



## **NOTICE OF MEETING**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

**Thursday 16 July 2009, 7.30 pm**

**Council Chamber, Fourth Floor, Easthampstead House, Bracknell**

### **To: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

Councillor Edger (Chairman), Councillor McLean (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Mrs Birch, Finnie, Harrison, Leake, Mrs McCracken, Mrs Shillcock, Turrell, Virgo, Ms Whitbread and Worrall

#### **Church Representative Members** (Voting in respect of Education matters only)

Mr G S Anderson and vacancy

#### **Parent Governor Representative Members** (Voting in respect of Education matters only)

Dr P Josepfs-Franks and vacancy

#### **cc: Substitute Members of the Commission**

Councillors Baily, Mrs Beadsley, Beadsley, Browne, Dudley, Mrs Pile and Wade

ALISON SANDERS  
Director of Corporate Services

### **EMERGENCY EVACUATION INSTRUCTIONS**

- 1 If you hear the alarm, leave the building immediately.
- 2 Follow the green signs.
- 3 Use the stairs not the lifts.
- 4 Do not re-enter the building until told to do so.

If you require further information, please contact: Sue Hills  
Telephone: (01344) 352060  
Email: [sue.hills@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:sue.hills@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)  
Published: 7 July 2009

**Overview and Scrutiny Commission  
Thursday 16 July 2009, 7.30 pm  
Council Chamber, Fourth Floor, Easthampstead House,  
Bracknell**

**AGENDA**

Page No

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

To receive apologies for absence and to note the attendance of any substitute members.

**2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 11 June 2009.

1 - 6

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

Members are asked to declare any personal or prejudicial interest 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.

**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.

**Holding the Executive to Account**

**5. EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S OLDER PEOPLE'S STRATEGY**

To consider the response by the Executive Member to the Overview and Scrutiny report on the Review of the Council's Older People's Strategy.

7 - 18

**6. EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND EXTENDED SCHOOLS SERVICES**

To consider the response by the Executive Member to the Overview and Scrutiny report on the Review of Children's Centres and Extended Schools' Services.

19 - 30

**7. EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN**

Forthcoming items on the Executive Forward Plan of a corporate nature are attached for consideration.

31 - 38

## **Performance Monitoring**

### **8. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW REPORT**

To consider the Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Report for quarter four (January to March) of the 2008/09 financial year (copies of the report are available with the online version of the agenda or available on request. Members are asked to bring their copies to the meeting).

## **Overview and Policy Development**

### **9. HOME OFFICE GUIDANCE ON SCRUTINY OF CRIME AND DISORDER MATTERS**

As the Crime and Disorder Committee, to note the new statutory guidance issued by the Home Office on the scrutiny of Crime and Disorder matters and to consider whether any changes are necessary to the Commission's approach.

39 - 90

### **10. HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

To note the previously agreed report of the review of the Implementation of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Improvement Plan undertaken by a working group of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

91 - 134

### **11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2009/10**

a) To adopt the work programme for 2009/10, for formal consultation with the Executive and Corporate Management Team.

135 - 142

b) To commence the Commission's working group on sustaining economic prosperity. Commission members' attention is drawn to the Action Plan previously circulated.

### **12. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY SELF EVALUATION**

To note the forthcoming exercise to complete the Centre for Public Scrutiny's self evaluation for Overview and Scrutiny in local authorities.

143 - 150

### **13. UPDATES FROM PANEL CHAIRMEN**

To receive verbal updates from Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairmen and the Vice-Chairman of the Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission will be on 24 September 2009.

This page is intentionally left blank



**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**  
**11 JUNE 2009**  
**7.30 - 9.30 PM**

**Present:**

Councillors Edger (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Finnie, Harrison, Mrs McCracken, Turrell and Virgo.

**Parent Governor Representative Members:**

Dr P Josepchs-Franks

**Also Present:**

Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Councillors Mrs Birch, Mrs Shillcock, Ms Whitbread and Worrall.  
Mr G S Anderson

**In Attendance:**

Tim Wheadon, Chief Executive  
Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services  
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive  
Ian Boswell, Safer Communities Manager  
Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview & Scrutiny  
Priya Patel, Democratic Services Officer

**4. Welcome and Substitute Members**

The Chairman welcomed the new members that had recently joined the membership of the Commission.

Councillor Browne attended in place of Councillor Worrall and Councillor Beadsley attended in place of Councillor Mrs Shillcock.

**5. Minutes and Matters Arising**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meetings of the Commission held on 1 April and 6 May 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

*Minute 75:* The Commission were informed that Michael Gibbons had now left the Portsmouth Diocese and that the Diocese should be appointing a new representative to the membership of the Commission.

*Minute 78:* It was reported that the Extended Schools Services Working Group report had been presented to the Executive Briefing by Councillor Mrs Birch and had been well received.

*Minute 81:* It was reported that the Board of Bracknell Forest Partnership had endorsed the proposed approach to partnership scrutiny at its meeting on 21 May.

## **6. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

Councillor Mrs McCracken declared a personal interest in Item 5: Review of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Theme Partnership, as the spouse of the Executive Member for Public Protection.

There were no other declarations of interest.

## **7. Review of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Theme Partnership**

The Chairman drew attention to the fact that for this agenda item, the Commission was meeting as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee, also that partnership working was more advanced in Bracknell Forest than in many other boroughs. The Chairman and the Lead Officer of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP), outlined the work of the CDRP for members. They reported that the CDRP was a statutory body which started in 1998 and included five organisations as statutory bodies; the Local Authority, Police, Police Authority, Fire Service and PCT. There were also other non-statutory members.

They outlined the six key priority areas for the CDRP which included; i) reducing crime, ii) reducing the perceptions of crime, iii) community issues, iv) reducing the harm caused by drugs and alcohol, v) anti-social behaviour, and vi) regeneration and development. Members noted the connection between these and the Council's own priorities.

Some of the successes of the CDRP included a 20% reduction in recorded crime in 2007-08, improved connections with neighbourhood forums and the local area policing board. Other successes included the Community Nuisance & Disorder Information System, schools knife crime DVD competition, joint tasking and the establishment of an e-safety sub-group.

Some of the challenges for the partnership included funding, the exchange of information and the 'prevent' agenda on extremism and terrorism. Members noted the small upward movement on many crime indicators in the last nine months. If additional funding were to be made available, this might be allocated to more preventative work.

In response to members queries, the Safer Communities Manager informed members that the Prolific and Priority Offenders (PPO) Scheme was an initiative set up by the Government to deal with the small number of offenders who continually committed crime. There were currently 14 PPO's in Bracknell Forest, of these, seven were either in custody or receiving treatment of some form.

The Safer Communities Manager informed members that the CDRP's governance arrangements were sound and that self assessment would be completed shortly.

The Commission agreed that the Chairman, the Head of Overview and Scrutiny and the Safer Communities Manager would meet to discuss how the Commission could effectively scrutinise the CDRP and what areas and issues could potentially be scrutinised.

**8. Services for People with Learning Disabilities - Executive Response to Working Group Report**

The Commission thanked the working group for a good piece of work and commended the working group for consulting a high number of individuals throughout their review.

Members noted that the Executive response had been considered and accepted by the Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Members also noted that a Working Group of the Children's Services and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel was reviewing the provision of educational services to people with learning disabilities by Bracknell and Wokingham College. Councillor Virgo stated that the issue around pupils with learning disabilities who were travelling long distances to courses, as a result of Bracknell & Wokingham College not providing courses suited to their needs, had been raised strongly with the Principal of the college.

The Commission noted the response of the Executive to the review.

**9. Executive Forward Plan**

Members asked if it would be possible to be given more detail on the financial impact of each decision being taken in the Executive Work Programme, to allow them to more effectively scrutinise decisions. The Head of Overview and Scrutiny was asked to find out by consulting the Borough Treasurer, if more detail can be offered in the Financial Impact section of the Executive Report.

The Assistant Chief Executive informed members that the item on Winchester House had recently been removed from the plan.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny was asked to explore the possibility of arranging another session of member training on finance scrutiny, as members who had attended this training had found it to be useful.

**10. Annual Audit and Inspection Letter - For Information**

The Commission noted the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of March 2009 from the Audit Commission, which was considered by the Governance and Audit Committee at its meeting on 29 April 2009.

**11. Performance Monitoring Reports (PMR)**

Chief Executive's Office

The Assistant Chief Executive reported the highlights for the Chief Executive's Office for quarter four:

- Lots of work around partnerships, much of which had been pioneering,
- Completing the Local Area Agreement refresh,

- Established an economic task group of officers to respond to the recession and challenges faced, this included Chief Officers from each department. A copy of the action plan would be circulated to Members.
- 65 detailed actions had been achieved out of 71.

It was also reported that there had been issues around data quality and that there was now a strategy in place. The strategy would be rolled out and progress would be reported back to the Commission.

In terms of looking forward, the Chief Executive's Office would be completing the Staff Survey, relaunching the CDRP Plan, progressing the Comprehensive Area Assessment and developing the Economic Action Plan.

### Corporate Services

The Director of Corporate Services reported the following highlights from the last quarter for the department as well as looking forward at what the department would be doing over the coming months including:

- Legal Services had carried out a lot of work around Corporate Governance, Planning enforcement and Section 106 agreements. Part of the legal team had been transferred to Bracknell Forest Homes.
- The Community Cohesion Strategy and equality schemes would be brought before the Commission in the autumn.
- Planning was underway for the autumn 2009 neighbourhood consultation process.
- Customer Services counters had been consolidated so that only Easthampstead House and Time Square now had reception desks. The counter service at Easthampstead House had also been closed and pay points at Post Offices were operational.
- The department had achieved a 97.5% council tax collection rate, with 78% paying by direct debit.
- Holding the elections to the European Parliament
- Work had been undertaken around the Government Connect initiative.
- The department had a lower than national average staff turnover, staff vacancy and sickness rates. In response to members queries in relation to high sickness rates in two particular sections of the department, it was reported that these were long standing cases of staff with chronic illnesses, which had recently been brought to conclusion.

The Director responded to Members' questions on reception arrangements, Enid Wood House, the Civic Hub review, the Internal Audit recommendation on the Cashiers function, the new civic vehicle and the budget implications of the Pericles IT system.

## **12. Review of the Council's Older People's Strategy**

The Commission noted the letter sent to the Executive concerning the review of the Council's Older People's Strategy by a Working Group of the Commission. The Commission was informed that the Older People's Strategy was due to be considered by the Executive in the following week and that the vast number of recommendations made by the working group had been accepted and incorporated into the report.

The Head of Overview & Scrutiny was asked to investigate the delays and costs of the lifts at Bracknell's train station and to inform Councillor Finnie.



13. **Report of the Working Group on Waste and Recycling Services**

The Commission adopted the amended report of the review of waste and recycling undertaken by a working group of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel for sending formally to the relevant Executive Member.

14. **Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2009/10**

The Head of Overview & Scrutiny reported that the indicative work programme attached to the agenda papers had now been approved by Council. The former Social Care and Learning O&S Panel work programme had been split into Adult Social Care and Children's Services & Learning to reflect the newly constituted panels. Two O&S panels had now agreed their work programmes, one of these had made some minor changes.

It was agreed that once all O&S Panels had commented on their work programmes, a revised overall programme would be brought back to the Commission to be adopted.

15. **Overview and Scrutiny Quarterly Progress Report**

The Commission noted the quarterly progress report on Overview and Scrutiny.

16. **Updates from Panel Chairmen**

Adult Social Care O&S Scrutiny Panel

The Chairman reported that the Panel had recently met at Heathlands with a busy agenda. Some of the major areas that the Panel would be considering would be the Transforming Social Care agenda and Safeguarding Adults.

Joint East Berkshire Health O&S Committee

Councillor Virgo reported that one issue that this Committee was currently considering was car parking charges at hospitals. The Committee had used a Freedom of Information request to glean information from the Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Trust on this issue. It was found that Heatherwood and Wexham Park hospitals had taken £800,000 in a year in car park charges. The Committee felt that this was not acceptable, particularly in the current climate. It was known that a private company were involved in charges and so the Committee were investigating how much net revenue the hospital actually gained from charges.

**CHAIRMAN**

This page is intentionally left blank

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION 16 JULY 2009

---

### **A REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S OLDER PEOPLE'S STRATEGY – EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO WORKING GROUP'S COMMENTS**

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Executive response to the review of the Council's Older People's Strategy undertaken by a working group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission is attached for the Commission's consideration.
- 1.2 The Commission received and noted the letter dated 29 April 2009 sent to the Executive Member concerning this review of the Council's Older People's Strategy at its meeting held on 11 June 2009, when it was informed that the Older People's Strategy was due to be considered by the Executive in the following week and that the vast number of recommendations made by the Working Group had been accepted and incorporated into the report.

