all review reports were considered by the O&S Commission and the Executive.

As well as sponsoring the panel activities, the Commission's annual work programme continued to scrutinise established milestone sessions such as health, crime and disorder and the Council's budget. The Council also carried out another review of its own into Digital Access.

Throughout the past four years the Commission has tracked progress towards delivering the Council Plan by reviewing the overview report which identifies achievements, but data presented has sometimes been out of date. By aligning our meetings with performance and finance information and triangulating it with the experiences of residents and customers, members of the Commission can consider the potential impact on all the borough's residents. Going forward it has been agreed CPOR data will be scrutinised by the O&S Commission prior to the Executive so that members of the Commission can help identify areas of concern to the Executive, which I think will be a strength.

The Commission had two conscientious parent governor representatives who, as well as attending Commission meetings, involved in Education, Skills, and Growth O&S Panel reviews. Sadly, their terms of office came to an end recently, but we have successfully recruited a new primary school parent governor representative and are seeking a new secondary school representative, as it is important to us that the voices of parents are heard in scrutiny.

O&S benefits from a wide range of experience and viewpoints. The Commission welcomes input from residents and local organisations via its public participation scheme. Panel reviews have involved a variety of residents and service providers in their reviews but I would like to see an increased impetus placed on publicity and attracting the public to participate in Commission meetings. This should be a feature next term to attract broader opinions on the council's performance.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the officers and staff, from all organisations who have maintained a high level of support for our scrutiny work over the past four years.



Introduction from Kevin Gibbs, Executive Director: Delivery, acting as Statutory Scrutiny Officer



The important role that Bracknell Forest Council's Overview and Scrutiny functions provide as part of the corporate governance of the council has been illustrated by the programme of meetings and reviews completed over the four years of the work programme.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny set out the elements that make for effective scrutiny.

These being:

- Dedicated officer resourcing.
- Member training which is of a high quality and integrated into councillors' ongoing work.
- A positive relationship between scrutiny and the executive – driven by a clear understanding of scrutiny's role and responsibilities.
- Timely access to proportionate, high-quality information.
- Good cross-party relationships between scrutiny members.

([The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#)).

The requirement for local authorities in England to establish overview and scrutiny committees is set out in [sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000](#) as amended by the Localism Act 2011. The Statutory guidance "[Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils and combined authorities](#)", sets out that as each council is a "democratically-elected body", it is for each council to determine how it sets out its arrangements to meet the requirement of the Act. Therefore, in line with this guidance, the arrangements in Bracknell Forest Council were revised in 2019, taking on board the feedback from the council's own commissioned review of its arrangements, and the issuing of the statutory guidance (May 2019).

The structure and approaches have now been in place for the last four years. The thematic structure of our panels, with the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, as sponsor and quality assurance, are central to the value of the work to the council, demonstrating the success of these arrangements. The role of the Commission in overseeing workloads, managing the programme and ensuring that the staff resources are used productively, has been at the core of the effectiveness of the work programme. Therefore, it is recommended that this approach is continued into the next Commission.

One change was made during the review period, to strengthen the health scrutiny function. In 2021, the Commission designated one Commission meeting per year as the Commission's Strategic Health Scrutiny Committee. Further, that the Finance and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel be retitled as the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Within the council's Annual Governance Statement (Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement), prepared by the council's Monitoring Officer, he has confirmed that:

Overview and Scrutiny has established a structure that allows activity to better align with the themes of the Council Plan. The function has established and delivered against a work programme that supports the council objectives. The Commission has carried out research and made recommendations to support the Council's climate change targets and has scrutinised the budget and monitored the performance of all Council departments through the Council Plan Overview Report. ([Annual Governance Statement 2020/21](#))

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer has responsibility for promoting the role of overview and scrutiny, and supporting and advising:

- The Overview and Scrutiny Commission & panels
- The Council's Executive and Executive Portfolio holders
- Officers and Chief Officers of the council

In my role of Statutory Scrutiny Officer, I am required to make regular reports to full council on the state of scrutiny, explicitly identifying any areas of weakness. I am happy to give the council assurance that scrutiny over the last four years has been and is effective. The work has been adequately resourced with dedicated scrutiny officers and departmental review resources. It has achieved the work programme it set itself and has been able to be agile to pick up issues of note and concern without losing the focus of the work programme.

In terms of areas of development, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function must, and must be seen to, hold all commissioners and providers of publicly funded services to account for the quality of their services within the borough area.

As the council increases its role in the system leadership of health and social care, so must the coordination on changes in this system be linked into Overview and Scrutiny. Further, having addressed the role of health within the governance of the Commission, so must the Commission look to see how the other blue light (Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust) services, operating in the borough are commissioned, are performing and are meeting the needs of local people.



Overview and scrutiny at Bracknell Forest Council

The current Overview and Scrutiny structure with an overarching O&S Commission and three O&S panels, has served the council well for the last four years. Each panel has been responsible for up to two themes from the Council Plan. By aligning activity areas with strategic themes, O&S has focussed on topics that closely supported the council's objectives over the four-year administration period. These themes will be reviewed as part of the development of the Council Plan for the next four years.

These arrangements recognise that scrutiny is most effective when operating the task and finish group model rather than as sub-committees of the Commission. Panels are able to work flexibly to carry out focussed enquiries and deep dive reviews across a wide range of topics in support of the council's objectives. Panels meet as required to deliver the work programme rather than on a pre-agreed fixed cycle.

The format is also flexible, and activities range from a single scrutiny panel meeting on an issue to a three - six month focussed review. In addition to the core panel membership, all non-Executive councillors can take part in any review work. This enables the O&S function to tap into the skills and knowledge of councillors across a wide variety of topics. It also means that councillors who need to balance external responsibilities can be involved effectively based on their availability, interests, and knowledge.

The importance of non-Executive councillors' involvement in policy development and pre-decision input and scrutiny is recognised by this approach, ensuring that scrutiny not only provides challenge but actively contributes to the work of the council.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Membership:

Councillor Angell (Chair), Councillor Virgo (Vice-chair)

Councillors Mrs Birch, Brossard, Gbadebo, Mrs Mattick,
Mrs McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, Mossom, Porter, Temperton, Gibson

Responsibilities:

- Create a focussed work programme to ensure scrutiny activity contributes effectively to the Council Plan objectives
- Continually manage the work programme to ensure the best use of resources, accommodating any necessary extensions or urgent short-term issues
- Act as sponsor for panels as they undertake deep dive reviews or support policy development
- Consider the recommendations from panels' scrutiny activity and, where they are supported, refer to the appropriate decision-maker
- Scrutinise the council's budget proposals
- Hold the Executive to account for council performance according to the Corporate Performance Overview Report
- Carry out the council's crime and disorder responsibilities and strategic health responsibilities.
- Strategic theme: Value for money
- Manage call in (the process to scrutinise Executive decisions).
- Review the policy framework.

Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel**Panel membership:**

Councillor Mrs Birch (Chair), Councillor Brossard (Vice-chair)

Councillors Ms Gaw, Mrs Hamilton, Gbadebo, Ms Hayes, Ms Merry, Skinner, Temperton

Parent governor representatives (voting): Victoria Hill

Strategic themes:

Education and skills
Economic resilience

Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**Panel membership:**

Councillor Porter (Chair), Councillor Mrs McKenzie-Boyle (Vice-chair)

Councillors Angell, Allen, Brossard, Brown, Ms Gaw, Mrs Ingham, Kirke

Strategic themes:

Communities
Protecting and enhancing our environment

Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel**Panel membership:**

Councillor Mike Gibson (Chair), Councillor Mrs Mattick (Vice-chair)

Councillors Allen, Atkinson, Bhandari, Brossard, Finch, Mrs L Gibson, Mrs McKenzie, McLean, Skinner, Mrs Temperton

Strategic themes:

Caring for you and your family

O&S activities are supported by officers from the Overview & Scrutiny Team within the wider Democratic and Registration Services function, providing 86 hours of support per week.



Ann Moore
Assistant Director:
Democratic &
Registration
Services

Overview & Scrutiny Officer	Overview & Scrutiny Officer	Overview & Scrutiny Officer	Governance & Scrutiny Manager
0.68 FTE	0.68 FTE	0.68 FTE	0.3 FTE

Scrutiny officers work across all three panels, supporting one review at a time. Moving support between panels ensures sharing of good practice and increases collaboration and understanding across strategic themes. It avoids siloed working and provides a balance of opportunities for councillors and officers to develop and share their skills.

Following a restructure of the Democratic & Registration Services Division a new officer model was put in place from 1 March 2023 to support the scrutiny function

Head of Scrutiny & Democratic Services	Team Leader: Overview & Scrutiny	Overview & Scrutiny Officer	Overview & Scrutiny Officer
0.3 FTE	0.68 FTE	0.68 FTE	0.68 FTE

Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel



**Chair: Councillor
Mrs Gill Birch**



**Vice-Chair:
Councillor Michael
Brossard**

All the panel members work very well together, and I would like to thank them all for their help and support during 2022-2023. I really appreciate their commitment, expertise and drive to make the council and services better for our residents.

Although the Coronavirus Pandemic has still impacted on our capacity to meet in person, so some activities have taken longer to complete, the officer support has been excellent, and the member involvement has increased so I would like to thank everyone for their commitment and efforts. We have continued to have virtual meetings, and this has enabled us to schedule meetings to accommodate people from outside the council attend reviews to give evidence and take part. However, it is very good to have meetings in person and they are gradually happening, for example desk-top exercises work better, and with one review all of us looking at websites was more effective as a group together.

The four-year plan has been delivered and we have completed all our planned reviews.

Monitoring reviews is standard practice, so the Chair went to the Town and Parish Liaison meeting in November to monitor progress with the recommendations of the [Community Infrastructure Levy](#). It showed that most of the recommendations are actioned and there is more partnership working with the Towns, parishes and Bracknell Forest.



Site visits to local schools

The two reviews completed in 2022-2023 were the special Educational Needs and Disabilities and the Child Criminal Exploitation.

The [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities review](#) was endorsed by The Executive in October 2022.

However, some issues require longer timescales and significant investment. Our recommendations are aimed at addressing issues in order to strengthen services and support provided for children, young people and their families in the borough in the future so some were to be addressed within a six-month timescale, 18 months or three years.

The recommendations were accepted by The Executive, and we monitored the review in March to look at the six month recommendations. Good progress had been made, although the SEND department is still dealing with a backlog of cases, the new structure is now becoming embedded and staff recruitment is nearly complete. Communication is still a priority.

The Panel had a meeting in September to look at the forward plan and another in November to discuss the budget.

We also had a meeting to discuss areas that we think could form the work programme for the next four years. Ideas for reviews are Foster Carers, Residential placements, Transition from Children's Social Care to adult Social Care, Exclusions and Inclusion in Schools and SEMH in young people.

Findings and observations

- The last four years have been challenging with Covid and sickness but I feel that the reviews undertaken: Care Leavers Review, Apprenticeships, Community Infrastructure Levy, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities review, Child Criminal Exploitation have been exceptional reports that have had a positive effect on our residents and improved our services.
- Weekly meetings with the lead officer have been very useful to keep on track with progress with the SEND review. If possible, I would recommend it as best practice to other panels.
- Staff sickness has had an impact on support with delaying the completion of reviews.
- Monitoring the Community Infrastructure Levy and SEND review has enabled the reviews to be concluded. Monitoring reviews is now firmly embedded as good practice.
- Member involvement was excellent with the reviews, up to 14 people, due to a mix of virtual meetings and in person meetings.
- Having meetings at different times, especially in the evening, has meant more members have been able to contribute. Members are now aware that there isn't an expectation of them being able to attend all meetings and visits, but if they have expertise and/or are interested they can take part as much as they have availability.
- There was more opportunity to look at the budget and scrutinise it, but I would like a separate opportunity for the Panel to look at it in greater depth.
- Having the latest Data has been a challenge and I hope going forward we will have the opportunity to receive the latest data to enable effective scrutiny.

Councillor Mrs Gill Birch



Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel



Chair:
Councillor John Porter



Vice-Chair:
Councillor Mrs Tina McKenzie-Boyle



Site visits to assess waste and recycling facilities

At the start of the new term in 2019 the objectives of the panel changed. The purpose was still to scrutinise how each service item had been delivered and whether it met the key objectives. However, in addition the panel will now input into reviews of upcoming contracts, initiatives and plans. This process results in more research and information which increases the influence of scrutiny and therefore allows Councillors to make a greater contribution on behalf of residents. To enable the continued success of this new process the Chair and monitoring officer need to ensure that reviews are revisited so that any recommendations made have been implemented on time and are successful. This part of the new process is vital for scrutiny to be effective.

Reviews during the term 2019 - 2023

Registered providers of social housing

This review looked at registered providers of social housing and was carried out due to an increased number of residents contacting their councillor regarding issues. A key recommendation from the review was for Bracknell Forest Council to provide information on their website about what to expect from landlords, including statutory health and safety requirements. In total five recommendations were made and accepted by the Executive. The full report can be found [here](#)

Burial Choices

This review looked at additional burial space within the Borough as the crematorium is running out of

space. Various sites were visited, and a suitable site was recommended for testing.

The report also identified a second phase to this review which was to understand what other burial options could be offered to residents that would increase the number of burials possible as well as increasing choice. This review requires to be revisited in the new term.

Food waste in flats

After the highly successful implementation of food waste collection from households, the panel reviewed the viability and introduction of food waste collection from flats and houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs).

Recommendations were that the Executive implements a progressive roll out of food waste collection for up to 20% of properties (up to 1800) with officers developing the criteria for suitable flats.

Additionally, a recommendation was that the Executive produces a report reviewing the roll out after 1 year along with a report on the effectiveness and cost by spring 2023. The full report can be found [here](#)

Integrated enforcement

Enforcement often requires collaboration between teams, services or external partners and this review looked at the potential development of this collaborative approach, in the form of a more integrated model. This was achieved by looking at the current enforcement structures and policies at the council while exploring a range of best

practices relating to integrated enforcement from other local authorities.

