

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
07 JUNE 2007
(7.30 - 9.25 pm)

Present:	Councillors Edger (Chairman), Baily, Mrs Birch, Browne, Finnie, Leake, Mrs Ryder (Substitute), Ms Whitbread and Worrall
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Church Representatives:	
	Mr G Anderson

Also Present:	
	Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Leisure, Corporate Services and Public Protection

Apologies for absence were received from:	
	Councillors Beadsley, Brunel-Walker, McLean and Thompson and Mr G Anderson

In attendance:	Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance & Scrutiny Alan Nash, Head of Finance David Bryant, Audit Commission Greg McIntosh, KPMG Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Scrutiny) Steve Richards, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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4. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Commission noted the attendance of the following substitute members:

Councillor Mrs Ryder for Councillor Thompson

5. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 15 March 2007 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to changing 'Direct' to 'Director' on page 1. The Chairman paid tribute to the contribution made by the former Chairman, Councillor Michael Sargeant.

6. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or indications that members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

7. Urgent Items of Business

The Chairman agreed that the minutes of the annual Overview and Scrutiny meeting held on 23 May 2007 should be considered as an urgent item at this meeting

pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act, 1972. The reason for urgency was to avoid the delay in confirming the composition of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels that would be incurred if this matter was postponed until the next meeting of the Commission.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 23 May 2007 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

8. **Annual Audit and Inspection Letter**

David Bryant, the Borough's external auditor, briefed the Commission on the Annual Audit and Inspection letter, which had been seen by the Executive and its content accepted. The letter had been drafted in March 2007, and since then the Housing Stock Transfer result had become known. Additional work on supporting people had been undertaken, and they were now happy with the direction being taken.

The overall performance of the Council was three stars, the second highest grading. The Council was performing just above average, and there was no cause for concern, with this rating being shared by about half the councils in the country. Bracknell Forest was improving adequately, although this was lower than the improving well rating received last year, due to a lack of consistency in improvement across the whole Council. The Council was aware of steps needed to improve and was taking the appropriate action.

Other points highlighted covered the following areas:

- There would be a focus on ensuring that the Medium Term Objectives were updated;
- Performance Management was weak in several areas, and there was a need for consistency so that there were high levels across the whole council. The CPA would focus on this as one of the areas to be looked at;
- There would be a move away from assessing individual organisations to Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA) which would look at how organisations worked in partnership to improve services for an area;
- The Council was achieving value for money, and officers were thanked for their co-operation and preparation of comprehensive files;
- Financial control was good, but there was a need to further embed Risk Management;
- There had been no problems with the Final Accounts Audit, and the 2006/07 Audit was just starting;
- A review of data quality had been carried out, and some recommendations made. Steps had been taken to address these concerns;
- In relation to community safety, members of the Commission felt that the Council was being criticised for something that it had no control over, and that the extraction of police officers from Bracknell Forest to other areas was a contributory factor in the increase in crime rates between 2004/05 and 2005/06; the report showed a reduction in the increase in the rate of crime and not a reduction in crime itself. Another contributory factor was that as crime in Bracknell Forest was relatively low, it was difficult to reduce it when starting from a low base. British Crime Survey (BCS) figures did try to look at statistics for unreported crime. As these areas were Police matters, it was not clear what actions the Council could take, and it would be difficult for the Council to do anything without the support

of the police. This Commission could raise these issues and ensure that the Executive were aware of them. The police could also be asked to attend Commission meetings and discuss the concerns and issues raised. The Community Safety Manager, Ian Boswell, would be able to provide a better picture, and could be invited to speak at the next Commission meeting. Councillor McCracken added that the Criminal Justice Act had some wording in it that there should be some scrutiny undertaken, and he supported bringing figures to the next meeting of the Commission to see whether crime was being reduced;

