

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
19 JULY 2007
(7.30 - 9.45 pm)

Present: Councillors Edger (Chairman), Baily, Mrs Beadsley, Browne, Brunel-Walker, Finnie, McLean, Thompson, Ms Whitbread and Worrall

Parent Governor Representatives:
Mr I Sharland

Also present: Councillor Dr Barnard, Executive Member for Children's Services
Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Leisure, Corporate Services & Public Protection
Councillor Ward, Executive Member for Education & Libraries

Apologies for absence were received from:
Councillors Mrs Birch and Leake

In attendance: Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance and Scrutiny
Ruth Burgess, Head of Libraries
Andrea Carr, Policy Officer
Sue Hills, Democratic Services Officer
Victor Nichols, Assistant Chief Executive

15. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission held on 7 June 2007 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Arising from the minutes –

Minute 8 – Annual Audit and Inspection Letter – crime reduction item to be deferred to 13 September meeting, when the review on anti-social behaviour would also be taken.

Minute 9 – Internal Audit Annual assurance Report – the Chairman reported that he had written expressing the Commission's concerns and had received an apology from the auditors.

Minute 11 – Departmental Overview and Performance – The Assistant Chief executive had responded to Councillor Mrs Ryder's concerns about the town centre and had copied all members of the Commission. A supplementary enquiry was in the process of being answered.

16. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

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

The Chairman pointed out to members that when items referring to the Housing Stock Transfer appeared on the agenda he would have to withdraw as a member of the Board of Bracknell Forest Housing, as would other Panel members who were also BFH Board members.

17. **Urgent Items of Business**

There were no urgent items.

18. **Review of Libraries**

Councillor Ward, Executive Member for Education & Libraries, and Ruth Burgess, Head of Libraries, attended for this item. The Commission received the Executive Member's response to the Overview and Scrutiny Report on Library Provision in Bracknell Forest.

Councillor Ward had found the report extremely useful and helpful and commented or responded to questions that –

- (i) Significantly there were many issues around services requiring higher resources and funding.
- (ii) The contribution of volunteers was valued but was not without cost as they needed support, supervision and training.
- (iii) The issues of location had been highlighted.
- (iv) He was very pleased with the success of the Crowthorne Library in its new location where it greatly enhanced the street scene.
- (v) The Bookstart project was a national project.
- (vi) There were positive signs of an increase in moral within the library service.
- (vii) The Audit Commission at the last meeting indicated that the library service was not as good as it should be, however Councillor Ward felt that residents' satisfaction was the number one issue.
- (viii) It was not the policy to increase foreign language books but to support the learning of English.

The Chairman thanked the Councillor Ward and Ruth Burgess for attending the meeting.

19. **Review of Youth Provision**

Councillor Dr Barnard, Executive Member for Children's Services attended for this item. The Commission received the Executive Member's response to the Overview and Scrutiny Report on Youth Provision in Bracknell Forest.

Councillor Dr Barnard recognised the hard work that had gone into the production of the report and the sensitive way in which the issue had been addressed. He commented or responded to questions that –

- (i) The report represented an excellent example of engagement with young people in terms of ascertaining their views.

- (ii) The Xpresionz website, launched at the youth BAFTA awards earlier in the year, was a vehicle to enable young people to find volunteer opportunities. The website would be developed further.
- (iii) How to reach the 'hard to reach'. The increase in the take up of the Duke of Edinburgh scheme was pleasing, particularly from pupils at College Hall PRU.
- (iv) Relating to access costs and transport, extended services were looking at this. A member asked if sports centre rates could be reduced in the south of the borough where there were no youth clubs and Councillor Dr Barnard indicated that this could be considered as part of the Youth Plan review.
- (v) The Youth Forum had already been involved over the development of facilities for young people in the new town centre. There was a need to look at appropriate universal youth provision as well as targeted provision. The town centre must be child and young people friendly.
- (vi) Specific problems with young people at Birch Hill were referred to and the Commission were informed that the Silver Bus was currently off the road but should be back after the summer holidays.
- (vii) A strategy being pursued was to encourage more activities at a younger age with play rangers.
- (viii) The service achieved good out-turns for a modest budget.
- (ix) Ways to compensate for the lack of youth centres in the south of the borough would be considered as part of the youth plan review.
- (x) Upon Councillor Dr Barnard inviting the Commission to be further involved in youth provision, the Chairman indicated that this would be discussed at the Lifelong Learning & Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

The Chairman thanked the Councillor Dr Barnard for attending the meeting.

20. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Executive Forward Plan for items of a corporate nature was noted. During discussion the following points arose –

- (i) 1007226 - the Director of Corporate Services would present on the ICT strategy at the next meeting of the Commission.
- (ii) 1006920 - Discussion on the sale of part of the land known as Old Manor Car Park was restricted as part of the executive report would contain exempt information.
- (iii) 1006993 – Neighbourhood Consultation Process – the forums were less well attended than initially. However, in Easthampstead the local councillors leafleted and attendance was 40. Government advice was that the process should be Partnership led, Council, Police and PCT. . The Commission felt this was a useful forum for receiving feedback but needed better organisation.
- (iv) 1006996 – The draft Health & Wellbeing Strategy was currently out to consultation and was included in the current Town and Country publication.