One of the main recommendations was to introduce the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) as a new standard. A further recommendation was to develop enforcement strategies encouraging greater collaboration across services and with partners. In total five recommendations were made and approved by the Executive. The full report can be found [here](#)

Enforcement strategy

This review, due for approval at The Executive in June 2023, was a companion review following the Integrated Enforcement Review. The objective was to focus on the use, effectiveness, and consistency of application of enforcement powers within the council and discuss if any changes to policy or approach should be recommended. Good practice was recognised within

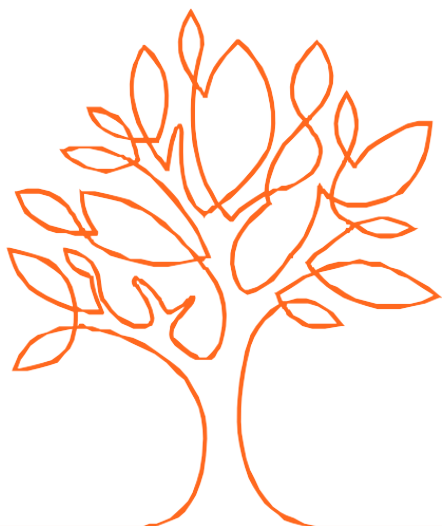
enforcement, specifically around the recent success of the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) which has provided security staff at the Lexicon with greater powers to help curb anti-social behaviour (ASB). Six recommendations were proposed, and the report will be published once approved.

Potential topics for the next four years have been discussed and include residential parking and EV charging for flats, cycleways in the borough, generation of own electricity for Council buildings, review of Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) and a review of parks and open spaces. Additionally, reviews of the burial choices, registered providers of social housing and food waste in flats reviews are a priority.

During the past four years one of my favourite reviews has to be that of introducing food waste into flats and houses of multiple occupancy. The success of food waste into households made this review even more important. The value of food waste collection supports the Council in achieving a greater recycling rate, reducing landfill, cutting emissions, assisting in a small way with achieving zero emissions and saving the Council money. The panel will soon look to review the recommendations and provide an update from officers on their progress.

Finally, I would like to thank my vice chair, Cllr Mrs Tina Mc Kenzie-Boyle, members of the panel and the officers from democratic services for all their hard work and dedication over the past four years.

Councillor John Porter



Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel



**Chair: Councillor
Mike Gibson**



**Vice-Chair:
Councillor Mrs
Isabel Mattick**

The Health and Wellbeing O&S Panel focuses on the Council's work addressing health and social care needs of the local community.

During the last year, a meeting was held to review progress of the recommendations made during the [Blue badge review](#). This enabled officers to provide feedback regarding the impact the recommendations were having and raise any issues that have arisen through the implementation of recommendations. This was an important process and I would like to emphasise the value of reviewing recommendations made in reviews to assess their impact and identify areas for improvement.

The panel recognises that the engagement of the public is key to the success of the scrutiny process, and therefore highlight the importance of public involvement in scrutinizing health and social care services. This was an important aspect of the O&S [review into Mental Health](#) in Bracknell Forest last year which led to 8 recommendations being accepted by the Executive.

The importance of accessibility of meetings and technological advances have enabled the panel to hold hybrid meetings, providing wider opportunities for public engagement. This has resulted in more inclusive, accessible and participative meetings, leading to better decisions and outcomes.








Benchmarking with other local authorities has also been identified as a valuable tool to assess the effectiveness of local health and social care services. This enables the panel to identify areas for improvement but also share good practice with other authorities. Site visits are also an essential part of the scrutiny process in assessing the quality of health and social care services as they provide an opportunity to meet staff and service users, observe how services are delivered and to raise any issues with service providers.









Furthermore, I would like to flag how communication is key. It is important to keep the public informed about the panel's work, as well as ensuring that they understand the importance of scrutiny in improving health and social care services. This encourages service providers to strive for improvement, leading to better outcomes for the local community.

Councillor Mike Gibson

Governance and Overview and Scrutiny in figures

This section summarises O&S activities over the current administration:







Commission			
2019-20	2020-21	2021 - 22	2022-23
6  meetings held Climate Change review commenced 	9  meetings held 3 reviews completed – recommendations to Executive	9  meetings held	7  meetings held
2 over 2 hrs	8 over 2 hours	1 over 2 hours	2 over 2 hours
Average 1:40 hrs each	Average 2:20 hrs each	Average 1:40 hrs each	Average: 1:45 hrs each
Total = 9:45 hrs	Total = 20:20 hrs	Total = 15:15 hrs	Total = 16 hrs

Panels			
2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
6  panel meetings held across 3 panels	25  review meetings held across 3 panels	36  review meetings held across 3 panels	25  review meetings held across 3 panels
2  reviews completed – recommendations to Executive 1 review almost complete – on hold	1  review complete – recommendations to Executive 2 reviews close to completion 3 reviews in early stages of pre-review preparation	5  reviews complete – recommendations to the Executive 1 review close to completion 2 reviews in progress 1 post-review feedback completed	4  reviews complete – recommendations to the Executive 2 post-review feedback completed

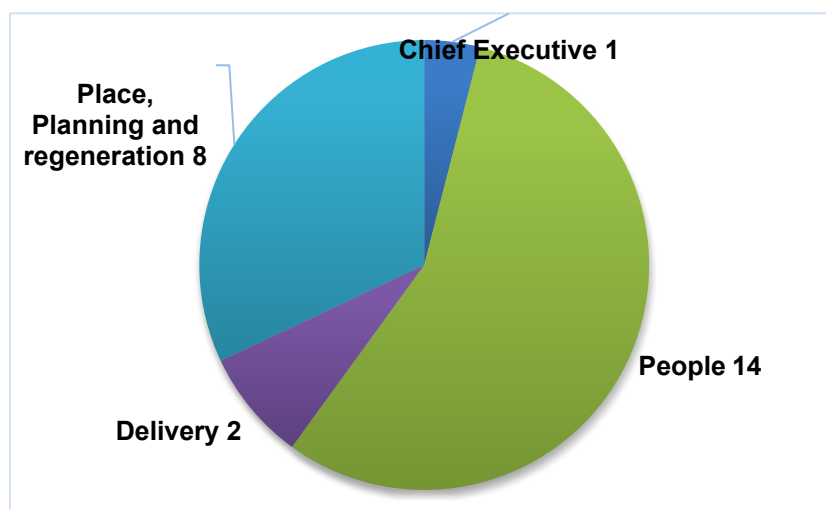
Further insights into O&S activities in 2022-23:

Activity overview by council theme		
 <p>Value for money</p> <p>Time in panel meetings: 4 hours Pages of evidence: 25</p>	 <p>Caring for you and your family</p> <p>Time in panel meetings: 8 hours Pages of evidence: 132</p>	 <p>Economic resilience</p> <p>Time in panel meetings: 4 hours Pages of evidence: 25</p>
 <p>Protecting and enhancing your environment</p> <p>Time in panel meetings: 3 hours Pages of evidence: 10</p>	 <p>Education and skills</p> <p>Time in panel meetings: 10 hours Pages of evidence: 203</p>	 <p>Communities</p> <p>Time in panel meetings: 4 hours 45 Minutes Pages of evidence: 38</p>

Summary of witnesses 2022-23:

Commission	Panels	Total
 <p>13 Officers</p>	 <p>17 Officers</p>	 <p>27 Officers</p>
 <p>4 External</p>	 <p>7 External</p>	 <p>10 External</p>
Executive members: 4	Executive members: 3	Executive members: 7

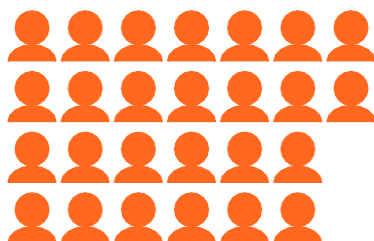
Bracknell Forest Officer witness by directorate



Number of councillors involved in reviews:

32

(Not including Executive Members)



Total press articles:

5



Overview of reviews 2019 – 2023

	2019				2020				2021				2022				2023
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Education, skills and growth Overview and Scrutiny panel			Care leavers				Apprenticeship		Evaluation of Care leavers recommendations		SEND						Child Criminal Exploitation
									Community infrastructure levy								
Environment and Communities - Overview and Scrutiny panel				Burial choices			Registered providers of social housing		Food waste in flats		Integrated enforcement						Enforcement strategy
Health and care - Overview and Scrutiny Panel							Isolation and loneliness				Mental health						Adult safeguarding - postponed until Q2 2023
								Blue badges									Evaluation of Blue badges recommendations

Getting involved

Overview and scrutiny activities benefit from a wide range of knowledge, experience and viewpoints and the Commission is keen to encourage wider participation. Review recommendations help shape the services we deliver for residents. Here are some insights from partners and officers about what they gained from recent reviews.