#### **2 SUGGESTED ACTION**

- 2.1 **That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission notes the response of the Executive to the review of the Council's Older People's Strategy undertaken by one of its working groups.**

#### Background Papers

Letter dated 29 April 2009 and accompanying comments to the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing.  
Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 11 June 2009.

#### Contact for further information

Richard Beaumont – 01344 352283  
e-mail: [richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

Andrea Carr – 01344 352122  
e-mail: [andrea.carr@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:andrea.carr@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

Doc. Ref

This page is intentionally left blank

DPB/CAM

22 June 2009

Councillor R C Edger OBE  
Chairman, Overview & Scrutiny Commission  
Bracknell Forest Council  
Easthampstead House  
Town Square  
Bracknell  
Berkshire  
RG12 1AQ

Dear Bob

**Executive Approval of the Review of the Council's Older People's Strategy  
by a Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

I refer to your letter dated 29 April 2009.

On 16 June, the Executive considered the comments put forward by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission Working Group, together with the other responses received as a result of the public consultation on the draft strategy. The overwhelming majority of the Working Group's comments were accepted and have been incorporated into the Older People's Strategy which was approved at the meeting.

I enclose a copy of the report that was presented to the Executive which includes the detailed responses to the Working Group's comments.

Once again, I would like to thank the Overview and Scrutiny Commission Working Group for its work in helping to shape the strategy.

With best wishes

**Councillor Dale Birch**  
**Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing**

Enc

cc Assistant Chief Executive  
Director of Social Care and Learning

This page is intentionally left blank

TO: EXECUTIVE  
16 JUNE 2009

---

**BRACKNELL FOREST OLDER PEOPLE'S STRATEGY**  
**Assistant Chief Executive**

**1 PURPOSE OF DECISION**

- 1.1 The consultation has now been completed for the Older People's Strategy and the comments received have been attached to this report (appendix 1).
- 1.2 This report sets out the comments received and recommends a revised draft of the Older People's Strategy (appendix 3).

**2 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**2.1 That the Executive approves:**

**the suggested amendments to the Older People's Strategy set out below and in more detail in Appendix 1, Appendix 2 and Appendix 3;**

**3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 The Strategy is a key action under the 2007-08 Corporate Theme 8 – Improve Services for vulnerable adults and older people.

**4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 Should the Strategy not be progressed, the Council is at risk of not delivering on its corporate theme as set above.

**5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

*Background to the strategy:*

- 5.1 The Council is committed to prepare a strategy for older people under its Corporate Theme 8 to improve services for vulnerable adults and older people. Officers have worked closely with a steering group comprising older people's stakeholders including the Council's older person's champion.
- 5.2 This strategy sets out a long-term vision for the future of our community, and paves the way for Bracknell Forest to become an even better place in which to live and work and, specifically, in which to reside as an older person. It also incorporates some specific actions and targets which we aim to achieve within the next five years and which will be stepping stones to achieving our long-term vision.
- 5.3 The draft strategy contains 31 action points which would be led by a range of departments and services, reflecting the cross-cutting nature of these issues. Monitoring and coordination would be led by the Director for Social Care and Learning. The target date for completion of all actions is March 2014, which will also synchronise with the Local Area Agreement. These action points have been produced as part of a separate document which will look at more specifically timescales and delivery targets. A preliminary version of this document is found at appendix 4.

### *Public consultation*

- 5.4 The strategy was subject to a 6-week consultation which commenced on 30 March and ended on 8 May 2009. During the consultation, copies of the full consultation documents and abridged versions were distributed by the Council and partner organisations, most notably, Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action. A drop in day session was also held at the Look In on 27 April to allow residents to speak to officers regarding the draft strategy.
- 5.5 A total of 15 people and organisations responded to the consultation, the results of which have been analysed in appendix 1. Many of the points are somewhat aspirational and do not directly address the points and actions already put across in the strategy. Many points look at what residents would like to see happen but lie beyond the remit of the Council to deliver within a five year timeframe.
- 5.6 The headline points to come out of the consultation were that the strategy was in part too general and wordy. People thought that the strategy was too wide ranging and the visions were somewhat utopian and attempted to be too many things to all people. It was also noted that the action points gave little idea of a timetable for delivery. Whilst the strategy is general, it has been written in such a way as to be relevant to the age groups it is addressing. Anything more specific would risk alienating parts of the age group. The visions are not thought of as utopian but more a dynamic view of the council aspirations for its older community. Finally, the action points have been reviewed and incorporated into a separate document which looks at timescales for delivery. This is included in this report at appendix 4.

### Overview and Scrutiny Working Group

- 5.7 A working group of the Overview and Scrutiny commission has reviewed the draft strategy. The working group's comments are set out at appendix 2. A suggested response is also set out in the appendix and the consequent changes have been incorporated in the revised strategy.

## **6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

### Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The relevant legal provisions are contained within the main body of the report.

### Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The Strategy's action plan does not identify the need for additional resources in order to deliver them within the timescales indicated in the report. The resources used in the delivery of the action plan are existing resources. The availability of these resources will depend on the overall budget and other priorities facing the relevant Directorates during the period covered by the Strategy.

### Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 It is anticipated that the strategy resulting from this work will have a positive impact on outcomes for all older people in Bracknell Forest. In addition to this universal impact, the Steering Group has representation from the Equalities Sub Group of the Community Cohesion and Engagement Working Group, and it is likely that there will be recommendations with regards to tackling age discrimination within the Strategy. An equalities impact assessment has been completed.

### Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 There are no risks associated with this report.



## **7 CONSULTATION**

As noted above

Contact for further information

01344 35 2164

Stephanie.boodhna@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Doc. Ref

L:\TC Redevelopment\OPS\OPS Executive Report June 09 3 sb

## Appendix 2 Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

### General Comments

- Point 3 *We are concerned that the strategy appears to promise too much to too many people, verging on the utopian. In our view, the strategy is rightly aspirational, but the aspirations need to be reasonable and achievable, otherwise there is a real risk that expectations may be raised unduly. There are also too many generalisations in the strategy.*  
The strategy seeks to set out a positive and dynamic vision for older people in Bracknell Forest.
- Point 4 *A related issue is the need to strike the right balance between help and interference. In our view, the strategy errs too far towards interference, and many residents feel that central/local government are already interfering too much in their lives.*  
The strategy reflects views developed through a steering group, comprising a full range of stakeholders.
- Point 5 *In the tables containing 'priority actions' the role of the relevant Bracknell Forest Theme Partnerships could usefully be set out more explicitly.*  
Agreed and will be amended in the action plan document.
- Point 6 *The draft strategy contains a large number of new actions for many Council officer teams. We would welcome an assurance that capacity exists to deliver these actions, and that the teams concerned have included these actions in their departmental service plans.*  
The strategy has been circulated to relevant officer teams involved for comment.
- Point 7 *The strategy adopts a fairly rigid adherence to the concept that old age starts at 50 years. This may well be due to government or European policy, but we regard it to be patronising, over-simplistic and possibly detrimental, in that the Council could be seen to be encouraging people to 'wind down' at the age of 50. The working group consider that the Council should be encouraging residents to be active – and probably to be in gainful employment – for many years after the age of 50.*  
The EU defines 45 as the threshold for an 'older person'. The council's strategy is not suggesting that at the age of 50 a person is deemed 'old' but rather that their circumstances and priorities may begin to change. Rather than encouraging people to wind down, the strategy takes a proactive approach to changes in people's lifestyles.
- Point 8 *We are concerned that more than a few of the actions in the strategy are too all-embracing, unspecific, and relatively timeless. We firmly believe that all actions in the strategy need to be 'SMART', and in particular specific and measurable. We refer below - in point 37 - to one action being extremely wide and non-SMART.*  
A separate action plan document is being prepared to address this point.

### Specific Comments

- Point 9 *Paragraph 1.2 – the point could be made more acutely. People's understanding of medical science allows them to live longer but there is less money in the pot to pay for this.*  
Agreed, strategy amended.
- Point 10 *Paragraph 1.8 – the aims of the strategy should include encouraging everyone to value older people and the contribution they make. By contrast, countries such as Japan truly value their older people.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 11 *Paragraph 2.3 – this should recognise that it is very difficult for many pre-retirees to plan because most people are dependent on income and the present financial situation is critical to their finance. Also, some employers seem to regard age as a liability.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 12 *Paragraph 3.7 – the wording of this paragraph suggests that the full range of Council services will be available for everyone, which cannot be the case, neither would the Council's limited resources support such a seemingly sweeping provision of services. We suggest that in this paragraph and elsewhere there needs to be a much clearer distinction between those services of benefit to older people which are universally available (such as leisure centres) and those which are targeted and subject to strict eligibility criteria (such as residential care). We also suggest that the emphasis needs to be on appropriate access to services by those who need them. In our view, most older people are self-reliant, often with assistance from their families and friends.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

#### 'Housing and the Home'

Point 13 *The 'issues' refer to the relevance to Bracknell, and it needs to be clear that the strategy relates to the whole of Bracknell Forest, and not just the principal town of Bracknell.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 14 *The 'issues' could usefully refer to the shortage of single storey homes as being particularly relevant to older people in the Borough.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 15 *The second bullet in the vision is distinctly utopian. With large parts of the borough being semi-rural, it is unrealistic that everyone will have easy access to shops and other amenities.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 16 *The third bullet in the vision should recognise that support for daily tasks around the house and garden is far more likely to come from family, friends or neighbours rather than a public agency.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 17 *The actions in Section 6, on 'Housing and the Home' appear to be addressed mainly from the perspective of social housing, whereas the majority of older people live in privately owned or rented housing.*

The section is aimed at all tenures of housing and it is made clear in the 'issues' section that the majority of people aged 50 and over are home owners. The aims to ensure that help is available for those who may find it difficult to stay at home as they get older and provide advice and help to adapt their homes.

Point 18 *We would welcome a commitment by the Council and its partners to provide basic information on specific services and grants for older people, which might help minimise uninformed, crisis-led interventions which can and do occur.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 19 *This section could perhaps refer to the concept in the draft Housing Strategy of a 'Care Village'.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

#### 'Neighbourhoods'

Point 20 *The Working Group does not believe that Bracknell Forest has any 'badly lit, vandalised and littered, urban neighbourhoods', and suggest that this is removed. Similarly, the vision point concerning being able to go out without fear of intimidation or mugging overstates the very low incidence of such issues in the Borough.*

Accepted, although these issues are frequently raised as a major concern for older people.

#### 'Social Activities and Networks'

Point 21 *We consider that the first bullet point on relationships and income is patronising, far too aspirational, and achieving the vision lies beyond the ability of the Council and its partners to influence.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 22 *The 'opportunities already available' could usefully refer to lunches and other opportunities for older people to work with primary schools, as part of the Extended Schools services programme.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 23 *The priority actions could usefully be extended so that those residents who do not have a computer are not disadvantaged.*

The priority actions do include using conferences and working groups to help older people access information and does not assume that the use of a computer is paramount to get this information.

#### 'Getting Out and About'

Point 24 *The 'issues for older people' should refer to the low level of residents' satisfaction with public transport in the borough.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 25 *The vision refers to people being able to afford a car. We do not believe that this has anything to do with the Council or its partners and should be deleted from the strategy.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 26 *We suggest that the vision could usefully refer to mobility wheelchairs and scooters, which enable older people to travel and be independent.*

This comment has been reviewed and is already made in 'opportunities already available'.

Point 27 *On the 'opportunities already available', we understand that the 'Dial-a-Ride' scheme is no longer available, and if so, this should be deleted.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 28 *On the 'opportunities already available', we suggest deleting the reference to the Age Concern car scheme, as there are other mini bus services available.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 29 *The action 'With partners, improve accessibility at Bracknell railway station for people with mobility problems' could perhaps be deleted as we understand this has mainly been completed, notwithstanding that despite months of work, the brand new lifts at Bracknell railway station are not yet in service.*

This comment will be incorporated into 'opportunities already available'.

Point 30 *The action 'Provide advice for less confident older drivers' should include Thames Valley Police in the list of key partners.*

This comment will be amended.

- Point 31 *This section might usefully refer to the Berkshire East PCT's strategy to offer as many health facilities as possible locally and avoid people travelling.*  
This comment will be incorporated where possible.

'Income'

- Point 32 *We suggest that this section of the strategy should make it much clearer that the Council and its partners are unable to have any significant influence on people's income.*  
Noted and incorporated.

- Point 33 *Priority actions here and elsewhere include many new commitments for the Citizens Advice Bureau and other voluntary bodies. We strongly question the realism of such expansion of services when their funding is under great pressure and the demand for their routine services has increased markedly during the economic downturn.*  
The OPS steering group has included representation from BFVA to help to ensure that the strategy takes a realistic approach to the voluntary sector.

'Information, Access and Participation in Services'

- Point 34 *This section could usefully include the current and potential further role of General Practitioners' surgeries in signposting people to the services which they may need, also the use of libraries as centres of information.*  
This comment will be amended within the strategy both with 'opportunities available' and also priority actions.