- It was pointed out that the three areas of concern consistently mentioned in the audit letter had also been raised the previous year. As these concerns seemed to be embedded, an update from the Director and/or Portfolio holder should be sought to ensure that the situation was being addressed and would not continue;
- David Bryant explained that the reason that the overall Cultural Services CPA score for 2006 was '2' compared with '3' in 2005, even though 93% of users were satisfied with the library service, was that it was linked to the standard of service expected. Paragraph 39 of the report highlighted some other indicators that had given rise to the score, and it was noted that note 1 on page 21 of the agenda showed that officers did have some concerns. Councillor Mrs Birch would ensure that the Audit Team were aware of these concerns, and added that a thorough report on libraries and the Library Service had recently been published, which showed that Bracknell Forest residents expected high standards in this area and received them. National standards needed to be looked at;
- Referring to the overall assessment (the CPA scorecard) on page 16 of the agenda papers, David Bryant explained that the fact that two scores had increased by one, and two scores had decreased by one did not balance out, with the underlying calculations being very complex.

9. Internal Audit Annual Assurance Report and Statement on Internal Control 2006/07

The Commission considered a report by the Borough Treasurer drawing to the attention of Members the specific issues which had been identified during the audit process:

- Internal Audit limited assurance reports
- FMiSS – three secondary schools, Sandhurst, Garth Hill and Edgbarrow, had met the standard, Brakenhale and Easthampstead Park had not met the standard, and the documentation for Ranelagh was still being reviewed;
- The theme for all three limited assurances had been IT control. The recommendations for one of the limited assurances would be implemented by 30 May 2007, and by 30 June 2007 for the other two;
- There was no guidance on how Internal Audit should audit themselves. This Commission might need to be involved in due course;
- Internal control – weaknesses had been addressed;
- The role of Audit lead Councillors had been clarified;
- Although the return rate of quality questionnaires was better than in previous years, some still had to be chased. The expectation was that all audits would be delivered by the time of the final audit. Councillor Edger requested that feedback be given that the Commission expected reports to be as full as possible;

- Although withholding contract payments to the internal auditor had been a drastic step, the Council felt that this course of action had been warranted. There were however concerns that the extra auditors since deployed would be re-deployed to other audits, and similar problems might recur. Councillor Edger asked for assurances to be given at the next Commission that these concerns had been addressed. The Chairman added that he would write to the auditors expressing the Commission's concerns.

RESOLVED that the Head of Audit's opinion and the proposed Statement on Internal Control be noted.

10. **Audit Committee Responsibilities**

RESOLVED that Councillor Worrell and Councillor McLean be appointed to act as lead Members on audit issues.

11. **Departmental Overview and Performance**

The Director of Corporate Services presented the Quarterly Operations Report (QOR) in respect of Corporate Services for the fourth quarter of 2006/07. Highlights included:

- Completion of the development agreement between BFBC and Bracknell Regeneration Partnership;
- Completion of many of the work streams for the new Civic Hub and Civic Centre;
- Continued work on refreshing the Council's Community Cohesion Strategy;
- Disability Equality Scheme action plan agreed;
- Development of the new Gender Equality Scheme and Action Plan for consultation in early 2007/08;
- Processes that related to waste and recycling added to the CRM system;
- Intensive preparations for the May 2007 elections;
- Creation of a unified Learning and Development team and a unified transport team;
- Work continued in HR on a range of staff recruitment and retention initiatives;
- Launch of the Young Person's website 'Xpresionz';
- A recent Socitm (Society of Information Technology Management) survey for use of online facilities put BFBC as number one in the country for residents who made weekly use of the web, with a figure of 34%;
- Annual accreditation of ISO9001 in Revenue Services renewed;
- Legal Lexel re-accreditation.