“The development of the written statement of action was a comprehensive, coproduced piece of work exploring the key actions needed to improve Special Educational Needs and Disability Service in Bracknell Forest. It is vitally important that we aspire to achieve the high standards of support and provision for all of our families and that the actions within the written statement of action aim to deliver that for children and young people with SEN and their families. I welcome the scrutiny review and note the findings.”

Grainne Siggins, Executive Director: People

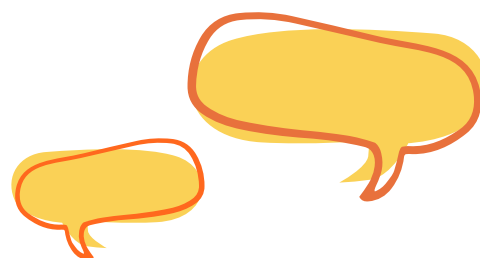
“The findings of the mental health review chime with our experience and we will look to build on them in our work to increase access and self-referral. Being involved in this scrutiny review highlighted the collaboration already in place across primary mental health services and meant we were able to help shape quality recommendations for the benefit of patients.”

Nadia Barakat, Director for Mental Health, NHS Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group

“There are a number of teams, in different departments across the Council that provide enforcement services and the panel heard evidence from them. As one of those teams we have been engaged throughout the scrutiny review process which has enabled us to share our good practice with the panel.

The opportunity to present evidence of current enforcement work and share potential options for the future has been invaluable so that Councillors appreciate the complexity and breadth of enforcement activity.”

Damian James, Assistant Director: Contract Services



Find out more about the [overview and scrutiny work programme](#). If you would like to be involved in future activities, contact committee@bracknell-forest.gov.uk.

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- Urgent item discussed by O&S commission
- Topic suggested at an O&S Panel or Commission meeting
- Public suggestion
- Officer suggestion



- Panel meeting to discuss how to conduct the review, who is involved and timings
- Meet with officers to discuss what is required to conduct the review
- Chair/Vice chair meet with O&S officers to agree agendas/timings for meetings
- Attend meetings. Interviews, site visits etc. (usually around 7 of these meetings)



- Panel meeting to discuss recommendations
- Panel meeting with executive member to agree recommendations
- Following evidence gathering from review meetings the report is written
- Engagement with the public and press
- Receive notes of meetings and Councillor reports



Ideas for scrutiny topics

Complete pro forma/scope

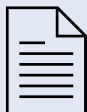
Review meetings & research

Review report

Presentation of report and recommendations

Completed scope goes to:

- CMT for officer input
- Commission meeting where the topic is agreed



Site visits



- Commission meeting to sign off report
- Report presented to CMT
- Report presented at Executive meeting
- Press release



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To: **The Overview & Scrutiny Commission**
6 July 2023

Outstanding Overview & Scrutiny Reports **Director of Delivery**

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Two Overview & Scrutiny Reviews were completed prior to the election and agreed by the previous Overview and Scrutiny Commission members. However, they were not signed off by the Executive, so members are asked to consider the following recommendations to ensure work undertaken is completed.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 **That the Commission agrees one of the three options below:**

- 2.2 **Option 1 - Accept one or both the reports and recommendations, in their entirety, and request the Chair of the relevant Panels present them to the Executive on 19 September 2023.**

- 2.3 **Option 2 - Agree the relevant Panel Chairs convene a meeting of their Panels to reconsider all the evidence on which the reports and recommendations were based, and redraft if appropriate, before presenting to the O&S Commission for agreement.**

- 2.4 **Option 3 - Agree one, or both, the reports and recommendations are no longer valid as they were carried out by the previous administration and archive them, without presenting the recommendations to the Executive.**

3 Reasons for Recommendation(S)

- 3.1 Members should consider both reports, attached as Appendix C and D and consider which option they would prefer for each report.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Three options are set out in the recommendations and provide alternatives.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The outstanding reports were the culmination of the 'Enforcement Strategy Review' and the 'Child Criminal Exploitation Review'.
- 5.2 Due to timings with the election the reports and recommendations were agreed by the Commission but were not considered by the Executive. Members of the Commission are asked to consider both reports Appendix C and Appendix D, respectively, and advise officers which option below they would prefer in order to complete the outstanding work.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.3 These are included in the review reports.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 EIAs were completed as part of the original reports.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 Ensuring the culmination of scrutiny review work is completed and recommendations are implemented is part of a robust work programme.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.6 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to:

Have no impact on emissions of CO₂.

The reasons the Council believes that this will have no impact on emissions are no Climate Change implications were noted during the reviews.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

- 6.7 The Education, Skills and Growth O&S Panel noted health and wellbeing issues in its report so it would be advisable to discuss these as part of any decision making about the future of these scrutiny review reports.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

Ann Moore, Assistant Director: Delivery - 01344 352260
Ann.moore@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Overview and Scrutiny Panel Report

REVIEW TITLE	O&S PANEL	DATE
Enforcement Strategy	Environment and Communities	16 March 2023

“This review was a direct result from the Integrated Enforcement review which was completed in September 2022. The panel wanted to ensure that the policy and strategy of enforcement were being followed.”

Councillor John Porter,
Chair: Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel



Recommendations



1. Executive member for Planning and Transport to contact the relevant minister, with a request for local authorities to have greater power in declining retrospective planning and prevent abuse of the planning system. This should be achieved by July 2023.
2. Raise awareness of [One.network](#) on the Council website to enable residents to find who is responsible for highways works and identify unauthorised works. This should be achieved by July 2023.
3. Investigate development of the use of CCTV as an enforcement tool to simplify the enforcement process when issuing fines, e.g., for fly-tipping. This will be an ongoing process; however, an update will be expected in 12 months' time.
4. Increase enforcement through the development of the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) training.
 - By adding value to the existing enforcement toolkit e.g., the use of the power to stop vehicles.
 - Look at the effectiveness of the existing partnership arrangement with the Lexicon security operators.This will be an ongoing process; however, an update will be expected in 12 months' time.
5. Develop and maintain the policy of enforcement regarding flyposting to ensure consistency is achieved throughout the borough. To be reviewed within 6 months.
6. Improve communication on the Council website:
 - To include greater coverage and reporting of success stories within enforcement including successful prosecutions.
 - Provide more information around highways works and the fact that emergency work can go ahead with retrospective application for a permit.Progress on this should be expected imminently and reviewed within 12 months.