'Health and Well-being'

- Point 35 *The 'opportunities already available' should also refer to the free swimming and 'keep mobile' schemes.*  
Agreed, strategy amended.
- Point 36 *The issues should include a specific reference to the creation of the new 'Healthspace' in Bracknell.*  
Agreed, strategy amended.
- Point 37 *We firmly believe that all actions in the strategy need to be 'SMART', and in particular specific and measurable. In our view, the action 'Ensure that the actions set out in the "Health and Well-being Strategy" (October 2007) are implemented wherever possible with a focus on the needs of older people, with particular reference to the potential impact of climate change and the economic downturn' is extremely wide and non-SMART.*  
Agreed. The strategy will contain an action plan which identifies key actions for the next 5 years.

This page is intentionally left blank

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
16 JULY 2009

---

**A REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND EXTENDED SERVICES IN AND AROUND  
SCHOOLS IN BRACKNELL FOREST –  
EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO WORKING GROUP REPORT**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report presents the attached Executive response to the review of Children's Centres and Extended Services in and around Schools in Bracknell Forest undertaken by a joint working group of the Health and former Social Care and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panels.
- 1.2 This Executive response is due to be considered by the Children's Services and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel at its meeting to be held on 16 September 2009.

**2 SUGGESTED ACTION**

- 2.1 **That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission notes the response of the Executive to the review of Children's Centres and Extended Services in and around Schools in Bracknell Forest undertaken by a joint working group of the Health and former Social Care and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panels.**

Background Papers

The report of the review of Children's Centres and Extended Services in and around Schools in Bracknell Forest.

Contact for further information

Richard Beaumont – 01344 352283  
e-mail: [richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

Andrea Carr – 01344 352122  
e-mail: [andrea.carr@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:andrea.carr@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

Doc. Ref

This page is intentionally left blank



GMB/CAM

17 June 2009

Councillor R C Edger OBE  
3 Turner Place  
College Town  
Sandhurst  
GU47 OFW

Dear Bob

**Overview and Scrutiny Report: A Review of Children's Centres and Extended Services in and around Schools in Bracknell Forest**

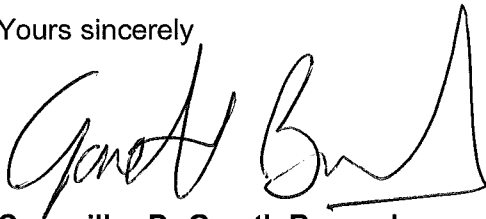
On behalf of Alan Kendall and myself, I am pleased to enclose a copy of the report considered by the Executive on 16 June 2009.

Following discussions, officers set out the response to the sixteen recommendations made in the report by the working group. The Executive have now considered these responses and agreed them.

We are pleased that the report recognised the considerable progress that has been made in these two areas for the benefit of children, young people and families in the Borough.

The Executive has asked that members of the working group are thanked for their thoughtful contribution.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gareth Barnard', written in a cursive style.

**Councillor Dr Gareth Barnard**

Enc

cc Councillor Alan Kendall  
Lesley Heale, Director of Social Care & Learning  
Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance & Scrutiny



TO: EXECUTIVE  
16 June 2009

---

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT: A REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S CENTRES AND  
EXTENDED SERVICES IN AND AROUND SCHOOLS IN BRACKNELL FOREST**  
Director of Social Care and Learning

**1 PURPOSE OF DECISION**

- 1.1 To determine the Executive's response to the recommendations in the report by the Social Care and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel's Working Group on *A Review of Children's Centres and Extended Services in Bracknell Forest Schools*.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 **That the responses and recommendations outlined in the supporting information in section 5 of this report are approved.**
- 2.2 **That the members of the working group are thanked for their report.**

**3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Working Group has spent considerable time reflecting on all the issues with the support of appropriate officers. As a consequence the report and recommendations are fully informed and merit support.

**4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 Not applicable.

**5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 5.1 The report portrays a very positive picture of the way in which the Extended Services and Children's Centres programmes have been developed in Bracknell Forest and recognises the progress that has been made. Both programmes have proved challenging to deliver: in the early days there was some resistance to the concept of extended schools and making the right facilities available for Children's Centres has sometimes been difficult given the limitations of available funding and constraints over where it is possible to build. Both are now well established and there is a high degree of confidence that targets for delivery will be successfully met. Whilst recognising this, the report sets out a number of recommendations for future development. These recommendations along with a considered response are set out in the following paragraphs.
- 5.2 **(a) Working Group Recommendation** *We would encourage the Council to move towards outcome-based performance measures for Extended Schools Services and (needing less advancement on measures) Children's Centres as early as possible, to get fully to the heart of what outcomes are being aimed for, in terms of improving the*

*lives and life chances of families and children. The Executive should set a timetable for stating and adopting these performance measures.*

This recommendation is agreed in principal.

Extended Services is a provision that covers a variety of services that have the potential to benefit children, young people, their parents and the community. These people may also be in receipt of many other interventions from the Council or its partners. Therefore it is sometimes difficult to determine precisely exact cause and effect and the impact of any one service in isolation. However, outcomes overall are measured through the Children and Young People's Plan, without reference to the individual interventions that children or families may have received. There is a clear timetable associated with this and relevant performance measures are reported in the quarterly Performance Management Report. The majority of extended services work is encouraging and supporting schools and other partners to make provision and so the performance measures that are used measure the outputs in terms of provisions made.

Children's Centres already have in place a set of performance measures. All services are monitored against national and local Key Performance Indicators and the membership of each centre is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is representative of the local community and that vulnerable families are accessing services. Parents who use the enhanced services of Family Outreach Support and parenting programmes also evaluate their own progress against personal targets set at the beginning of the intervention.

All but one of the national KPIs for Children's Centres are targets that are shared with other agencies e.g. the maintenance of breastfeeding rates; the reduction of A & E admissions; the reduction of children living in workless households etc. It is therefore more difficult to evidence the impact that children's centres alone are having on these targets.

In addition to quantitative data, a wide range of qualitative evidence is also collected including case studies; written and verbal feedback from families; the results of consultations etc.

Both programmes, Extended Services and Children's Centres, are the subject of specific external review and the national framework for monitoring effectiveness continues to develop.

- 5.3 **(b) Working Group Recommendation** *The departmental service plan statements and targets need to be less vague, so it is clearer exactly what is to be achieved in each year.*

Agreed. The Social Care and Learning Service Plan, 2009/10 is more precise in terms of both actions and targets for Extended Services and Children's Centres.

- 5.4 **(c) Working Group Recommendation** *The current assessment of Children's Centres by officers, which is on-going, should cover the next 5 years, the optimum disposition of the buildings for each Centre, partnership input, and the long-term funding position.*

This recommendation is agreed in principal. Whilst a five year planning cycle would be optimal, funding is confirmed on a shorter term basis.

The LA is currently reviewing the final disposition of the remaining centres taking into consideration the available capital budget which has to be spent by March 2010. It is unlikely that there will be any further capital allocations and it is therefore essential that the remaining buildings are sited in areas of need and also meet government reach criteria. Planning constraints will also play a major part in these decisions.

Revenue funding is also secure until March 2011 (the end of the last Comprehensive Spending Review). However, once the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill receives Royal Assent (expected towards the end of 2009), children's centres will be given a statutory basis and will receive long term revenue funding on the same basis as schools.

Current partners, both voluntary and statutory, are either commissioned through Service Level Agreements, or work together under Partnership Agreements. It is hoped that it will be possible to award SLAs of 3 years in order to secure the already successful multi-agency working.

- 5.5 **(d) Working Group Recommendation** *Residents in the areas without a single-site Children's Centre building should be surveyed for their views on the accessibility, range and success of the service.*

Agreed. Once the phase three buildings are in place, it is likely that the only area without a central building will be that which encompasses Binfield, Jennett's Park and the new development at Amen Corner. Services will be run from local community buildings and the local communities will be consulted on a regular basis regarding the accessibility and success of the services on offer.

- 5.6 **(e) Working Group Recommendation** *The Council strives to improve the involvement of charities and the voluntary sector with the ESS programme, also voluntary support from the private sector.*

Agreed. Charities, the voluntary sector and volunteer support have been involved in ESS work since its inception, from helping identify needs through to being commissioned to provide services in response to needs. Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action is an active partner. The value of the contributions from the third sector overall has been significant. As the programme moves forward the Council will strive to improve engagement still further.

- 5.7 **(f) Working Group Recommendation** *The Council encourages, where appropriate, ASGs to strengthen their membership and accountability, and review whether they are suitably funded and empowered in practice. This is particularly important as there is uncertainty over their budgets after August 2010.*

The Council is developing its work on community activities and services from engagement through commissioning to evaluation. The ASGs are central to the local accountability that the Council believes is needed for community based work to be effective in delivering outcomes in the period to August 2010 and beyond. A strong membership is key to accountability. The best groups are in this position and new members are being recruited to other groups on an ongoing basis.

In practice, the budgets that ASGs have received have been sufficient in recent years to fund local aspirations. Budget provision will continue until August 2011. Currently there is no guarantee of funding after this time as current Government funding plans only stretch to March 2011. However work is underway on a model of funding that includes area based allocations as a key identified element. The expectation is that

this model would be available to use whatever funding allocations are available after April 2011.

- 5.8 **(g) Working Group Recommendation** *The Council carefully manages the expected transition from central funding to schools-based funding, and maximises contributions from partner organisations such as the PCT.*

Agreed. The pattern of central and school based funding is now into its second year, of three. A model is being developed clearly identifying the key areas of support available to schools which seeks to ensure sustainability.

ESS work has been on a basis of facilitating and supporting schools and partners. Work currently embraces the contributions from partners, including the PCT, to shared objectives. This is an essential element that can be expected to continue in the future.

- 5.9 **(h) Working Group Recommendation** *The partnership with Health Visitors should be developed, specifically so that they are informed of the full range of services at all of the Children's Centre.*

Agreed. The co-location of the Health Visitors at The Oaks and The Rowans in multi-agency rooms also housing the Family Outreach Workers, Parenting Worker and the CAF Co-ordinator, is working extremely well and families receive a more holistic service as a result. Wherever possible, this model of multi-agency working will be supported with the provision of office space in future buildings e.g. The Alders.

The promotion of children's centres through the red book insert and discussion with parents at the first ante-natal visit will be part of the Partnership Agreement with the PCT.

Those Health Visiting teams who are not based on centre sites receive regular updates about the centre services via email and packages of publicity e.g. posters etc. They also receive visits from centre staff who attend the Health Visitors team meetings.

- 5.10 **(i) Working Group Recommendation:** *Focus should be maintained on funding those extended services that are sustainable beyond August 2010.*

Agreed. Funding services that will be sustainable in the long term has always been a priority in advising ASGs on spending priorities. This focus will be maintained. Schools are also fully signed up to this approach.

- 5.11 **(j) Working Group Recommendation:** *The Social Care & Learning and Health O&S Panels be kept informed, via quarterly Performance Management Reports as to the funding position and advised of possible future developments.*

Agreed. The format of the quarterly PMR provides sufficient scope for members of the Panel to see both progress in terms of achieving the external and internal targets that have been set and to be made aware of planned developments. Officers will provide any additional information that the panels require in order to further the sound development of these activities.

- 5.12 **(k) Working Group Recommendation:** *The Council should require the 14 schools – Kennel Lane excepted – yet to achieve 'fully extended' services to publish plans showing how that will be achieved by the end of 2010, with the identified progress*

milestones. Progress reports on this should be included in quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports, which are reviewed by the Social Care and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Agreed. By April 2009 28 schools have met the requirements to achieve 'fully extended' services leaving 9 schools (including Kennel Lane) yet to reach the standard. Discussions are underway and plans have been developed in all these schools that should see them though to meet the standard by June 2010. In many cases action is needed in only one, possibly two, of the five areas and schools are aware of what needs to be done and undertaking the required work. Schools have been encouraged to include these developments in their School Development Plans and in many cases have done so. Progress towards achieving the target is reported in the quarterly PMR.

5.13 **(l) Working Group Recommendation:** *More is done to improve the 'reach' of Extended Schools Services to teenagers and hard-to-reach groups.*

Agreed. ESS services are well-established in secondary schools, using the same inclusive approach as in primary schools. Youth Services have been a central partner since the project's inception. However the Council will strive to extend the reach still further and the development of Integrated Youth Support provides good opportunities to do this, for example, some really positive work in Great Hollands has developed partly from Extended Services activities at Easthampstead Park School.

Focusing services on disadvantaged groups is a priority for spending decisions, and will continue to be so. The Council now has funding to address the needs of economically disadvantaged children and young people on a pilot basis in 2009/10 and across the Borough from April 2010, currently for one year.