RESOLVED that the neighbourhood process be brought back to the Commission in due course.

21. **Corporate Performance Overview Report**

The Commission noted the Corporate Performance Overview report for the fourth quarter 2006/07. The Assistant Chief Executive highlighted the following –

- (i) Climate change – the heating systems for the new town centre would be environmentally friendly.
- (ii) Adult Social Care – there had been good improvement in adult social care services.
- (iii) Budget pressures were an area of concern

The following matters were raised via questions –

- (i) Alternate Bin Collection - following the press coverage of maggots in wheelie bins, the commission were informed that information would be relayed to residents via Town and Country, the website and home visits. In the period April to June 2007, 250,000 bins had been emptied and 5600 calls received about the service.
- (ii) The Annual Report would be available by the end of July. A hard copy would be available upon request.
- (iii) Public transport uptake and satisfaction – the report contradicted Councillor McLean's perception of widespread dissatisfaction. The Assistant Chief Executive would send Councillor McLean the information.
(ACTION – Victor Nichols)
- (iv) Bracknell Forest Partnership – the Commission would look at BFP at some stage in the future.

VICE CHAIRMAN IN THE CHAIR

22. **Report of the Review of Healthcare Funding in Bracknell Forest**

Councillor Edger presented the report of the Working Group on Healthcare Funding in Bracknell Forest. During the review Dr Llewellyn, Chief Executive, Berkshire East Primary Care Trust, and Councillor Birch, Executive Member for Adult Services, were interviewed.

The Working Group established that Bracknell Forest had not been underfunded for the years 2004 to 2007, as had been feared. However, in respect of the current year, the former Bracknell Forest PCT's allocation was under target by 3.7%, whilst the other two areas in East Berks had been overfunded. The details of the proposed allocations for the current year had been included in information sent to the Director of Social Services & Housing, the significance of which had not been recognised.

Points highlighted from the report included –

- (i) Bracknell Forest had the fifth lowest spend rate per head of population in the country.
- (ii) Prior to the merger of the PCTs, Bracknell Forest was to have received an increase of 1.5% over Windsor & Maidenhead in 2007/08 and the Commission expected this increase to be honoured.
- (iii) The Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Health & Social Care Partnership Board should monitor to ensure mistakes of the past did not recur.

RESOLVED that

- (i) subject to an additional recommendation that the report be brought to the attention of the three local Members of Parliament requesting that they do as much as possible to ensure findings in the report were pursued and implemented, the report be adopted and forwarded to the Executive to consider the recommendations; and
- (ii) the report be brought back in twelve months to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel by the Executive Member for progress to be assessed and judged on its recommendations, after which a report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

The Vice Chairman thanked Councillor Edger for a very thorough report.

CHAIRMAN RESUMED THE CHAIR

23. Scrutiny of Bracknell Forest Partnership - the requirement to form a Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Head of Performance and Scrutiny introduced this information item updating the Commission on new and prospective legislation and on changing Government and Council policy affecting overview and scrutiny of partner organisations. Under the Police and Justice Act a commencement order was expected early autumn, but as this had now been delayed for some time, a decision was not required at this point.

Principal changes were –

- (i) Scrutiny of the Bracknell Forest Partnership.
- (ii) Requirement to have a Crime and Disorder Committee to review and scrutinise, to make reports or recommendations regarding the functioning of the 'responsible authorities' of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Community Safety Partnership.
- (iii) Consultation documents and detailed arrangements awaited, subject to legislation, on a larger role for overview and scrutiny flowing from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill.
- (iv) Further changes to scrutiny arrangements may derive from likely developments to Local Strategic Partnership governance arrangements.

Three broad options were offered to accommodate the extra work and the Bracknell Forest Partnership expressed a preference for putting as much of the scrutiny work as possible into the domain of the Joint East Berkshire Health O&S Committee, to free up the Health O&S Panel to cover all external public services.

RESOLVED that

- (i) the new legislation and changing Government and Council policy affecting overview and scrutiny of partner organisations be noted;
- (ii) following the deferral of the Police and Justice Act commencement order, the Commission would return to structural and other issues surrounding this work following a detailed briefing to the September meeting.

24. **Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Commission received the report of the Head of Performance and Scrutiny outlining a draft overview and scrutiny work programme.

A member raised the question of flood risk management, a weak area in the CPA audit. This matter would be raised at the quarterly meeting of Panel chairmen, Directors and Executive Members. **(ACTION – Richard Beaumont)**

Monitoring of the best value Transport Plan to be considered for addition to the programme at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that, subject to the addition of the ICT Strategy to the Commission's programme, the draft overview and scrutiny work programme be approved and referred to the Executive and Corporate Management Team for consultation.

25. **Updates form the Overview and Scrutiny Chairmen**

Nothing to add.

CHAIRMAN