Background information and key findings

This companion review follows the Integrated Enforcement Review (September 2022) which identified that enforcement is a complex area covering a wide range of services across various departments, organisations, and agencies. It focussed on looking at what enforcement powers the council holds and how these are distributed across teams within the council. One of the recommendations was to develop enforcement strategies encouraging greater collaboration across services and with partners. Therefore, the aim of this review was to focus on the use,

effectiveness, and consistency of application of enforcement powers within the council and discuss if any changes to policy or approach should be recommended.

The panel found that:

- Enforcement processes can be complex which can make it difficult for residents to understand or follow, this was evident when looking at enforcement strategies within planning.
- Greater power within planning for local authorities needs to be sought.
- There was evidence of good examples of effectiveness of powers within enforcement, specifically with the recent implementation of CSAS powers for Lexicon staff. Further success was seen within the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) regarding the issue of fly tipping.
- Greater publicity of enforcement strategies and success stories will help to improve the effectiveness of enforcement powers.
- One.network is a useful tool that can enhance residents' knowledge of highways work.

Good Practice



The panel recognised the good work that exists within enforcement, specifically the recent success story around the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) which has provided security staff at the Lexicon with greater powers to help curb anti-social behaviour (ASB). It is anticipated that this scheme will act as a pilot and be a useful contribution to the recommendation to increase enforcement through the development of the CSAS scheme.

Review findings



As acknowledged in the recent integrated enforcement review enforcement is an activity which covers a broad range of services across many departments within the Council. The review highlighted that the range of activities within enforcement can be complex and is often not helped by public misinformation regarding processes and policies. Awareness of enforcement can be raised through publicity to make sure residents can see the results of successful enforcement within the borough and are aware of the processes involved in enforcement across the Council.

A focus in this review was for the Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel to look at strategies and policies with consideration of the following:

- ✓ Is the policy fit for purpose or does it need to be reviewed?
- ✓ Is it being adhered to, if not why?
- ✓ Are there any ways the process or policy can be enhanced?

The Panel identified and interviewed senior officers from Bracknell Forest Council including the Executive Director of Place, Planning and Regeneration, Assistant Director of Contract Services, Head of Natural Estates, Assistant Director Planning, Assistant Director Highways and Transport and the Head of the Public Protection Partnership. Additionally, desktop analysis of policies and other relevant documents was undertaken by the panel.

Planning



Councillors highlighted that a common complaint from residents was regarding concern around planning enforcement. This was often in relation to what is, to the casual observer, a dismissive

approach to planning applications which can result in the erection of buildings larger than the submitted plans followed by a reliance on retrospective planning to resolve the issue. Councillors are concerned that planning enforcement within the borough is perceived as weak which may result in an increase of planning breaches.

Senior officers explained that after a breach of planning has been reported the enforcement process can be lengthy. Buildings need to be physically measured and compared to approved plans. Officers then need to check to see if retrospective planning could be made and assess the harm that the breach has made. To appeal against a refusal of planning requires a long list of grounds. However, if there is genuine reason and harm being caused by a breach then it is pursued using a rigorous eight-phase investigation which forms part of the council's [local enforcement plan](#) for planning. Retrospective applications then need to be dealt with on the same basis as the initial application which adds further time to the process.

The panel raised the point that the tightening of planning enforcement is not a priority within central government and the wider planning system. In fact, there is a focus to deliver more homes through permitted development and hence increased possibilities for people to make changes without the need for planning permission.

Discussions around the conversion of office blocks, which is covered by prior approval processes, highlighted a need for improved protection of residents. Planning enforcement follows legislation and therefore doesn't have much input into the conversions of these buildings. There have been concerns with one particular property, Hayley house, which needed to be passed onto the PPP and the fire service.

Overall, the planning team confirmed that they are confident with the strengths of their enforcement strategy and feel it supports and reinforces cases where they need to go to court to make prosecutions. Evidence of this is seen within the planning policy document where an eight-phase investigation flow chart, on page 28, can be found which details the process from receipt of complaint through to direct action if necessary. This strategy remains successful due to regular reviews and updates in response to changes in legislation.



After discussions about issues within planning enforcement the panel felt that local authorities should have greater powers to help address abuse of the planning system, specifically regarding retrospective planning. It was felt that a step towards achieving this would be for the Executive member for Planning and Transport to contact the relevant minister in central government.

Highways and Transport



An issue discussed around highways was the volume of work taking place, however, it was acknowledged that companies have a statutory right to carry out work. The council cannot decline applications but are able to control when the work happens. The website [one.network](#) can help increase awareness and provide a platform to find out when and where work is taking place.

By registering for free residents can use the one.network website to receive updates of work due to take place in the selected area and also the duration of the work. This information is helpful for residents as it keeps them up to date with disruption within the chosen area caused by highway work. If they wish residents can also use the information to report unauthorised works to the council which will assist officers to investigate and implement enforcement to contractors and companies undertaking works without a permit.



After learning about the benefits the one.network website can provide the panel recommends improving awareness via promotion on the council website. This will be beneficial for residents and the council and could be a useful tool to help monitor and report unauthorised highways work.

Public Protection Partnership

Public Protection Partnership | Bracknell Forest
West Berkshire



The Public Protection Partnership (PPP) is a shared service delivering Environmental Health, Licensing and Trading Standards on behalf of two authorities Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire Council.

A focus within the PPP's strategy is to take an approach of tackling issues from 3 ways:

- ✓ Prevention – using media and information on the website to provide information to the public around a topic. The use of signage and CCTV as a preventative measure.
- ✓ Intelligence gathering – encouraging residents to report offences, highlighting ways to achieve this i.e. Who to contact, where on the website to find forms to report concerns and breaches of enforcement.
- ✓ Enforcement – issue of fines

This strategy has produced some successful results:

- **The Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS)**
Thames Valley Police have accredited ABM Facility Services UK Ltd, a private company who hold the security contract at the Lexicon Shopping Centre in Bracknell. Five of their Security Officers have been presented with individual CSAS certificates. These members of the security team have been granted police powers to assist them in tackling ASB, all have been police vetted and completed a CSAS training course. Working in partnership with Thames Valley Police and Bracknell Forest Council, the Security Officers have the authority to issue fixed penalty notices (FPN) for graffiti, fly-posting, cycling on a footpath as well as breaches of the Alcohol Public Space Protection Order (PSPO).
- **Fly tipping** – there has been a marked reduction in fly tipping and resulting prosecutions for offenders. A decision was made about 12-18 months ago to employ a dedicated resource to specifically deal with this problem. Some recent successes in this area are evidenced here:

Offence 	Outcome 
Fly tipper convicted after collecting rubbish from residents to be disposed of was found fly tipped at a disused school site.	The defendant was fined £320 and was ordered to pay a contribution towards the prosecution costs
Fly tipper convicted at Reading Magistrates Court following rubbish found fly tipped outside a charity shop.	The Court sentenced by way of a conditional discharge for 12 months and ordered the defendant to pay a contribution towards the prosecution costs.

- The PPP also utilise the positive effects that publicity of successful cases and outcomes can have. The main benefits of this:
 - Develops knowledge and awareness of enforcement which can result in increased reporting from the public of enforcement breaches.
 - Can help to act as a deterrent if there is publicity around the fines given.
 - Provide reassurance that Councils are implementing successful enforcement strategies.