Some of the key challenges facing the department in the first quarter of 2007/2008 were:

- Continued support for the town centre regeneration
- Progressing development of plans for Civic Centre
- Supporting the work on the "Your Homes – Your Choice" project
- The Boris intranet site was launched in May, and was liked by staff
- Reviewed the Code of Conduct for Members, which was about to be adopted by the Standards Committee
- Development of the use of systems e.g. Rebus, Agresso and Modern.Gov

- A total of £0.5M saved from the budget, although some vacancies had to be held in order to achieve this;
- A significant reduction in sickness, which was low compared with other councils (Bracknell Forest were in the top 20%), and also when compared with industry;
- An increase in the number of staff who had reported themselves as disabled.

The Head of Performance and Scrutiny presented the QOR in respect of the Chief Executive's Office for the fourth quarter of 2006/07. In addition to the matters reported by the Director of Corporate Services, the work of the Chief Executive's Office had included:

- The Council's first Local Area Agreement (LAA) with central government was signed in March 2007;
- The 2006 CPA scorecard was published in February 2007. Work was taking place in preparation for the CPA in October 2007;
- The draft Annual Report had been through CMT, and would now go to the Executive and be finalised by the end of June 2007. A one page summary for residents would also be produced;
- The staff survey was being run externally, and the results would be published when they became available;

Councillor Mrs Ryder was concerned that the centre of Bracknell would become a ghost town before the Town Centre Regeneration took place, and would like to know what had been put in place to sustain the commercial being of the town centre. The Head of Performance and Scrutiny undertook to look into this and provide an answer for Councillor Mrs Ryder.

12. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Executive Forward Plan for items of a corporate nature was noted.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

- Overview & Scrutiny Commission coverage in 2007/08 might include the housing stock transfer;
- Each Panel would determine its own work programme;
- With the Community Safety Team now being within the Chief Executive's Office, Community Safety would now come under the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, and fall within the remit of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission, and a Crime and Disorder Committee should be set up under the auspices of the Commission. The Community Safety Manager would be invited to the July meeting of the Commission to give an update;
- Supporting People and Adult Services would come under the Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel;
- Officers were asked to establish whether a written response had been received from the Executive to the Trees Policy report.

13. **Past Activities and Indicative Work Programme**

The Executive Members (Councillors McCracken, Barnard and Ward) who had received the reports raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels had been written to, and there would be a report on this at the next meeting of the Commission.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The activities of the Commission for the last three years be noted; and
- ii) The indicative overview and scrutiny work programme for 2007/08 attached at Appendix 1 of the report be approved, with the caveat that it was not a definitive list.

14. Panel Updates

Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Leake reported that the work being carried out by the Health Strategy Working Party had been interrupted by the local elections, but would now be resumed.

There were concerns with the General Practitioner out of hours service, which would be taken up with the PCT.

The PCT budget would be scrutinised more rigorously, and the implications of Community Strategy on health provision in Bracknell Forest looked at. A problem would be the resources available to tackle these.

Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Browne informed the Commission that topics brought forward brought forward from the previous year would be looked at in the coming year.

Lifelong Learning and Children's Service Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Members were advised by Councillor Mrs Birch that the Panel was up to date with its work programme, and would start a new forward plan. Some monitoring would take place to see how reports were compiled.

Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Finnie informed the Commission that the first meeting of the Panel had taken place, and a forward plan had been discussed. A working group had been formed to shortlist the review topics.

Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Leake updated the Commission on the work of the Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who were due to meet next on 21 June.

Working Group on Healthcare Funding

The Commission were informed by Councillor Edger that copies of the Health Funding Review had been passed to Members, and comments received back. A meeting had been held with Glyn Jones (Assistant Director, Community Care), and the points raised had been noted. They had been sent to the consultant (Keith Ford) who had helped on the review to check that the conclusions and recommendations were realistic. They would be finalised and sent to the Executive and Chief Executive of Berkshire East PCT, and the draft report would come to this Commission in July 2007 for approval.

The Commission were informed that an (SEEMP) Elected Member Scrutiny Network meeting would be taking place on 26 June 2007 at Elmbridge Borough Council in Esher, and members of the Commission who would like to attend should contact the Head of Performance & Scrutiny.

CHAIRMAN