

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
13 MARCH 2008
(7.30 - 9.50 pm)

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

Councillor Beadsley (Substitute for Mrs Beadsley)

Mr I Sharland (Parent Governor Representative)

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Thompson, Mrs Beadsley, Mrs Birch and Leake
Mr G S Anderson (Church Representative)

Also Present: Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services
Jo Alderson, Head of Procurement
Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance & Scrutiny
Sally Hendrick, Head of Audit & Risk Management
Alan Nash, Head of Finance
Priya Patel, Democratic Services Officer

59. Minutes and Matters Arising

Minute 58 – Executive Forward Plan

Second paragraph, first sentence, remove Councillor Worrall, subject to this amendment, it was

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission held on 17 January 2008 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

Minutes 52 – Corporate Performance Overview Report (CPOR)

The Director of Corporate Services reported that in relation to CC01 (percentage of people who feel that people get on well in their local area) the Borough had reported this to be 54% in 2006, however the Audit Commission had used an alternative denominator and had reported that it was 81%. This put the Borough into the second to top quartile. Members asked that in future they receive both the Audit Commissions figures as well as the fuller figures from the Residents' survey.

Minute 54 – The Council's Budget Consultation

The Head of Performance and Scrutiny agreed to check whether Councillor Worrall had received a response to his query on tree works.

60. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting or indications that Members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

61. Internal Audit Plan 2008/09

The Head of Audit and Risk Management presented a report that sought the Commission's approval for the proposed Internal Audit Plan 2008/09. She stated that a detailed plan had been drafted to satisfy the legal requirements of a Local Authority Internal Audit Service, including maintaining an 'adequate and effective' audit of the Council's accounting records and providing an annual opinion on the adequacy of the Council's control environment.

Members asked if the Plan recognised the new directorates. Officers reported that whilst discussions had been based on the existing structure, the Plan would be applied to the new structure.

In response to Members' queries around the computer audit, officers stated that internal audit would focus on IT systems, process and control, access and security as well as software and how it was used by the Council in practice.

In addition, officers stated that the number of days spent on each element of the audit was associated with the level of risk involved. Members noted that the total number of days reflected the reduction of internal audit work consequent on the housing transfer, also that External Audit had increased their planned audit days for 2008/09.

The Commission approved the proposed Internal Audit Plan 2008/09.

62. Performance Monitoring Reports (PMR)

The Commission was asked to consider the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of the third quarter October to December 2007/08 as reported in the Performance Monitoring reports for the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Services Department.

The Director of Corporate Services highlighted a number of areas of the Department's work over the third quarter as well as detailing some of the work the Department would be working towards in the final quarter.

In terms of progress made against the Service Plan, the Director of Corporate services reported that Outcome 11.4 (Joint Arrangements) had not been met. Pressure of work within the Legal Services section had dictated that the review was unlikely to be completed in this Municipal year, although most of the major joint arrangements had been reviewed and revised agreements had been put in place for some of the arrangements where necessary.

The Commission queried the percentage of staff appraisals being undertaken in other departments. The Director of Corporate Services reported that it was generally very high in all departments and that none of the departments had less than a 70% return. In addition the Corporate Services Department and the Education, Children's Services and Libraries departments had achieved Investors in People status.

In response to Members queries, the Director of Corporate Services reported that the Civic Hub's technical requirements aimed to achieve a 'BREEM rating' of excellent. This would be monitored by consultants to ensure it was achieved. In terms of furniture, some new furniture would be procured whilst existing good quality furniture would also be utilised.

The Head of Performance and Scrutiny outlined some of the notable achievements of the Chief Executive's Office over the third quarter. He stated that a great deal of time and effort had gone into the CPA inspection from the Chief Executive's Office. The CPA Inspection report was due to be considered by the Executive in the following week.

In terms of progress against the Service Plan he reported that there were three actions that were causing concern:

- i) Internal regeneration strategy for town centre,
- ii) Economic development – a list of all existing economic activity was due to be compiled with a view to assessing whether to launch an Economic Partnership.
- iii) Older Persons Strategy – the Strategy would be an extensive piece of work and it was unlikely that it would be complete by April 2008.

The Commission raised a query in reference to page 8, paragraph 1.1.5 of the Performance Monitoring Report that stated 'ensure Members and Scrutiny Function are involved in the development of the Town Centre.' The Head of Performance and Scrutiny stated that Overview and Scrutiny were kept regularly informed of progress on the town centre regeneration and that Members had decided not to include a review in the work plan for the Commission. Members could consider adding this to their work plan, however it needed to be recognised that the work plan was already crowded.

The Chairman stated that it was important to complete the work on the Older People's Strategy.

The Commission raised the following queries, which the Head of Performance and Scrutiny agreed to follow up after the meeting:

- i) Section 4, CAB and New Hope relocations are detailed, was there any reason why the Look In was not mentioned? (Councillor Beadsley to be provided with a response)
- ii) Why would the CPO Secretary of State decision be as late as the summer? (Councillor McLean to be provided with a response)
- iii) The target for BV127a (violent crime) officers to verify that this is correctly shown as green. (Ian Sharland to be provided with a response)
- iv) Members queried whether the reduction in crime was genuine and requested that future reports showed both British Crime Survey figures and CADIS figures.