The good practice and examples provided by the PPP have highlighted some ways to enhance enforcement strategies within the Council. Therefore, the panel proposed the following recommendations:



- Improve communication, through greater coverage and reporting of success stories on the Council's website. This could be used to develop and increase understanding of enforcement processes.
- Increase enforcement through the development of CSAS.
- Investigate the use of CCTV to enhance the enforcement process when issuing fines, e.g for fly-tipping. CCTV can additionally act as a deterrent and provide reassurance to the public with respect to fly-tipping hotspots.

Parks and open spaces (rangers)



There was discussion within this review regarding CSAS training of park rangers, which could enable them to issue fines regarding littering, dog fouling etc. Whilst currently staff within the Parks and Countryside don't have enforcement powers it was acknowledged that expanding CSAS powers within this area would not be appropriate for the following reasons:

- ✓ Due to the nature of their work park rangers often work on an individual basis and therefore for safety reasons it was not felt appropriate to provide them with CSAS powers
- ✓ Residents are respectful of park rangers, and it is felt that this relationship could be harmed through providing them with powers to enforce fines. It was acknowledged that they can achieve good results through speaking with and asking residents to pick up litter or clear up dog fouling without additional powers enabling them to issue fines. They are respected within the community and have a good relationship with the public.

The Parks and Countryside team carried out an extensive piece of work to look at how some enforcement action might be delivered for dog fouling and environmental crime issues. It was found that this wasn't straightforward in terms of ensuring how staff would be able to witness offences and then go through a process of issuing a fixed penalty notice. They concluded that giving rangers these additional responsibilities would be too much of a shift in terms of the core work they are currently required to do. An important aspect noted was whether pursuing CSAS training for park rangers was worthwhile to target a minority of people who commit these crimes. It was however noted that there is a process in place if a ranger, or member of the public, were to witness an offence such as dog fouling where a form can be completed, and the issue is followed up with the PPP partnership to take further action.



The panel concluded that no recommendations were necessary within the parks and countryside team, and it was agreed that the team is successful in their approach towards enforcement and the work they do.

Financial considerations

These recommendations will mean additional responsibilities are to be added to existing employees' workloads.

All costs (including training) will be contained within existing budgets but if they exceed these they will be highlighted as budget pressures and additional funding will be requested as part of the annual budget cycle. Some costs may well be offset through additional income gained by enforcement activity.

Review Panel

Councillor Angell	Councillor Mrs Ingham
Councillor Allen	Councillor Kirke
Councillor Brossard	Councillor Mrs McKenzie-Boyle (Vice chair)
Councillor Brown	Councillor Porter (Chair)
Councillor Ms Gaw	

Contributors to the review

Andrew Hunter	Executive Director: Place, Planning and Regeneration, Bracknell Forest Council
Damian James	Assistant Director: Contract Services, Bracknell Forest Council
Sean Murphy	Head of Public Protection Partnership
Alison Beynon	Strategic Manager, Public Protection Partnership
Councillor John Harrison	Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection
Councillor Chris Turrell	Executive Member for Planning & Transport
Wayne Scott	Traffic Manager: Highways and Transport
Stephen Chown	Head of Natural Estates: Parks and Countryside
Max Baker	Assistant Director: Planning
Esther Prangle	Governance and Scrutiny Officer, Bracknell Forest Council

Overview and Scrutiny Panel Report

REVIEW TITLE	O&S PANEL	DATE
Child Criminal Exploitation	Education, Skills and Growth	March 2023



“The review was originally in our forward plan to investigate how County Lines operate within Bracknell Forest and consider how a range of partners work together to reduce opportunities for exploitation. However, the Covid Pandemic had a huge impact on how these operate. Therefore, the review was broadened to look at Child Criminal Exploitation and looked at any changes to CCE activity because of the pandemic. National evidence pointed to an increase in localised CCE activity. Safeguarding of our young people is incredibly important in this age of fast communication and social media pressures that can make them far more vulnerable to exploitation. How our council and community work in partnership is key to protecting them.”

Councillor Gill Birch, Chair: Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Recommendations



1. Collaborate with Thames Valley Police and other relevant partners to develop and implement regular Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) awareness campaigns within schools, targeting both children and parents. **12 months.**
2. Engage with local businesses and community organisations to develop strategies designed to both raise awareness of CCE and promote the creation of safer places for children and young people. **12 months.**
3. Conduct a comprehensive review of the website to enhance its usability and accessibility in relation to child exploitation. Ensure the information on the relevant web pages is clear and concise, and that there are links to relevant external resources. Engage with children and young people during the process and consider 'Good Practice' from other Local Authorities identified by the Education, Skills, Growth O&S Panel. **6 months.**
4. Develop and implement a survey focused on CCE for safeguarding leads from schools in the borough. Use the findings to identify gaps and areas for improvement in existing policies and practices relating to CCE. Consider working with the Education, Skills, Growth O&S Panel on this. **6 months.**
5. Conduct regular awareness campaigns on the use of cannabis and its impact on vulnerable children and young people. Use a variety of communication channels such as social media, print materials and public events to reach a wider audience. **6 months.**
6. Work with partners to develop and maintain a map or database of vulnerable areas and hot spots related to CCE. **12 months.**

Key findings

The Panel found that:

- Councils have a key role in identifying support as early as possible to help children and young people escape and recover from the exploitation that they have suffered.
- Raising awareness of child exploitation has the potential to disrupt or prevent exploitation. There are a number of ways awareness can be raised, from communication campaigns to drama productions, social media and word of mouth.
- Exploitation around drugs has become more localized and grooming is increasingly happening online.
- Child Criminal Exploitation hotspots do change, partly due to multi-agency work but also as groups and children move on.
- The multi-agency group is getting stronger in sharing intelligence and educating children about technology use.
- There's a screening tool in place that is suitable for all exploitation and referrals are encouraged from anybody that's worried that a child might be exploited. When a referral is received it goes to a triage meeting where there are a number of agencies involved including Makesafe, Youth Justice, Youth Services and the permanency team within children's Social Care.
- Where the victim, the perpetrator, and the location are known, then there is a strategy in place to disrupt one of these three things in an attempt to prevent harm or a crime. An increasing challenge associated with this approach is that while locations used to be predominantly physical locations, they are now often online which makes it harder to detect the perpetrator, and therefore makes it harder to disrupt.
- Every two weeks, internal departments within Thames Valley Police meet and review all the intelligence around county drugs lines that are currently operating in the area. That meeting is broken down into vulnerable persons and locations.
- Nationally, there isn't a strong data set around the crossover between CCE and Children Looked After (CLA). However, children who come into care (particularly later on in their lives) are more likely to go missing. In this context, a young person under the age of 18 years is to be considered "missing" if they are absent from their place of residence without authority, or in circumstances where the absence causes concern for safety of the child. Research shows there is a strong correlation between children who are missing and CCE. There is also a strong correlation between children excluded from school and CCE.
- Community prevention and contextual safeguarding are developing aspects of CCE prevention at the Council. More work is needed to make sure that our communities are vigilant and supportive.
- One important aspect of responding to exploitation is the more holistic the service's responses to young people are, the better trajectories are for children and young people.

Good practice:

- There has been much multi-agency work undertaken in Bracknell Forest to tackle County Lines. Additionally, a lot of prevention work relating to CCE is done within the partnership with the Thames Valley Police, Missing And Child Exploitation (MACE), and Makesafe. This has led to a yearly decrease in number of children who are reported as missing.
- The Council has undertaken considerable work on developing and embedding a language that is considerate and careful and does not include victim-blaming vocabulary towards children who are being exploited.
- In the financial year of 2018/19 greater resources were put into the missing and exploitation team by the Council, which led to the creation of the exploitation prevention manager post. As this has continued to develop a strong emphasis on seeing young people face to face was introduced, particularly for return conversations, and this has played part in the decrease of the number of missing children in recent years. This new approach facilitates a conversation in a much more informal way. As a result, the quality of the information from return home conversations has become much better and much more effective in helping identify sources of harm. Now, these conversations are one of the most important sources of information.