5.14 **(m) Working Group Recommendation:** *Given that Kennel Lane School serves the whole Borough, all Area Steering Groups should be encouraged to consider how they can best support the inclusion of special needs pupils at Kennel Lane.*

Agreed. All ASGs should give this consideration. Work is underway, coupled with the Aiming High for Disabled Children focus on short breaks, to identify and provide for individual child and young people. It is agreed that this is best driven from the viewpoint, expectations and capabilities of the child at, normally, Kennel Lane School.

5.15 **(n) Working Group Recommendation:** *Schools should be further encouraged to undertake their improvement planning – setting their vision, objectives and actions – in the light of the 'whole child' and the views of all stakeholders.*

Agreed. The Council is encouraging schools to use the NCSL/TDA School Improvement Planning Framework which is a collection of tools that can be used as whole process or individually to enhance one part of a process. Implicit to the approach is the involvement of all stakeholders. Through the involvement of parents, the community and other local stakeholders the needs of the 'whole child' are identified. About one half of schools have attended workshops and there are reports of the effective use of the tools. The LA collects and analyses school improvement plans and provides support where this is required.

5.16 **(o) Working Group Recommendation:** *The Council strives to realise the benefits of partnership work supporting children and families through the Community Activity and Services Partnership.*

Agreed. The 'CASP' is a relatively new partnership that the Council sees as central to moving forward its work on community focused delivery.

- 5.17 **(p) Working Group Recommendation:** *The Council further ensures that local area needs continue to be identified to inform service delivery through enhanced engagement processes such as consultations, questionnaires, focus groups and other methods.*

Agreed. Engagement has been implicit in service delivery from the start of the ESS programme, as the expectation is that all service delivery is rooted in the needs of children, young people and families. Various engagement methods have been used; the best have been used frequently, others have been used only once and alternatives then used. These approaches will continue.

For Children's Centres, local area needs will be regularly assessed through a variety of different indicators such as the birth rate figures, the take up of tax credits and the Foundation Stage Profile.

Children's Centres have Advisory Boards with representative parents/carers and other members of the local community who meet termly to discuss local need.

There is on-going informal consultation with users of the centre and other professionals to ensure that services meet need.

There are also groups run for parents/carers with specific needs e.g. lone parents, young parents, parents of children with SEN/disabilities, fathers, EAL groups etc. which allow for enhanced engagement around the development of services to meet their needs.

Partnership working with the voluntary sector e.g. PLA, PACT, HomeStart, Action for Children etc allows for engagement with the more hard to reach groups of our community.

## 6 **ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

### Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 No legal issues arise from this report.

### Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The Borough Treasurer is satisfied that no significant financial implications arise from this report.

### Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Equalities Impact Assessments have been completed for both Children's Centres and Extended Services.

### Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 There are no strategic risk issues arising from this report.

## 7 **CONSULTATION**



### Principal Groups Consulted

7.1 Not applicable

### Method of Consultation

7.2 Not applicable

### Representations Received

7.3 Not applicable

### Background Papers

Report by the working group of the Social Care and Learning Scrutiny Panel - 'A Review of Children's Centres and Extended Services in and Around Schools in Bracknell Forest by a Joint Working Group of the Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel and Social Care and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel'.

### Contact for further information

Karen Frost, Early Years, Childcare and Play Manager      01344 354024  
[karen.frost@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:karen.frost@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

Graham Symonds, Extended Services Manager      01344 354067  
[graham.symonds@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:graham.symonds@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

Martin Gocke, Chief Officer: Access & Inclusion      01344 354009  
[martin.gocke@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:martin.gocke@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

### Doc. Ref



# Agenda Item 7

## OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION

**EXECUTIVE WORK PROGRAMME:** Chief Executive's/Corporate Services

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I017331
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Revenues and Benefits System Replacement

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To approve a business strategy for the delivery of revenues and benefits.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** No financial implications

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** Not applicable

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** None

**DATE OF DECISION:** 14 Jul 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I017048
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Commitment Budget 2010/11 - 2012/13

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To approve the Commitment Budget and budget process for 2010/11.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** None at this time

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** Not applicable.

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** None

**DATE OF DECISION:** 14 Jul 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I016057
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** ICT Strategy Action Plan 2007 – 2012

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To approve the Council's ICT Strategy Action Plan

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** Within existing budget.

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** ICT Steering Group

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** Meetings.

**DATE OF DECISION:** 14 Jul 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I017764
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Procurement Regulations

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To enable the Executive to monitor progress on the improvements required arising from the procurement regulations report presented to the Executive in October 2008.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** Within existing budget

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** Not applicable.

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** Not applicable.

**DATE OF DECISION:** 14 Jul 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I016268
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Annual Complaints Report

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To brief the Executive about complaints made against the Council in 2008/09

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** Not applicable

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** Not applicable.

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** Not applicable.

**DATE OF DECISION:** 15 Sep 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I014589
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Place Survey

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To inform the Executive of the Place Survey results for 2008.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** None

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** Bracknell Forest residents

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** The survey itself was the bi-annual survey of residents for Bracknell Forest.

**DATE OF DECISION:** 15 Sep 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I016142
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Corporate Performance Overview Report

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To inform the Executive of the performance of the Council over the first quarter of 2009/10.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** No financial implications

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** Not applicable.

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** Not applicable.

**DATE OF DECISION:** 15 Sep 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I015724
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Discretionary Rate Relief and Hardship Relief

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To consider new applications for discretionary rate relief and hardship relief.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** Within existing budget

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** None.

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** None.

**DATE OF DECISION:** 30 Sep 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I010993
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Bracknell Town Centre Regeneration Strategy

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To confirm a strategy for the regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** None

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** Town Centre Stakeholders

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** External consultation

**DATE OF DECISION:** 20 Oct 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I015593
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Social Care and Community Transport Review

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To consider the review and recommendations emanating from this.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** Revenue savings anticipated

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:**

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** Meeting with interested parties.  
Postal survey of users.  
Interviews with users and providers.  
Focus Groups.

**DATE OF DECISION:** 15 Sep 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I017797
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** 'All of Us' Community Cohesion Strategy and Equality Schemes Monitoring Report 2008-09

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** Monitoring report on the implementation of the Council's 'All of Us' Community Cohesion Strategy and the Race, Gender and Disability Equality Schemes during 2008-09.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** Within existing budget

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** Council's Equality Sub-Group  
Community Cohesion and Engagement Working Group

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** The document has been available for comment to the groups as listed.

**DATE OF DECISION:** 20 Oct 2009

<b>REFERENCE</b>	I016144
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Corporate Performance Overview Report

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To inform the Executive of the performance of the Council over the second quarter of 2009/10.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** No financial implications

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** N/A

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** N/A

**DATE OF DECISION:** 15 Dec 2009



<b>REFERENCE</b>	I015726
------------------	---------

**TITLE:** Discretionary Rate Relief and Hardship Relief

**PURPOSE OF DECISION:** To consider new applications for discretionary rate relief and hardship relief.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:** Within existing budget

**WHO WILL TAKE DECISION:** Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection

**PRINCIPAL GROUPS TO BE CONSULTED:** None.

**METHOD OF CONSULTATION:** None.

**DATE OF DECISION:** 31 Dec 2009

This page is intentionally left blank

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION (CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE) 16 July 2009

---

### HOME OFFICE GUIDANCE ON SCRUTINY OF CRIME AND DISORDER MATTERS Assistant Chief Executive

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report invites the Commission, in its capacity as the Council's statutory Crime and Disorder Committee, to note the new statutory guidance issued by the Home Office on the Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder Matters, and to decide on the changes necessary to the Committee's approach.

#### 2 SUGGESTED ACTION

**That the O&S Commission, meeting as the Crime and Disorder Committee**

- 2.1 **Notes the new statutory guidance issued by the Home Office on the Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder Matters; and**
- 2.2 **In relation to the specific proposals in the Home Office guidance, as set out in paragraph 3.4:**
- (i) **Cooperates with other Crime and Disorder Committees in the Thames Valley Police area by providing the published papers and minutes of Bracknell Forest's Crime and Disorder Committee to those other councils, for information;**
  - (ii) **Defers co-opting community representatives onto the Committee, and holding public meetings;**
  - (iii) **Determines not to initiate a protocol which lays down the mutual expectations of scrutiny and community safety partners;**
  - (iv) **Involves the Thames Valley Police Authority in work undertaken by the Crime and Disorder Committee, by co-opting a Police Authority member onto the Committee when policing matters are being considered.**

#### 3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Home Office's Guidance for the Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder Matters, attached, was issued in May 2009. The guidance covers: the history and nature of community safety; the role of scrutiny, and detailed guidance on Sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 (as amended by Section 126 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007).
- 3.2 The guidance specifies the role of the Crime and Disorder Committee in Section 3.2 (page 24) with reference to the legislation. The guidance states this gives 'powers to scrutinise the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP), rather than the partners – this supports a focus based on policy and finding solutions. Focusing on policy :

- gives the partners the reassurance that the crime and disorder scrutiny committee is there to ensure that the community safety partnership is accountable and its performance is improved, rather than just 'having a go' at the partners;
- emphasises the fact that scrutiny is focused on improvement, on enhancing the performance of existing services, and on a constructive examination of the priorities of the partnership; and
- means that there is wider scope for the committee, or group of members, to cut across organisational boundaries over the course of their investigation.'

The guidance also stipulates that, 'the role of the committee in whichever form it is applied should be as a 'critical friend' of the community safety partnership, providing it with constructive challenge at a strategic level rather than adversarial fault-finding at an operational level.'

3.3 The Home Office guidance also states that the role of the Crime and Disorder Committee should include:

- to consider Councillor Calls for Action;
- to consider actions undertaken by the responsible authorities on the community safety partnership; and
- make reports or recommendations to the local authority with regard to those functions. In practice, the nature of the committee and its work should mean that recommendations will be directly for responsible partners as well.

3.4 The current approach by the O&S Commission acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee is consistent with the main principles of the Home Office Guidance. However, the guidance contains some particular issues for Members' consideration:

- (i) On cooperation with other Crime and Disorder Committees in neighbouring boroughs, Section 2.2 of the guidance (page 16) encourages working closely with neighbouring unitary authorities when a police authority area spans more than one borough. This would apply to Bracknell Forest, as it forms a part of the Thames Valley Police area. That area covers two county councils, nine district councils and 7 unitary authorities. It would be a major and time consuming undertaking to agree a coordinated approach to scrutiny of crime and disorder matters between those councils. Consequently, it is suggested that the Committee's cooperation comprises providing the published papers and minutes of Bracknell Forest's Crime and Disorder Committee to those other councils, for information. At a later stage, Members may wish to consider exploring more active cooperation with the Crime and Disorder Committees of other local authorities in the Thames Valley.
- (ii) The guidance points to innovative approaches to the scrutiny of crime and disorder issues taken by some councils' overview and scrutiny committees, for example in co-opting community representatives onto committees, and in holding public meetings (page 19 of the guidance). The Council's experience is that it can be difficult to secure the co-option of community representatives, and public meetings need to be properly resourced, planned and have clear objectives if they are to be worthwhile. Consequently, it is suggested that it would be premature to embark on these innovative approaches at this early stage in the Committee's existence.

- (iii) The guidance suggests that 'partners and the scrutiny function at the local authority (or local authorities) might want to consider developing a short, flexible and meaningful protocol which lays down the mutual expectations of scrutiny members and partners of the community safety scrutiny process' (page 25). It is suggested that, as the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Panels have had good co-operation from the Council's community safety partners, such that a protocol would be unnecessary.
  
- (iv) The guidance states (page 29) that, 'Police authorities occupy a unique position within the landscape of community safety partnerships. They have a clear, statutory role to hold to account the police. In this context, it is vital that local authorities' community safety scrutiny complements this role. Local authorities should, in all instances, presume that the police authority should play an active part at committee when community safety matters are being discussed – and particularly when the police are to be present.' The guidance specifies that Local authorities should take one of three options to involve police authorities in work undertaken by the Crime and Disorder Committee. The first option does not apply in Bracknell Forest Council's case, as the Council's representative on the Thames Valley Police Authority is a member of the Executive. Option 2 is that 'a member of the police authority should be issued with a standing invitation to attend the committee as an "expert adviser"'. Option 3 is for the Committee to co-opt 'a police authority member onto the committee when policing matters are being considered, and it would be for the police authority to decide the most appropriate member to appoint.' As the O&S Commission meet infrequently as the Crime and Disorder Committee, it would not be a good use of Police Authority time to have a standing invitation to the Commission's meetings. Option 3 appears to be the most suitable, allowing the Police Authority to attend meetings when appropriate and to determine their most appropriate representative on each occasion.