63. Procurement Update Report

The Head of Procurement presented a report that asked the Commission to note the continued progress being made by the procurement function. She reported that the Council spent in excess of £90m p.a. on the procurement of external goods and services. The recently approved revenue budget proposals contained annual savings of £370,000 (£200,000 in 2008/9 and a further £170,000 in 2009/10) which needed to be generated through procurement.

The Head of Procurement reported that the recent Corporate Performance Assessment had reflected positively on the Council's procurement function stating that 'the Council had a firm basis for effective procurement'.

The Commission raised concerns about maverick spending in a few areas and felt strongly that it should be closely monitored. The Director of Corporate Services reassured the Commission that maverick spending was not a large scale problem and that it was tackled when it arose. The Council operated a devolved purchasing model, which meant that instances of maverick spending could occasionally arise. The Commission asked that officers brought back a report to them detailing levels of maverick spending across the year, whether there was a case to centralise procurement and a description of the system used for internal approval of procurement actions.

64. Corporate Community Cohesion Strategy 2006/07 - Annual Report

The Commission considered a report that gave them a detailed progress report on the implementation of the Council's Corporate Community Cohesion Strategy during 2006/07. The Director of Corporate Services reported that the new Strategy would be approved by the Executive in April.

She reported that all of the 72 Key Tasks in the Strategy had been completed within their respective timescales, with the majority ahead of schedule. In addition, of the 25 performance indicators where information was available, the Council's performance has seen 12 improve; 8 remain stable and only 5 decline. In light of this progress, the Council was well placed to build on its achievements and to move the Community Cohesion agenda further forward via the current development of its new strategy for 2008-2011.

The major performance indicator by which the Council was measuring its progress in Community Cohesion was the "percentage of people who feel that people from different backgrounds get on well together". This had been measured by survey in 2003 and 2006. The results showed that there had been a dramatic improvement, with those that agree with this statement increasing from 66% in 2003 to 81% in 2006, which brings the Council into the top 2nd quartile when compared nationally. This was clearly a major achievement for the Council.

One of the major pieces of work undertaken to support the Community Cohesion Strategy had been the completion of the Black and Minority Ethnic communities' audit. The community profile of the Borough had changed vastly since the Census published its figures of 5% of the population being from a black or minority ethnic background in 2001. It was now around 12%, it was important to monitor this information so that service provision could be informed.

In response to Members' queries, the Director of Corporate Services stated that consideration could be given to incorporating Shopmobility into the work plan in the new strategy.

With reference to page 51, paragraph 4.5, the Director of Corporate Services agreed to provide an update to Councillor Baily on the Accessible Hackney Carriage policy.

65. Overview and Scrutiny Quarterly Progress Report

The Commission received a quarterly progress report on Overview and Scrutiny. Members highlighted that with reference to page 83 of the report – Care Homes, a scoping document would be worked up in the following week.

Members reported that a meeting had now been scheduled for the Annual Health Check Working Group.

66. Working Group on the Local Area Agreement

The Commission received a verbal progress update on the working group carrying out a review of the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

The Chairman reported that the working group had come up with 35 suggested priorities, in addition to 12 mandatory priorities. The draft LAA was due to be approved by Council by April 2008. Following this, targets needed to be agreed with the Government Office for the South East by June 2008. The working group would now be considering a scoping study and considering how this work would be taken forward.

67. Updates from Panel Chairmen

Adult Social Care and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel

A scoping document was being worked up for a meeting scheduled in the following week.

Environment and Leisure Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Members of the Waste working group reported that a meeting with SITA around strategic waste had been very informative and had generated some good discussion. The Working Group hoped to be meeting with Waitrose soon. Also, another working group hoped to have completed a draft report on the Road Accident Plan soon.

Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Members of a working Group had visited two secondary schools – Garth Hill and Brakenhale. The working group was hoping to meet teachers soon that were involved in work around English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel

A focus group was due to meet shortly.

In terms of the Joint East Berkshire Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Members reported that this Committee would be serviced by officers from either the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead or Slough Borough Council, from the end of March 2008 onwards.

68. Draft Annual Report to Council on Overview and Scrutiny

The Commission were invited to: consider the draft 2007/08 Annual Report on Overview and Scrutiny; note that comments on the draft report would be invited from the Corporate Management Team and the Executive; and to delegate to the Chairman of the Commission the finalisation of the report.

The Commission thanked the Head of Performance and Scrutiny for an excellent report and agreed the recommendations.

69. Executive Forward Plan

The Commission considered forthcoming items on the Executive Forward Plan that were of a corporate nature.

Councillor Finnie expressed concern that he had not been consulted on item 1010010 (Grants Decision), as the Voluntary Sector Champion. Officers agreed to investigate and report back. Members also asked for a note to explain the process behind grant decisions.

The Chairman of the Health and Safety Panel reported that for the sixth year running the Borough had received a gold medal for Health and Safety, but that it was not being displayed anywhere in the Borough. Officers agreed to look into this and consider possible locations of where it could be displayed and report back to Councillor Baily. The Commission congratulated staff on the achievement of this award for the sixth year running.

The Chairman informed Members that the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 5 June 2008 would be held at Sandhurst Town Council.

CHAIRMAN