- It was recognised by officers at all levels that the staff support offer for officers in Children Services is strong. The work within social care (including work around CCE) can be emotionally demanding and so it is important that officers feel supported. Some of this work includes a monthly supervision meeting where a well-being score takes place.

Background

Child exploitation is a serious and growing crime. It is complex and continually changing. In general, child exploitation occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of a power imbalance to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into criminal or sexual activity or modern slavery. The effects of child exploitation can be devastating and have a profound impact on children for the rest of their lives.

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) activity can include children 'being forced to work in cannabis factories, being coerced into moving drugs or money across the country, being forced to shoplift or pickpocket, or threatening other young people. One of the most common types of CCE activity is County Lines. This involves 'organised drug dealing networks that exploit children and vulnerable adults to move, hold and sell drugs across the UK using dedicated phone lines to take orders'. Exploitation is a key component of the business model and gangs use children because they are 'cheaper, more easily controlled and less likely to get picked up by the police.' More local carrying of drugs, across the same borough or district, is also increasingly seen by councils and partners.

The Bracknell Exploitation Annual Report 2021/22 noted significant multi-agency work in Bracknell Forest to tackle County Lines drug dealing. In this period, there was one county drugs line active in Bracknell that was known to have exploited children to move drugs and there were no known missing children linked to CCE. These reductions suggest the problem profile is now largely confined to the town itself.

Councils have a key role to play in tackling child exploitation, from awareness-raising and staff training to prevention and support for children who have been victims. Councils cannot do this alone and so close working with partners including the police, NHS and schools is vital if areas are to have the right systems in place to prevent and disrupt criminal activity putting children and young people at risk.

Review findings

Makesafe

The Bracknell Forest Makesafe is a small team comprising a manager, a specialist social worker and a specialist family worker. The team undertakes direct work with children at risk of exploitation. In 2021/22 the Council's Makesafe team reported that the number of vulnerable children assessed as Level 3 (evidence of active exploitation) had halved from the previous year.

	2020/21	2021/22
Assessed as Level 1 (Vulnerabilities to exploitation but no indications child is being groomed)	51%	67%
Assessed as Level 2 (Indicators that the child is being groomed for the purposes of exploitation)	24.5%	22%
Assessed as Level 3 (Evidence of active exploitation.)	24.5%	11%

The reduction in level 3 cases creates a shift towards more awareness raising and preventative support for young people.

The Makesafe team noted that “nothing has been usual for children since the pandemic began”. The goal is to move forward collaboratively to make Bracknell Forest as safe as it can be for children as they regain some of the opportunities lost in covid. This review aimed to support that goal by considering key aspects of safeguarding and scrutinising how effective they are.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

The MASH is the ‘integrated front door’ for all new safeguarding concerns about children consisting of staff from Social Care, Early Help, Youth Justice, Police, Education, Health, Housing, and Probation collectively working to triage new reports about children. Reports are received from referral partners all across the Borough – including members of the public, professionals and families of children directly.

The MASH has embedded the use of an integrated CCE screening tool into practice to collate information and screen these worries or indicators – this is either completed by the MASH or the MASH support other agencies who know children best to complete the screening tool to draw out the level of concern/risk and the next steps. MASH staff are trained to use the tools appropriately, as well as how to use professional judgement alongside the tool.

The MASH is the central point for receiving all missing children notifications from the Police into Children’s Social Care and plays an integral role in coordinating follow-up activity for each child who is reported missing – including ensuring that Return Home Conversations take place by the relevant agency and practitioner.

Return Home Conversations may take place by the Youth Service, Children’s Social Care fieldwork teams or the Make Safe exploitation team – the MASH role is to ensure that contacts are received, triaged and allocated to the correct follow-up agency with minimal delay and no later than 24 hours.

Missing And Child Exploitation (MACE)

The MACE is concerned with oversight and scrutiny and aims to ensure everything that should be done for that child is being done. The MACE may also look at how partners can work together to neutralize hotspots.

MACE convenes once a month, but many other meetings happen as issues emerge. The agenda is fixed, and a child will stay on it until such a time it is agreed as a collective that the risk is lessened. Once this happens the child will go on to the risk management meeting and agenda. This is a meeting between the police and Makesafe.

This allows the sharing of police intelligence, concerns around CCE and any information that provides partners to maintain a grasp on what’s going on. They work together to prevent and avoid the criminalisation of children.

Youth Justice Team

The Youth Justice Team works with children over the age of ten who are at risk of entering the criminal justice system. Some of these children who come into contact with the service may be demonstrating behaviours that could be indicative of CCE – for example using substances or showing violence and aggression at home toward their parents.

The team use a range of assessment tools (including the screening tool) to help identify children whose behaviour may be caused by CCE and work closely with the exploitation team in these instances. The team works with the police to prevent and avoid criminalisation of children who have offended because they have been exploited by others to do so.

Youth Justice Team is multidisciplinary. There is a health worker social worker speech and language worker, and mental health worker. The ability to respond to all areas of a child’s life where they’re struggling or navigating difficult things culminates in playing a part in tackling CCE.

If there is evidence of a child being exploited there is a National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The referral will be evaluated by the staff at the NRM who will then provide conclusive grounds that the child in question has been exploited. This can be used as evidence in court. It is a useful tool that supports a child through a criminal investigation where they are the victim. If a child ends up in court because of a drug offence etc, and there is evidence of exploitation, Youth Justice will mitigate for them on that basis.

The Youth Justice Team works closely with schools to keep young people in school. There is an education worker in the team who links with the schools and will attend some of the exclusion meetings. The education worker will try to put things in place to make it easier in school for that child and to hopefully prevent exclusion. The team have also done some group work in schools where they have talked about exploitation with a group of boys. This started before the pandemic and is starting to resume again now. Children tend to react positively to the sessions.

The Youth Justice Team and Thames Valley Police recently carried some sessions on knife crime with the children and parents at a local school within the borough.



After learning of recent successes of crime related awareness activities in local schools, the Panel recommends Officers collaborate with Thames Valley Police and other relevant partners to develop and implement regular CCE awareness campaigns within schools, targeting both children and parents.

Community Safety Team

The Community Safety Partnership's (CSP's) three-year plan for 2020-23 contains a priority of reducing and responding to exploitation. The plan is required to be reviewed each year and, in 2021/22, a key focus area of Serious Violence and All-age Exploitation was set. In terms of governance, a strategic Serious Violence and Exploitation Sub-Group has been set up to collectively identify how to prevent and tackle it as well as manage performance and progress and report back to the CSP. The sub-group also oversees two operational groups: one for u18s at risk of exploitation and serious violence and one for adult victims at risk and perpetrators (including those who may present a risk to u18s). The strategic group and both operational groups are all multi-partner groups involving organisations and Council services including Involve, Berkshire Youth, BFC Youth Services, police, school representatives, the Lexicon and The Wayz.

BFC Community Safety co-ordinates bids against the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Community Safety Fund which, in 2022/23, has included youth diversionary work in the town centre and a youth project in Crowthorne Parish which involved Parish Council engagement. Both projects are being conducted using community youth organisations.