Contact for further information

Richard Beaumont – 01344 352283  
e-mail: [Richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

This page is intentionally left blank

# NATIONAL SUPPORT FRAMEWORK DELIVERING SAFER AND CONFIDENT COMMUNITIES



Home Office

Guidance for the Scrutiny of Crime  
and Disorder Matters – England

Implementing Sections 19 and 20  
of the Police and Justice Act 2006





# Contents

Introduction	1
<b>Section 1: An introduction to community safety</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Brief history	3
1.2 Community safety priorities	4
1.3 Who delivers on community safety?	5
1.4 The responsible authorities	6
1.5 The performance landscape for crime and policing	10
1.6 Scrutiny and community safety – working together	11
<b>Section 2: What good scrutiny of crime and disorder would look like – putting it into practice</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 What scrutiny is, and why it is important	14
2.2 Structural issues	16
2.3 Key areas for scrutiny	18
2.4 More general issues around partnership working	22
<b>Section 3: Detailed guidance on sections 19 and 20 of the Act</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 Committee structures	23
3.2 Role of the committee	24
3.3 Frequency of meetings	26
3.4 Co-option	28
3.5 Responding to requests	32
3.6 Attending committee meetings	33
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>35</b>
Appendix A – Glossary	35
Appendix B – First step resources	37
Appendix C – The Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009	39
Appendix D – Section 126 of the Local Government Involvement in Public Health Act 2007	42



## Introduction

Crime is consistently one of the top concerns for communities everywhere – and therefore working to keep the areas we live in safe and harmonious is an ongoing priority for politicians and public servants alike.

But, safety depends on far more than the action of the few professionals for whom it is their dedicated occupation. It needs a creative and cooperative approach that draws in other services – from licensing, to activities for teenagers, to planning – but also engages the community at large: businesses; faith groups; local charities; community groups; and individual members of the public.

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) have made significant progress over the past ten years, but further evolution is always required. Throughout this document you will see references to changes made as the result of recent reforms – reductions in bureaucracy, devolving responsibilities to the local level, streamlining of processes. The powers now given to enable councillors to scrutinise CDRPs are integral to this new landscape.

At heart, scrutiny is about accountability. Councillors have a unique place in local decision making, providing a clear line of democratic accountability between decision-making and the people they serve. The new provisions will enable them to bring their unique perspective to bear on how CDRPs are tackling crime and disorder and potentially benefit communities everywhere..

These powers are given to local authorities' scrutiny functions by sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 ('the Act') – as amended by section 126 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. There have also been regulations passed under section 20 of the Police and Justice Act. These provisions provide local authorities with a framework for the development of an ongoing relationship between CDRPs and scrutiny bodies.

This guidance has been written for a variety of people:

- For those working in community safety, it will introduce them to scrutiny in local government, to the principles that underpin it, and to the positive contribution it can make to their work: and
- For councillors, and officers working in local authorities, it will provide information on community safety issues (including the national policies and structures) and give them advice on how scrutiny can add value to the work they do with partnerships.

Key points which may be particularly useful to certain groups are contained in **coloured boxes** throughout the document: CDRPs may find the information in the **orange** boxes most useful; councillors and local authority officers, the **purple** boxes and the **green** boxes will be useful to all groups.

The guidance consists of the following sections:

- Section 1: an introduction to community safety, for members and officers who may be unfamiliar with some of the themes and the jargon.
- Section 2: an exploration, through some worked examples, of what good scrutiny of crime and disorder issues might look like.
- Section 3: a discussion of the practicalities, including the designation of crime and disorder committees and community safety partner responsibilities.

#### Notes on the wording and scope of the guidance

Where we have used the word “committee” in the guidance, in most instances we are referring to what the regulations call the “crime and disorder committee”. We have omitted the prefix to minimise unnecessary repetition of the phrase.

This guidance applies to England. Separate guidance covering Wales will be issued later in 2009 as the provisions will come into force in Wales on 1 October 2009.

# Section 1 - An introduction to community safety

## 1.1 Brief history

*You might find this most useful if you are a scrutiny member or officer.*

All councillors are now aware of the partnership landscape that connects so much of the work of local public services. But the history of partnerships has been a story of evolution more than design. Partnerships on safety are one of the oldest and most prescribed parts of the local strategic partnership family.

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) were created by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to develop and implement strategies to reduce crime and disorder (although they are not called CDRPs in the statute). They are known as Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in Wales. They exist to ensure that a number of prescribed 'responsible authorities' work together to jointly agree and delivery community safety priorities. The responsible authorities are:

- The local authority
- The police force
- The police authority
- The fire and rescue authority
- The primary care trust

The responsible authorities have a duty to work in co-operation with the 'co-operating bodies' who are probation, parish councils, NHS Trusts, NHS Foundation Trusts, proprietors of independent schools and governing bodies of an institution within the further education sector. It is likely that from April 2010, probation authorities will become responsible authorities and the duties of CDRPs will be expanded to include reducing re-offending.<sup>1</sup>

Other partners can also sit on the CDRP, meaning that membership can vary widely across the country. However, the above core membership is the same for every partnership.

Since 1998, CDRPs have become an integral part of the work of police forces and local authorities in particular, though a wide range of partners may also be involved, tackling a range of local issues to do with safety.

Unlike most elements of local strategic partnerships, CDRPs have been subject in the past to a very significant amount of direction, legislation, and targets from the centre. A review of the Crime and Disorder Act concluded in 2006 and subsequent amendments to legislation were made through the Police and Justice

---

<sup>1</sup> Provisions included in the Policing and Crime Bill

Act 2006. This resulted in regulations<sup>2</sup> and guidance that further evolved the work of CDRPs.

#### **What does this mean for me?**

Councillors and scrutiny officers might reflect on the fact that these CDRPs have a relatively long history, which means relationships may be well established and partners cautious about how the dynamic may be affected by new scrutiny activity. They may also be used to working within a tightly defined framework, and may only recently have begun to adapt to an approach that is more flexible and allows more local discretion.

### **1.2 Community safety priorities**

All CDRPs in England are now part of a new performance framework. What this means is that CDRPs should not be subject to any central targets or funding streams apart from what is negotiated through the Local Area Agreement. There are four main elements to the performance framework:

- National Public Service Agreements (PSAs) as measured through the National Indicator Set (NIS)
- the Local Area Agreement (LAA)
- Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)
- The Place Based Survey

Government identifies its priorities for reducing crime through these PSAs, whereas LAAs reflect local priorities.

PSAs and LAAs change periodically; it is important to emphasise that these will reflect, at local level, changes in the community safety landscape in the area, and, at national level, changes in national priorities reflected in government policy.

In order to identify and deliver on the priorities that matter the most to local communities, CDRPs are required to carry out a number of main tasks. These include:

- preparing an annual strategic assessment. This is a document identifying the crime and community safety priorities in the area, through analysis of information provided by partner agencies and the community.
- producing a partnership plan, laying out the approach for addressing those priorities;
- undertaking community consultation and engagement on crime and disorder issues; and
- Sharing information among the responsible authorities within the CDRP.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Crime and Disorder (Formulation and Implementation of Strategy) Regulations 2007 and The Crime and Disorder (Prescribed Information) Regulations 2007

These key tasks have been affected by the changes put in place relating to the CDRP performance regime. More information can be found at Section 1.5.

#### **What does this mean for me?**

Targets in the LAA will be considered by scrutiny in any case – councils were given powers to scrutinise LAAs as part of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. It may not provide best use of scrutiny resources to focus too much time on performance information. But the strategic assessment provides a chance to get underneath high-level information and think about how well the partnership understands the area and its mapping need. Some areas have access to quite sophisticated crime and anti-social behaviour mapping technology, for example, that councillors may be unaware of and find insightful.

### **1.3 Who delivers on community safety?**

*The Independent Review of Policing* carried out by Sir Ronnie Flanagan, and published in early 2008, stated that, “policing is far too important to be left to the police alone” (p 5). This is even more relevant when it comes to community safety and was behind the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Community safety is not just about the police. Like every challenging outcome that local authorities and their partners deliver for their communities, community safety needs a wide range of people and organisations to be involved and contributing to address crime and its causes.

This theme was expanded upon by the Policing Green Paper, *From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing our communities together*, published in July 2008, which emphasises the role both of CDRPs, other partnerships and of local communities in improving community safety.

The public policy imperative for close joint working, across a wide range of organisations and sectors, is consequently very clear.

#### **Looking more widely at partnership**

A good illustration of how effective community safety needs to be creative and draw in the widest group of agencies is provided in the practical guide called *Tackling Gangs*. While gangs and gang violence may seem like a serious problem for the police to deal with, the guidance shows how real impact can only be achieved with a much wider approach. The guidance recommends creating a multi-agency partnership to include:

- Police
- Local authority: community safety, anti-social behaviour team, children and young people’s services, housing
- Crown Prosecution Service
- Further education colleges
- Prison Service

- Probation Service
- Youth Offending Team

Though these would provide leadership, there might be other organisations to involve to really make a difference:

- the business community – they have an interest in reducing crime and can provide job training, voluntary opportunities and sponsorship for projects;
- the voluntary and community sector – they can create vital links to hard to reach parts of the community, providing both trusted services and valuable information;
- Department for Work and Pensions and Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency – they can help crack down on gang members committing benefit fraud or licensing offences
- Revenue and Customs – they can help tackle illegal import of weapons and drugs
- Primary Care Trusts – gang members will often report to A&E when injured, but not report to the police
- TV licensing – can go into gang members homes and be part of a campaign to put pressure on gang members

#### 1.4 The responsible authorities

In Section 1.1 we mentioned the statutory responsible authorities sitting on the CDRP. While the role of scrutiny is to **scrutinise the partnership as a whole**, good scrutiny is based on relationships and mutual understanding. This section explains the individual roles within the partnership in more detail.

##### *Local authority*

Most local authorities have staff dedicated to community safety, though resources in smaller districts may be limited. But community safety needs the support of a wide range of people throughout the council to be effective. The council has a legal duty under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to carry out all its various functions with due regard to the need to prevent crime and disorder in its area. This duty is likely to be extended to include reducing re-offending from April 2010<sup>3</sup>.

Public policy makers in local authorities and other sectors have grappled for some time with issues relating to the links between crime and services provided by the council and its partners. The relationships between specific services such as child welfare, education and training, health (including mental health), and crime and disorder priorities are complex.

---

<sup>3</sup> Provisions included in the Policing and Crime Bill



A common priority is tackling anti-social behaviour. In order to successfully tackle anti-social behaviour you first need to understand it – therefore information exchange and analysis of the problem including those involved is the first stage. Co-ordinating services including youth support, drug and alcohol action, policing and park management will then be important given their links to those involved in anti-social behaviour. The solution to an anti-social behaviour problem does not lie with one service or partner agency alone.

The importance of giving people a good start in life is obvious – this is why local authority functions such as **Children’s Trusts** and **Youth Offending Teams** are important contributors to community safety. Youth Offending teams sit within the local authority but bring together multi-agency partnerships around education, health and social services. They are overseen nationally by the **Youth Justice Board**.

If people have jobs, relationships, houses and good mental health they are far less likely to commit crime or re-commit crime even if they have been convicted in the past. Other important partners are **Drug and Alcohol Action Teams** – another local authority team that leads a multi-agency partnership and links into the community safety partnership. **Housing services**, either in-house, arms length or from social housing providers, are an important partner, both in getting people settled but also in tackling problems such as estates whose design encourages crime. Apart from the specialist teams named above, **adult social services** have a role to play in working with people with chaotic lives and mental health needs in particular.

### *Police*

No one person is in overall control of policing in England and Wales. The current governance arrangement which involves chief officers of police, police authorities and the Home Secretary - what is known as the 'tripartite arrangement' - has evolved over time, based on the broad principles of political impartiality of the police, policing by consent of the public, the Government's overall responsibility for ensuring a safe society in which to live, and the need for the expenditure of public money to be properly accounted for.

There are 43 police forces in England and Wales, as against the 381 local authorities, which means that many police forces deal with several local authorities at once. For some areas this is more problematic than others. In London there is only one police force, the Metropolitan Police, for all 32 borough councils. However, London is divided into 34 **Basic Command Units** (BCUs) which are coterminous with each borough, with two separate BCUs for Heathrow and the Royal Parks.

Chief Constables have discretion to organise their force anyway they see fit, and may use a variety of different terms for the sub-units within the force, including BCU, Division, District or Borough. In Thames Valley Police there are only five BCUs, for example, but these are subdivided into “Local Policing Areas” that are coterminous with local authorities.

Below the BCU level there are **Safer Neighbourhood Teams**. These have been rolled out throughout England and Wales and are an important part of partnership working. The latest focus is on joining up Neighbourhood Policing with Neighbourhood Management.

### *Police authority*

The role of the police authority is to secure an efficient and effective police force for the area. This is done by setting the strategic direction for the police in the area for which the authority is responsible, and by holding the Chief Constable to account. All police officers and staff are accountable to the Chief Constable, and the Chief Constable to the police authority.

