

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
23 MAY 2024
6.30 - 7.41 PM



Present:

Councillors McLean (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), C Eberle, Egglestone (acting Vice-Chair), Frost, Haffegge, Smith (Substitute), Virgo (Substitute), Watts and Webb

Present Virtually:

Councillors Barnard, Ejaz and Pickering
Victoria Hill, Parent Governor Representative

Also Present:

Susan Halliwell, Chief Executive
Kevin Gibbs, Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Andrew Hunter, Executive Director: Place
Ann Moore, Assistant Director: Democratic & Registration Services

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Brown
Stuart McKellar, Executive Director: Resources
Grainne Higgins, Executive Director: People
Damian James, Assistant Director: Contract Services

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors M Forster and McKenzie-Boyle

4. Minutes of previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 29 February 2024 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

Responses to all of the queries and requests for information raised in the meeting had been received or formed part of the agenda.

5. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor Christoph Eberle declared a personal interest in Thames Water as the company he worked for meant he carried out projects for Thames Water occasionally.

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

6. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

7. Public Participation

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

8. **Council Plan Overview Report**

The Chief Executive presented the Quarter 4 Council Plan Overview Report, which was the concluding report related to the previous Council Plan 2019-2023.

Achievements delivered this quarter included the adoption of the Local Plan following extensive consultation; agreeing the creation of the new Berkshire Prosperity Board and the safety valve proposals being signed off by the Department of Education.

Challenges remained around significant budget issues due to costs related to the safety valve programme, the general economic climate, and pressures around adult and children's social care costs. It was also noted legal issues had held up the Market Street development but that these had now been completed and work, in conjunction with Abri housing association, had begun to build the expected number of affordable housing units on that site.

Councillors requested further information around budget challenges and were informed the forecasted overspend last summer had been reduced due to management actions but that a £1.225 million overspend remained. There was also a £4 million contingency in the budget for 2024-2025 but it was likely restrictions would need to continue. It was noted this was the first time Bracknell Forest had issued an overspend and many local authorities were struggling financially.

Other questions centred on the reduction in planning income and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The reduction in income was due largely to smaller builds coming through which brought in less income than larger sites. It was noted it had been a reasonable year in terms of CIL collection. The link to the CIL statement would be circulated to Commissioners following the meeting.

9. **Thames Water Scrutiny Review Report**

The Chair of the Environment and Communities O&S Panel presented the Thames Water Scrutiny Review Report to the O&S Commission. Members discussed the revised set of recommendations and agreed the report should be recommended to the Executive on 18 June.

RESOLVED: That the Commission endorses the recommendations, as set out in the Panel report, and recommends these to the Executive.

10. **Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report 2023-2024**

The Commission considered the draft report for Council which covered overview and scrutiny activities for the period April 2023 – March 2024.

It was noted the changes in the political demographic of the Council had impacted on the amount that could be undertaken by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. However, it was noted a work programme was now in place.

The Chair thanked the panel chairs, vice-chairs and all of the panel members, and concluded by thanking the governance and scrutiny officers for their effort and support in delivering the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the 2023-24 annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission was agreed and adopted. This report to be presented to council by the Chair of the Commission.

11. **Work Programme Update**

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

Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel

It was noted all activities for the sexual health scrutiny review had now been undertaken. The draft report was slightly delayed and would be available at the August O&S Commission meeting.

The Panel Chair provided a comprehensive update on the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) Frimley Park Hospital. The Bracknell Forest Council representatives, Cllrs Egglestone and Virgo, had attended the first meeting of the JHOSC and received an update about the rebuild programme and specifically, the site selection process.

Questions were raised about the number of beds, hospital design, staff accommodation, site selection and highways infrastructure. It was agreed the representatives would ask further questions about these areas at future meetings of the JHOSC. Future meetings would take place monthly and dates would be published shortly.

Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

An update on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the safety valve programme was provided by the Panel Chair.

Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

The Panel Chair reflected on the challenges during the past year and thanked the Statutory Scrutiny Officer for his assistance in finalising the Thames Water scrutiny review report.

It was noted the Panel intended to review the recommendations in the next three/six months and confirmed housing and water discharges were the Panel's next scrutiny review topics.

CHAIR