BFC Community Safety is also currently supporting the NHS to conduct a focus group of professionals across several boroughs to look at the prevention of serious violence and exploitation involving young people up to the age of 25. The project aims include identifying where there are gaps and opportunities in provision to reduce young people's involvement in serious violence.

BFC Community Safety has arranged access to a Serious Violence Dashboard which has been set up by the Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) showing local perpetrators of serious violence and the people (including children and young people) who are at risk from those perpetrators. This data will be used by the two operational groups to manage local offenders and safeguard those at risk from them. A wider programme of work is taking place with the VRU, one strand of which is auditing existing community and voluntary sector provision as well as identify gaps in provision.

BFC Community Safety has a growing network of contacts with the local community through services and organisations including Involve and Parish/Town Councils. For ease, awareness and advice content is mostly shared online or by e-mail as this enables messages to be shared to as wide an audience as possible without incurring costs and requiring large resources - although it is recognised that not everyone regularly uses or has access to the internet. Officers have set up stands and held events in the past but did generally find that engagement was difficult, attendance was sporadic, and reach was limited.

It is acknowledged by officers that CCE awareness does need to be regular and available in different formats. Examples of recent CCE awareness activities include an online modern slavery and exploitation event featuring several different speakers hosted by Involve. Attendance was fair but several resources were produced and shared. Work also took place with Bracknell and Wokingham College's Media Department where films on child exploitation were made and shared publicly.

Contextual Safeguarding

'Working Together to Safeguard Children' and a growing number of other key national publications and research papers provide local authorities and partner agencies with a mandate to address the growing concerns around contextual risks affecting children and young people.

The approach of Contextual Safeguarding was developed by Dr Carlene Firmin and colleagues at the University of Bedfordshire in 2015. It's an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Contextual Safeguarding is therefore the intervention into the contexts presenting harm to children- those being peer groups, schools, neighbourhoods and online.

Most of the Council's work with businesses on reducing child exploitation is focused within the town centre, which is the social hub of Bracknell Forest. The Community Safety Partnership has a close working relationship with the Lexicon and the Peel Centre, and this relationship is in place in meetings such as the Partnership Problem-Solving Groups and Town Centre Management meeting. Police, the Council and businesses work together in this way to problem-solve crime and disorder issues. CCTV in the town centre is in place, not only to prevent crime and disorder but also to offer a level of protection to children and young people. Bracknell Walk Youth Centre is also a well-placed safe space for children and young people and work is taking place to map what it currently offers as well as what its potential is.

The Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board is leading on contextual safeguarding within the borough. Identified with the Board's strategic plan is the aim to address contextual safeguarding and the Board aims to achieve this by "promoting a contextual safeguarding approach by partner organisations". Adopting this holistic approach to safeguarding practices encourages earlier identification of any potential harm within the wider environment and promotes collaboration with wider partners to help reduce risk.



As part of the ongoing work to address contextual safeguarding in Bracknell Forest it is recommended officers at the Council engage with local businesses and community organisations to develop strategies designed to both raise awareness of CCE and to promote the creation of safer places for children and young people.

The changing nature of CCE

Officers from the Council highlighted the importance of recognising the changing nature of the issue and how the Council and its partners respond to it, both flexibly and collectively. The impact of the cost-of-living crisis was identified by officers from the Council and its partners as an emerging issue that will have an impact on the ever-evolving nature of child criminal exploitation.

Nationally, recent trends have seen younger children as well as children from more typically middle-class backgrounds being targeted by criminals, with social media increasingly used to lure them in. Snapchat is particularly used by exploiters as the primary function of the popular app is the ability to send impermanent content. In addition, during the Covid lockdowns, there was an increase in the use of children's bank accounts by criminals to store illicit cash. This was also seen across the country.

These changes will require another shift approach, as is often the case with the evolving CCE landscape, for the detection of earlier signs of CCE is becoming harder.



Due to the changing nature of Child Criminal Exploitation and the role education plays in protecting children from exploitation it is recommended officers develop and implement a survey focused on CCE for safeguarding leads from schools in the borough. Use the findings to identify gaps and areas for improvement in existing policies and practices relating to CCE.

As highlighted, exploiters adapt their tactics and techniques. For instance, if there is an increased police presence or more public awareness of exploitation at a particular place then the exploiters will move. This can be challenging to monitor, and the sharing of information is key in ensuring there is a quick response when there is a change of location.

The changing of 'hotspots' is discussed regularly in MACE meetings. Targeting vulnerable locations used by exploiters is part of a wider strategy to prevent or reduce exploitation. Some of these locations may have businesses nearby.



It was recognised by officers there is potential for work to be done with partners to allow for more effective monitoring of hotspots by regularly exchanging relevant information. Therefore, it is recommended the Council work with its partners to develop and maintain a map or database of vulnerable areas and hot spots related to CCE.

It is recognised by officers that cannabis use is a gateway for exploitation in the local area. Moreover, the drug market is changing across the country, and there is a rise in the use of cannabis edibles by children. They are often sold online and are delivered in the post so they are hard to trace as they look like sweets. The consumption of these edibles (as well as cannabis in general) by children and young people is a significant concern. The impact of cannabis on children who are vulnerable (particularly with mental health concerns) can be really dangerous and officers recognise more can be done locally to promote this impact.



It is recommended that the Council conducts regular awareness campaigns on the use of cannabis and its impact on vulnerable children and young people. A variety of communication channels such as social media, print materials and public events should be considered in order to reach a wider audience.

Website feedback

Website Desktop Exercise

The Panel met in person to carry out a review of the Council's website within the context of child exploitation. The Panel concluded:



The information on the '*Report child abuse or concern about a child*' webpage is too long and 'wordy'. The language used is overly technical and is not clear or concise enough.



It is not clear on the webpage who MASH is. It is also unclear what hours the phone line is open.



There are very few links to useful and relevant external resources relating to child exploitation.



The Croydon Council's website was identified as an example of good practice.



Based on their findings during the website review, the Panel recommends officers conduct a comprehensive review of the website to enhance the usability and accessibility in relation to child exploitation. Ensure the information on the relevant webpages is clear and concise, and that there are links to relevant external resources. Engage with children and young people during the process and consider 'Good Practice' from other Local Authorities identified by the Panel during this review.

"It was wonderful to learn how the different partners work together care so much about our young people. The case studies showed how they really make a difference to young people and their compassion and understanding of the problems that our young people face was brilliant."

This review was fascinating, and all the panel members learnt a great deal about how our Community Partnership and businesses work together. Partnership working has always been a strength of Bracknell Forest Council, but I would like to say thank you to everyone who gave evidence and came to talk to us for their professionalism and dedication in keeping our young people safe. Many thanks to all the officers, police, Community and young people for their input and support.

A special thank you to Joey Gurney and my Vice- Chairman Michael Brossard for all their help and patience.

I commend the recommendations in the report to you all and we will review this in a years' time."

Councillor Mrs Gill Birch, Chair: Education, Skills and Growth Scrutiny Panel

Review panel

Councillor Mrs Birch (Chair)	Councillor Ms Hayes
Councillor Brossard (Vice Chair)	Councillor Ms Merry
Councillor Ms Gaw	Councillor Skinner
Councillor Gbadebo	Councillor Temperton
Councillor Hamilton	Victoria Hill (Parent Governor Representative)

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