In order to do this, police authorities have an officer structure that supports a committee made up of local councillors and independent members, with councillors holding a majority of one. Councillors are drawn from top-tier authorities using a formula to give political balance. At least one of the independent members must be a magistrate. Most police authorities have between 17 and 25 members, though 17 is typical.

The police authority sets the strategic direction for the force by, amongst other things, deciding how much council tax should be used for policing (allocated by the use of precepts) and putting in place local police priorities. In doing so, police authorities also have a statutory duty to consult communities.

In holding the Chief Constable to account, police authorities carry out functions similar to those which the scrutiny committee might seek to exercise. It is important to emphasise that scrutiny bodies and police authorities should work closely together to ensure that their activities are complementary.

### *Fire and rescue*

Fire and rescue services have a relatively focused remit, but are often committed and enthusiastic members of community safety partnerships. Fire and rescue is structured into 50 services across England and Wales. Accountability is provided through the **fire authority**. The fire authority is a committee of councillors. How this committee is made up depends on the boundaries of the fire service. Where boundaries are co-terminous (which is the case for counties) the fire authority is a committee of the council. Where the fire service covers more than one authority, there is an external committee that is made up of councillors from each

of the local authorities in the area. The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority is an exception. It oversees the London Fire Brigade, and is made up of eight members nominated from the London Assembly, seven from the London boroughs and two appointed by the Mayor.

The contributions of the fire and rescue service may make to community safety might include:

- fire safety education, focusing on children in schools and groups in the community who may be particularly vulnerable;
- road safety - reducing collisions and accidental deaths;
- planning for, and reacting to emergencies such as floods; and
- being a positive mentor and role model for young people.

#### *Primary care trust*

Health is a statutory partner in CDRPs through legislation. Its role is often problematic and they have been the most difficult partner to engage in CDRPs. Areas where health has a role in community safety include:

- tackling the misuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances, commissioning and providing appropriate drug and alcohol services;
- arranging for the provision of health advice or treatment for people who put themselves or others at risk through their use of drugs or alcohol;
- helping to support the victims of domestic violence; and
- working with other local partners to help prevent problems occurring in the first place, for example by alerting the police to licensed premises where a lot of alcohol-related injuries occur.

#### *Probation*

Each provider of probation services in an area is expected to become a responsible authority through legislative changes which are likely to take effect from April 2010. Probation authorities will then have an equal role in CDRPs alongside the other five responsible authorities. Some probation areas already have effective relationships and a clear role within local partnerships, although the duty placed on partnerships to address re-offending and on probation to be a full responsible authority will enhance this relationship in the future.

Probation is part of the **National Offender Management Service (NOMS)**, which also runs prisons and therefore has an important role in the criminal justice system. The changes planned through developments in NOMS will bring about **Probation Trusts** who will both commission and provide court and offender management services.

Some examples of probation's role include:

- preparing pre-sentence reports to help magistrates make sentencing decisions;
- supervising community orders, including **Community Payback**;
- helping offenders develop life skills so they can get back into education or employment;
- collaborating on programmes to tackle issues like drugs, drink driving and domestic violence; and
- supporting **Multi-Agency Public Protection Programmes (MAPPA)** which assess and control high risk offenders on release

### 1.5 The performance landscape for crime and policing

The performance landscape for community safety, and CDRPs, is changing.

Scrutiny should be aware that police and community safety partnerships are adjusting to significant changes in planning, monitoring and assessment. Although, the changes brought about in the Policing Green Paper should make it easier for the police to work even more collaboratively at the local level, but there may be a period of adjustment and learning, which could even create opportunities for scrutiny to contribute constructively through challenge and help with policy development.

Some of the changes are:

- introduction of the Policing Pledge;
- greater focus on rigorous scrutiny of performance of the police force by the police authority;
- external monitoring to move from the Home Office to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC);
- crime maps and neighbourhood-level information now available for all 43 forces from December 2008;
- much more public information – surveys, website with quarterly information, public reporting of police authority inspections, letters from HMIC to chief constable and chair setting out performance issues and requiring an action plan; and
- greater focus on self improvement and peer support. Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships will have responsibility for supporting CDRPs.

#### **Confidence**

The most significant recent change for both the police and partnerships is in a new approach to dealing with community confidence. All other targets on crime have been abolished except for one, which is a public perception indicator measured through the British Crime Survey. The question they ask members of the public is whether they agree with this statement:

*The police and local council are dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in this area.*

Confidence presents a significant opportunity for scrutiny – the most significant factor in the Metropolitan Police Service’s approach to confidence is community engagement. In representing the community, scrutiny has the potential to make a real contribution to understanding confidence and increasing it.

## **1.6 Scrutiny and community safety – working together**

Community safety partners have a long history of working together and getting results. The introduction of crime and disorder scrutiny committees enhances existing partnership arrangements by developing a clear structure for overseeing and reviewing the delivery of joint responses on community safety and by creating a clearer link between partner agencies and the public on community safety.

Because the role of scrutiny should be focused on the partnership as a whole, if issues arise which relate specifically to a particular partner organisation, it may be appropriate to refer such issues to the governing bodies of that organisation for action.

Scrutiny, done well, can always add value. Public services can be improved by an independent eye providing balanced, researched and constructive ideas. Part of that success, however, depends on choosing the right topic and understanding the landscape. Here are some suggestions about how the scrutiny of crime and disorder matters could add value and focus on issues that matter to the public:

**Neighbourhoods** – Neighbourhoods are very important for both community safety and councillors, but understanding how to make the most of this connection may need some careful investigation – there is no national direction on what neighbourhoods should look like, so they are different everywhere. But every part of England and Wales has a neighbourhood policing team, and many local authorities have linked this with their own neighbourhood management and with ward councillors.

**Confidence** – The new confidence agenda for councils and the police presents real opportunities for scrutiny. As well as being a shared responsibility across the two organisations, it’s also an area that councillors should have a unique perspective on. As the police and partners develop an increased focus on communicating and engaging with the public, scrutiny may be able to provide practical help and suggestions. This might draw on community knowledge, or help link the police with the experience of other services in the area that have been successful at building a connection with local people. Police authorities are tasked to hold the Chief Constable to account for performance against the

confidence measure, so this might also be a fruitful area for joint scrutiny with the police authority.

**Criminal justice** – The Policing and Crime Bill contains measures to add reducing re-offending to the core areas of focus for CDRPs, as well as increasing the responsibilities of probation. These changes, along with a clear focus on integrated offender management will mean that there will be a period of change. The Ministry of Justice is also encouraging magistrates to become more involved in engaging with the community. Partnerships might benefit from the support of scrutiny to help them manage these transitions successfully, and get the most from better engagement with the criminal justice community.

**Territory and hierarchy** – Partnership working is complex, particularly in areas with complex geography such as two-tier areas. There can be tensions between the county's LAA – which will have community safety targets - and district CDRPs – because in most cases CDRPs exist at district council boundaries although there is a requirement for county co-ordinating arrangements to add value and bring together district community safety activity. For scrutiny to be successful, councillors need to develop an understanding of what the local crime and disorder structures are, the dynamics that exist at different layers of partnership activity and of any tensions that might exist. Scrutiny provides an invaluable tool in offering an independent voice to challenge whilst still respecting local flexibilities and sensitivities.

### **Choosing a community safety topic...**

**Bedford Borough Council** has an effective process for choosing topics which has helped them work in closer partnership with the police. When developing the scrutiny work programme, they carry out a formal consultation process which includes direct mail to partner organisations, advertisements in the local media and borough and parish council newsletters, and discussions with the directly elected mayor, councillors and the citizen's panel.

On one occasion, the police responded to this invitation and requested a review of local "cop shops" and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). This created a context that was followed up by collaboration throughout the process. When a public forum was held in a local school to gather scrutiny evidence, it carried both the council and police logos and attracted a good audience. Members got 'their hands dirty' by spending half a day on the beat with PCSOs. PCSOs completed confidential questionnaires which also went to the council's own street and park rangers.

At the end of the process, the police and community safety teams remained involved, participating in both the review of the evidence and the informal meeting to consider what recommendations to include in the review final report.

As a result of this collaborative approach, the report was accepted and police implemented the majority of the recommendations, twice reporting back to the scrutiny committee on progress. More widely, the review developed and cemented relationships and demonstrated the value scrutiny can add to partners' own priorities.

Your contact for more information:

Hugh Bartos, Bedford Borough Council, [hugh.bartos@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:hugh.bartos@bedford.gov.uk)

## Section 2 What good scrutiny of crime and disorder would look like – putting it into practice

### Section 2.1 What scrutiny is, and why it is important

*You might find it most useful to read this section if you are a community safety partner.*

In 2000, the Government passed laws changing the way in which most councils conducted business and made decisions. Up until that point, decisions had been made in committees. All members of the council were on one of these committees and (theoretically) could play a part in the decision-making process.

Now, decision-making in all but a handful of small district councils (called “fourth option authorities”) is carried out by an executive. This is either an elected mayor, or a cabinet of a number of councillors, each with responsibility for a specific policy area.

To balance this concentration of executive authority and to ensure that other members could contribute to the council’s decision-making and policy development processes, the Government made provision for what was known as ‘overview and scrutiny.’ Under section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities altering their executive arrangements would have to set up a committee, or committees, of the council to carry out this overview and scrutiny work. The Government did not specify what the roles of these committees would be, but most authorities sought to establish a system whose responsibility would be both to hold the executive to account and to carry out policy development work. Common to all scrutiny functions is the fact that they can research issues and recommend actions to be taken, but their only powers are to advise and persuade, based on the evidence they gather and analyse.

Since 2000, the responsibilities and powers of scrutiny committees have expanded considerably.

- Firstly, the bulk of detailed scrutiny work is now carried out away from committees, in “task and finish” groups (some authorities call these by different names, but they are basically small, time-limited informal panels made up of councillors, and sometimes people co-opted from the local community because of their experience or knowledge).
- Secondly, scrutiny work now encompasses the work of partners, not just the local authority. These powers have been given by a succession of pieces of legislation including the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (more details on these provisions can be found below).



## Principles of Scrutiny<sup>4</sup>

There are four fundamental roles that define good scrutiny and underpin scrutiny activity:

1. provides 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers;
2. enables the voice and concerns of the public and its communities to be heard;
3. is carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny process; and
4. drives improvement in public services

## Scrutiny in action

The practice of scrutiny varies hugely around the country. It is impossible to adopt a nationwide approach or standard for scrutiny, which is why both the introduction of crime and disorder scrutiny arrangements under sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act 2006, and the regulations that support them, are based on a flexible, enabling approach.

If you are a community safety partner, you will have to work closely with the relevant scrutiny bodies that cover your geographical area to see how the scrutiny of community safety matters will work best for you.

A 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate and this guidance provides examples of high-quality scrutiny work to support local authorities in developing an approach to crime and disorder scrutiny that both fits in with other scrutiny policies, takes account of local partnership arrangements, and is proportionate and therefore adds value to local crime and disorder activity. See Section 2.2.

## Politics

If engagement with scrutiny (the concept of it, and as it is practiced in local authorities) is a new thing for you, you may be concerned about politics. You may be especially concerned that, by attending committee or giving evidence in another way, you will be drawn unwillingly into political debate.

Scrutiny as practiced in most authorities is generally non-party political in its approach. Councillors have done a great deal to ensure that a culture of consensus operates on committees, and members of all political parties work well together on many councils. While disagreements may arise, all councillors have a commitment to ensuring that the work they do, and the work that the authority does, meets the needs of local residents.

---

<sup>4</sup> According to research carried out by the Centre for Public Scrutiny

Sometimes this commitment manifests itself in political discussion and debate. As partners and councillors alike, you should recognise that scrutiny often examines subjects that are highly political in nature.

This is not necessarily a negative thing. Some of the best examples of good scrutiny are instances where members, officers and partners have harnessed the power of political debate to carry out thorough analysis of a given issue. For example, there have been a number of highly successful reviews into local residents' fear of crime – an emotive and political issue which members, with their understanding both of local politics and the local community, are extremely well placed to investigate.

## **Section 2.2 – Structural issues**

### In English unitary areas

The boundaries of unitary areas in England (areas where a single local authority is responsible for a given geographical area), will only rarely match the boundaries of a police area, or the operational area of another partner (this is often called co-terminosity). Often, a single community safety partner might have to deal with a number of different authorities operating in neighbouring areas. This can have the effect of stretching resources, and duplicating scrutiny activity undertaken in different authorities. It may be a particular challenge for police authorities.

Because of the problem of co-terminosity, partners and those scrutinising their actions alike should be careful both to ensure that the demands that they make on each other are not unreasonable, and that neighbouring unitaries work closely with one another – aligning their work programmes to minimise duplication where possible.

London boroughs are also unitary authorities, but the governance position here is slightly different given the role played by London's Mayor. Community safety partnerships should still engage with London borough scrutiny as above, but there should be recognition that the Greater London Authority is likely to have an interest in some of the work of partnerships, where it has broader implications.

### In two-tier areas

Two-tier areas present some complications. These are where (usually) a number of district councils, and a single county council, operate in a given geographical area. Responsibility for specific services are divided between districts and counties. The division of services is historic in nature and can often be difficult for those outside the local government sector (and, indeed, for many within it) to understand.

Some district councils are so-called “fourth option” authorities. This means that they have not adopted the new executive arrangements, and still operate under the old committee system. However, most of these authorities operate a scrutiny function of some kind, which will need to accord to the same principles and requirements set out in this guidance for other authorities.

If you are working with a district council or county council as a partner, you should consider the following:

- You should not assume that you will be able just to talk to the county (or conversely the districts) to the exclusion of others, simply because they cover the same geographical area (and even though some district councillors are also county councillors).
- You should not assume that talking to the districts and the county will involve duplication of work – as stated above, they have separate roles and functions.
- You should encourage the districts and the county to work together to deliver a scrutiny function that is able to add most value in the context of what are likely to be quite complex local governance arrangements.

If you are a councillor or officer in a district or county council, you should consider the following:

- You should work with the other councils in the county area to see if you can develop a joint approach to the scrutiny of community safety issues. A number of counties have already started developing joint scrutiny across the board in a county – **Cumbria** and **Cambridgeshire** are examples of areas where councils have come together to carry out scrutiny work which cuts a cross a number of different authorities in a two-tier area. This could take the form of a standing arrangement, or a more ad hoc approach, whereby you could consider whether other councils in your area are likely to have an interest in the topic you are considering for scrutiny, and, if so, seek ways of working collaboratively.
- You should also work with other councils in developing your work programme. By so doing, you can identify areas where more than one authority is planning to carry out a piece of work on a given subject over the course of a municipal year. The evidence-gathering process can be planned so as to ensure that multiple pieces of work complement each other. There may be a possibility for carrying out such work jointly, as described above. This will minimise the risk that partnerships will be expected to contribute to a large number of reviews on a similar subject at the same time.
- Community safety partners may not understand the distinction between work undertaken in district and county councils. When planning joint work,

you should consider how districts and the county will work together on community safety issues. You should not assume that the county will automatically “lead” on community safety issues for the area.

## Section 2.3 – Key areas for scrutiny

### Use of different techniques

Scrutiny can take a variety of different approaches to scrutinising community safety issues. While the focus of sections 19 and 20 and the regulations, is on committees, a lot of scrutiny work is likely to be undertaken in different ways.

- **Policy development** – scrutiny committees may carry out in-depth scrutiny reviews focused on a specific topic relevant locally. Often this is done by means of a task and finish group, which will examine evidence from a wide variety of sources before producing a report and recommendations, to which partners and/or the council’s executive will have to respond. These pieces of work arguably have the most impact on local policy making, and we will provide you with some examples of them below.
- **Contribution to the development of strategies** – if the community safety partnership is putting together a strategy, plan, or policy, it may be useful to build in a process for scrutiny at draft stage. Councillors can provide valuable evidence to support the drafting process – especially intelligence from the local community.
- **Holding to account at formal hearings** – bringing in representatives of the partnership and questioning them about their roles, responsibilities, and activities. This is the simplest method for scrutiny to “hold the partnership to account”, though this has limitations in terms of constructive outcomes and should be a small part of interaction between scrutiny and the partnership.
- **Performance management** – examination of the performance of the partnership, often using high-level scorecards or, where appropriate, more detailed data. The best scrutiny functions will use this as an opportunity to look at performance “by exception” (which will highlight both particularly good, and particularly poor, performance), as part of their existing processes for monitoring performance across the Local Area Agreement. This could involve the committee looking at particularly good performance, to see what lessons can be learned, thus sharing good practice across all public and third sector organisations operating in the local area.

### Comprehensive area assessments and scrutiny

CAA is about providing for the public a rounded view of the performance of local public bodies and how they deliver in partnership. Judgements are based on the evidence that public bodies generate through their ordinary working, and therefore high-quality evidence from scrutiny will appropriately influence Audit Commission leads in making those judgements.

Generally speaking, scrutiny has two important roles to play within the assessment process:

1. Looking at the results of assessments, and using this data to decide which areas of crime and disorder/community safety activity should be the subject of scrutiny work.
2. Carrying out scrutiny investigations which feed into the assessment process. In particular, scrutiny may want to focus on identifying areas of exceptionally good performance that merit 'green flags.'

### Particular strengths for scrutiny

Scrutiny can, by using the different techniques above, apply itself to a number of different policy areas. We have identified a number of particular strengths of scrutiny – engagement and involvement of local people, analysis of issues of local concern, and promotion of joint working – and provide a number of examples of successful reviews demonstrating these.

#### *Engagement and involvement of local people*

Detailed scrutiny work can help the community safety partners to involve local people more in the work they carry out. This can be difficult for partners to do on their own, and the experience and knowledge – and community intelligence – which councillors can bring to the process is invaluable.

**Rugby** was one of the first councils to pilot the operation of community safety scrutiny. To involve the community in the work they undertake, they have decided to co-opt a number of community representatives onto the committee that looks at community safety issues..

Of course, you may feel that a more flexible approach is required. Many authorities have involved local people closely in carrying out work by co-opting them onto informal “task and finish” groups instead of onto the formal committee.

Even traditional public meetings can be worthwhile in gathering valuable evidence which can be used to influence future policy-making. **Waltham Forest** held a public meeting about knife crime, focusing on children and young people, which heard emotive evidence from victims and relatives on the devastating

effect of such crime on the community, as well as positive and constructive ideas on how the problem could be solved.

### *Analysis of issues of local concern*

The fear of crime is a significant issue for many people. This can cause problems for partners, who find it difficult to reconcile this perception with the reality, in many areas, of falling crime levels. This can be interpreted by local people as an unwillingness to respond to problems which they know exist in the local community, irrespective of the evidence which has been gathered by sources such as the council and the police. Scrutiny can play, and has played, a vital role in resolving this impasse and setting out a way forward for local people and professionals.

In **Harrow**, particular concerns arose when it became apparent that, although Harrow was London's safest borough in terms of violent crime, the fear of crime was rising almost exponentially, and was a key issue for residents as identified through the Quality of Life survey. Members decided to conduct a review on the subject which culminated in a conference bringing together local people and a wide range of community safety – and other – partners in the local community. This led to a more keener understanding amongst partners and the council of how the issues around perception of crime had arisen, and a commitment to tackling these issues. Recommendations were made which contributed to a significant reduction in the fear of crime the following year.

In **Middlesbrough**, members carried out work into the perceived problem of “teenagers hanging around”. Again, this was an issue of perception. By taking evidence from young people and those who felt threatened by their behaviour, members were able to build an understanding between the different groups involved, and present a report on the matter which informed local partners' responses to the fear of crime (and encouraged joint working between community safety partners and others).

Anti-social behaviour is another issue which is often high on the local political agenda, connected to the more general fear of crime which we have covered above. Here, again, scrutiny can help to cut through perceptions and provide clear evidence to back up given policy recommendations.

For example, responding to concerns about the rise in violent alcohol-related crime in its city centre, **Stoke** carried out a review of the issue which involved community safety partners, and others more widely involved in business and regeneration. Recommendations included the need to highlight to the council and partners of the good work already being undertaken and joint working between transport providers, the licensing authority, businesses and community safety

partners improve the night-time environment.

### *General benefits of joint working*

In **Redbridge**, the scrutiny function carried out an in-depth piece of work into CCTV. This resulted in the council and a number of partners – not just CDRP partners – putting together a strategy for the more effective deployment and use of CCTV cameras. This included the placement of relocatable cameras, and the requirement that the likely effectiveness of new installations would have to be demonstrated, with agreement being reached across the partnership.

As demonstrated by our case study example of **Haringey** – set out later in this document - scrutiny can also work well to improve relationships between partners.

Members in **Middlesbrough** have recently been carrying out work on the responses of the criminal justice system to the needs of victims of crime. This work involved a large number of local partners, including Youth Offending Teams and the Probation Service. It looked at the difficult issues around the differences between victims and perpetrators of crimes, and the chains of events that can lead one to the other. It evaluated the services provided to such people by a whole range of partners, identifying gaps and seeing where joint working needed to be improved. This kind of work is particularly valuable in creating more meaningful partnership working that can go beyond high-level agreement over strategy into sustained collaboration on operational issues.

In **Oxfordshire**, the county's Community Safety Scrutiny Committee carried out a review to answer the question, "How can Oxfordshire County Council and county councillors best engage with the county's Neighbourhood Action Groups?" These groups were set up to work with the police's small ward-level community policing teams. Recommendations were made which included the enhancement of information sharing between NAGs and other community safety partners – thus improving the extent to which community intelligence found its way into more strategic policy-making – and an increase in resources, both from the police and the council, to ensure that NAGs could be of maximum effectiveness.

In **Cardiff**, the scrutiny function carried out a review of the area's approach to community safety, with the intention of "mainstreaming" an understanding of community safety (mainly across the council), in response to the objectives of section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act (which we explained in section 1).

Many of these issues will be explored in more depth in Section 3, below.

## **2.4 More general issues around partnership working**

The scrutiny of community safety issues is just one part of a wider agenda in local policy-making for partnership working. Scrutiny has a significant opportunity to contribute to this agenda, and will be doing so in a number of ways:

- through providing evidence to influence judgements as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment;
- through monitoring the delivery of partnerships against the negotiated targets in the Local Area Agreement; and
- through an understanding of the wider implications of community safety issues, informed by section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act.

For this reason, it is important to emphasise that the scrutiny of community safety partners and community safety issues is not a stand-alone exercise. It should always be seen in this wider context. Scrutiny will have a role to play in linking up partners working across the spectrum of local policy-making – not just those working in community safety.

Councils should develop ways to integrate the scrutiny of community safety issues within a cohesive and coherent strategy for the scrutiny of other partners and the services they deliver.



## Section 3 - Detailed guidance on sections 19 and 20 of the Act and the Regulations

### 3.1 Committee structures

**Section 19** of the Police and Justice Act 2006 requires every local authority to have a crime and disorder committee with the power to review or scrutinise decisions made or other action taken in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions. The Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009 (the Regulations) complement the provisions under section 19.

All authorities – including fourth option authorities - will need to create, or designate, a crime and disorder committee to deal with crime and disorder scrutiny (see section 2, above, for more detail on executive arrangements).

The terms of reference of the committee are to scrutinise the work of the community safety partnership and the partners who comprise it, **insofar as their activities relate to the partnership itself**. These partners are listed in section 1, above.

It will be up to each authority – along with its partners - to decide on the best way to put procedures in place for these new scrutiny powers.

The Act and the Regulations do not require councils to alter existing committee structures. There, must, however, be a formal place where community safety matters can be discussed. The crime and disorder scrutiny role could be undertaken by:

- a dedicated crime and disorder overview and scrutiny committee (or Sub-Committee) This may be required where there is specific demand – for example, in the case of larger authorities or those councils with a well-developed system of subject-based sub-committees; or
- the main overview and scrutiny committee, in those authorities which only have one or two scrutiny committees. The committee could establish task and finish groups with the specific remit to deal with crime and disorder scrutiny matters, while retaining the ultimate responsibility to look at community safety issues. A small group of Members with a specific remit to scrutinise these crime and disorder issues would enable the Members to focus/specialise on those issues and provide effective scrutiny of crime and disorder matters. The use of small task and finish groups of this type could prove to be an effective technique where local authorities and their partners would rather not use a formal committee for the discussion of all community safety issues.

## Section 3.2 Role of the committee

Whether you are a councillor or a partner, you will find that scrutiny work is more effective where it focuses on a policy issue, rather than on a single organisation.

This is why the legislation gives powers to scrutinise the CDRP, rather than the partners – this supports a focus based on policy and finding solutions. Focusing on policy :

- gives the partners the reassurance that the crime and disorder scrutiny committee is there to ensure that the community safety partnership is accountable and its performance is improved, rather than just 'having a go' at the partners;
- emphasises the fact that scrutiny is focused on improvement, on enhancing the performance of existing services, and on a constructive examination of the priorities of the partnership; and
- means that there is wider scope for the committee, or group of members, to cut across organisational boundaries over the course of their investigation.

The role of the committee in whichever form it is applied should be as a 'critical friend' of the community safety partnership, providing it with constructive challenge at a strategic level rather than adversarial fault-finding at an operational level.

At a basic level, the role of the committee is to do the following:

- to consider Councillor Calls for Action that arise through the council's existing CCfA process. Detailed guidance on CCfA has already been issued. Although the Police and Justice Act 2006 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 put in place CCfA provisions for community safety and for other local government matters respectively, local authorities should ensure that their procedures for all CCfAs are the same, to minimise unnecessary bureaucracy.
- to consider actions undertaken by the responsible authorities on the community safety partnership; and
- make reports or recommendations to the local authority with regard to those functions. In practice, the nature of the committee and its work should mean that recommendations will be directly for responsible partners as well. We will discuss this issue later in this section.

The committee should include in its work programme a list of issues which it needs to cover during the year. This should be agreed in consultation with the relevant partners on the community safety partnership and reflect local community need.

**Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)** for both local government matters and for crime and disorder matters came into force in April 2009. CCfA gives councillors a new right to raise matters of local concern with their council's overview and scrutiny committee. Overview and scrutiny committees can then decide whether to use their powers to investigate the issue.

There are a range of options available to committees in considering how to respond. They could, for example, instigate a review of policy, call members and officers to attend a meeting, and answer questions or make recommendations to the executive. They can even require the executive to review a decision that it has made.

CCfA is therefore a valuable tool in equipping councillors to act as powerful advocates for the communities they serve and to strengthen still further their role as community champions. Councillors will of course continue to resolve issues informally, as they do now. But where they are not satisfied that real action has been taken to resolve the issue they have raised, they have the ability to ask the overview and scrutiny committee to take the matter further.

The crime and disorder CCfA will be an important tool for community safety partnerships to work together to resolve crime and disorder problems, in a forum which is open to the public. It should therefore boost public confidence that police and local authorities are acting on crime and anti-social behaviour issues.

More information on CCfA can be found in the IDeA and CfPS Best Practice Guide <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=9410176>

## Protocols

Throughout this section we suggest that partners and the scrutiny function at the local authority (or local authorities) might want to consider developing a short, flexible and meaningful protocol which lays down the mutual expectations of scrutiny members and partners of the community safety scrutiny process. This could well enable you to embed the committee's work programme more effectively within its core purpose. Certainly, getting the work programme right will be crucial to the success of the scrutiny process for community safety.

If you are thinking of developing a protocol, do remember that it should be a means to an end – a method of improving the relationship between the scrutiny function and its partners. It is not a legal document setting down minimum standards or something which you are required to “comply” with. The example below, of Haringey, illustrates the point of meaningful joint working, and of the virtues of seeking to build real relationships.

### **Building relationships with community safety**

**The London Borough of Haringey** has been doing in-depth reviews of community safety for many years, and has a strong relationship with community safety partners. Building that relationship for them was all about people. Firstly, the council community safety team sat across the corridor, and they built informal relationships as officers. Secondly, the cabinet member for community safety was once a scrutiny chair, and she acted as an advocate for scrutiny, suggesting ways that they could get involved and support what partners were doing. Thirdly, the police seconded an officer to work in the council for several years so the scrutiny function was able to build relationships with a familiar face. These opportunities enable the scrutiny function to build a reputation for being an independent voice. Partnerships can have their own tensions, and partners in Haringey learned that scrutiny could moderate between different views and carry out genuinely useful work that partners valued, supporting policy formulation and facilitating a community response. Their workstreams included:

- Anti-social behaviour – this was successful because it was deliberately timed to fit with a strategy the partnership was writing and could therefore feed into the strategy directly;
- CCTV – the partnership requested the scrutiny functions help as part of a wider review of CCTV, and even provided funding to engage Leicester University for expert advice; and
- street prostitution – this review also used a well-known criminologist, and it was so well regarded that Haringey’s scrutiny function was later called as a witness by the London Assembly during their own review of the topic across London

Your contact for more information:

Rob Mack, London Borough of Haringey, [rob.mack@haringey.gov.uk](mailto:rob.mack@haringey.gov.uk)

### **3.3 Frequency of meetings**

The regulations leave the frequency of meetings to local discretion, subject to the minimum requirement of once a year.

If a local authority decides to undertake “set piece” community safety scrutiny only once a year, this annual meeting could be in the form of an event looking at crime and disorder matters and discussing which crime and disorder matters should be considered in the next municipal year as matters of local concern.

In addition, the scrutiny function should consider community safety issues more consistently throughout the year, just as it would with any other subject matter. Although it is difficult to suggest an arbitrary figure for an “ideal” number of meetings, scrutiny functions and partners should work together to come up with local solutions, which might form a combination of formal meetings, informal “task and finish” groups, or other methods of evidence gathering and public involvement.

As part of the accountability role of the committee, it might be useful to request the attendance of senior members of the partnership at key meetings through the year. This might include the chair of the partnership, the Cabinet member with community safety responsibilities, or senior members of partner organisations, such as the local police commander.

## **Two-tier scrutiny**

We touched briefly on issues of two-tier scrutiny in Section 2, but this section goes into more detail on the practicalities.

The requirements under sections 19 of the Police and Justice Act and the Regulations will apply to both county and district local authorities.

Whilst it will be for each local authority to decide how it will implement crime and disorder scrutiny, it makes sense that both tiers work together as far as possible to avoid any duplication. As explained in Section 2, above, districts and counties should consider developing a joint approach for looking at community safety issues that cut across organisational boundaries.

### Joint crime and disorder committees

**Section 21** of the Police and Justice Act 2006 amends section 5 of the Crime and Disorder Act to enable the Secretary of State to make an order requiring councils to appoint a joint committee to carry out crime and disorder scrutiny functions. This will be used **where CDRP mergers have taken place**, so that responsible authorities and co-operating bodies are not required to answer to two or more separate crime and disorder committees. Otherwise, committees may find it beneficial to work together informally..

A number of local authorities have already taken this joint approach and because of the link with the LAA and community safety, one possibility would be that community safety issues could form part of the work of a joint overview and scrutiny committee.

Councils in **Cumbria** have created a Joint Committee which aims to take a

strategic overview of the performance and delivery of the community strategy as co-ordinated through the Cumbria Strategic Partnership.

**Staffordshire County Council** have set up a Partnerships, Scrutiny and Performance Panel to examine the performance of the Local Area Agreement which includes the delivery of the community safety agenda.

A county-wide committee specifically for community safety might be made up of the chairs of the district council crime and disorder committees as well as some county councillors – it should be pointed out that councils will still need their own committees despite the existence of joint structures. This is as much for the sake of pragmatism as to meet the requirements of the Act – there will always be local community safety issues best dealt with by individual authorities.

While a joint approach to crime and disorder scrutiny is beneficial, it should not be undertaken instead of scrutiny by individual local authorities at a district or county level, but should be used to complement that form of scrutiny. It should also be emphasised that it is quite possible to take advantage of many of the benefits of joint working merely through enhanced communication between neighbouring authorities and their relevant partners. For many authorities and their partners, joint arrangements may not be appropriate or desirable at present.

### **Section 3.4 Co-option**

The regulations allow crime and disorder committees to co-opt additional members to serve on the committee. These co-optees can be specialists in particular areas and can bring great value and expertise to the committee's work.

Members can be co-opted in accordance with the Regulations, which allow a committee to co-opt additional persons provided that they are an employee, officer or member of a responsible authority or of a co-operating person or body and are not a member of the executive of the local authority. The committee can decide whether they should have the right to vote. However, the decision to allow them to vote should be taken in accordance with any scheme in place under Schedule 1 to the Local Government Act 2000. Membership can be limited to membership in respect of certain issues only. The council should take care to clarify the role of such a co-optee, who may be expected, as part of the committee, to hold his or her own organisation to account.

There is also a general power to include additional non voting members under section 21(10) LGA and paragraph 5 of Schedule 8 to the Police Justice Act.

## Co-option and Schedule 1 to the Local Government Act 2000

Under Schedule 1 of the Local Government Act 2000, councils can put in place a formal scheme (similar to the council's scheme of delegations) to allow a co-opted member to have full voting rights.

If you already have a scheme, your co-option plans for community safety must comply with it. Local authorities may prefer ask people [to contribute informally to small task and finish groups or to participate as non-voting members, rather than as full voting members of committees, to ensure that co-optees' work and contribution is focused on areas where they can add most value. So the council and its partners may agree that, although co-option to a committee might be appropriate, the co-optee should not have voting rights.

### Co-option and police authorities

Police authorities occupy a unique position within the landscape of community safety partnerships. They have a clear, statutory role to hold to account the police.

In this context, it is vital that local authorities' community safety scrutiny complements this role. Local authorities should, in all instances, presume that the police authority should play an active part at committee when community safety matters are being discussed – and particularly when the police are to be present.

Local authorities should take the following steps to involve police authorities in work undertaken by their committees.

#### *Option 1*

One member of the crime and disorder committee should be a member of the police authority. We envisage this being the approach that will be adopted by most (but not necessarily all) counties and unitaries.

However, there are a number of circumstances where this will not be possible. In many authorities (unitaries, counties and districts alike) there may be no member appropriate to sit on the committee in this capacity. The principal reasons would be:

- If the relevant local authority representative on the police authority is a member of the executive; or
- If the local authority has no direct member representation on the police authority. There are many areas for which this will be the case, given

that most police authorities cover large areas but only have 9 local councillor members.

### *Option 2*

The second option is for all other circumstances – covering most districts, and those counties and unitaries where having a police authority member on the committee will not be possible.

In these circumstances, a member of the police authority should be issued with a standing invitation to attend the committee as an “expert adviser”. Ideally this would be a police authority member, but subject to local agreement there may be some circumstances, and meetings, where a police authority officer would be more appropriate. For example, care will need to be taken when inviting police authority members to attend when they are also councillors.

Such an advisor would not be a formal member of the committee, but would be able to participate in committee discussion as an expert witness.

Steps should also be taken to ensure that, where appropriate, the police authority have a direct input into the delivery of task and finish reviews that involve the police. The level of involvement in such work that is appropriate can be decided between the police authority and the local authority, the authorities delivering the work.

Agreement over these issues should – as we suggested at the beginning of this section – form part of a protocol between the local authority and its partners. This will allow for local differences, and for agreement over further methods of engagement and involvement – the sharing of work programmes and delivery of joint work pertaining to the police, for example.

The vital thing to remember is that clear and sustained engagement between the police authority and the local authority, as equals, will be necessary to make sure that their roles complement each other. This goes beyond attendance at committee, which should be treated as only one element of this engagement.

These arrangements, and the unique relationship which is necessary between councils and police authorities, should not divert scrutiny bodies or their partners from the fact that the scrutiny of community safety is about much more than the police force and their activities, as we made clear in earlier sections.

### *Option 3*

The third option would be for committees to consider co-opting a police authority member onto the committee when policing matters are being considered, and it would be for the police authority to decide the most appropriate member to



appoint – this can be an independent or councillor member. This would provide a more direct link between the police authority and overview and scrutiny committee and would be particularly relevant if the committee is considering matters directly relevant to policing.

#### **To co-opt or not to co-opt...**

**Suffolk's Local Area Agreement Joint Scrutiny Panel** has adopted co-option as a new way to invigorate scrutiny and involve the community. The panel has appointed six Independent Community Members as permanent co-opted scrutiny members with full voting rights. An advertising campaign was held and applicants were put through a rigorous recruitment process. The roles are well-defined with both job specifications and person profiles. Though the roles were advertised in the media, the most effective marketing was through established networks of people already involved actively in the community.

The Independent Community Members are paid expenses but no salary, and are committed to six meetings a year. In practice, however, they are very enthusiastic and engaged and take part in a great deal more, including task and finish groups. The added dividend of these new faces has been a renewed interest and energy for scrutiny from existing councillors. An Independent Community Member was elected as Chairman by panel members.

The LAA Joint Scrutiny Panel, as well as involving the community, also links together relationships in a two-tier area. The panel has members from the county and each district and borough council in Suffolk, and is a forum which is an effective example of cooperation across the tiers.

**Cardiff City Council** uses expert witnesses to improve its scrutiny reviews. In November 2007 the council did a theme review of the structure in the council for delivering crime and disorder reduction. Cardiff regularly looks to bring in the highest profile experts possible for its theme reviews, such as Professor Michael Parkinson on competitiveness and Ben Page from Ipsos Mori on consultation. For this review they invited South Wales Police, Cardiff Local Health Board, the National Probation Service, Welsh Assembly Government and the Home Office to bring high-level expertise and enhance their understanding of wider issues.

Your contacts for more information:

Sue Morgan, Suffolk County Council, [sue.morgan@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:sue.morgan@suffolk.gov.uk)  
Richard Phillips, Cardiff City Council, [R.Phillips@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:R.Phillips@cardiff.gov.uk)

## Section 3.5 Responding to requests

### Requests for information

As part of the crime and disorder scrutiny process, the relevant scrutiny committee will from time to time request for further information from the community safety partnership – performance information, for example.

When asked, the partnership will be under a duty to provide this information. There is no specific timescale for this, but the committee can expect a response to be provided as soon as reasonably possible.

### Timescales

Community safety partnerships will be obliged to respond to requests from committees within a reasonable time. The committee and the partnership may want to agree a certain timescale locally.

Partnerships should bear in mind the need for the information to be relevant to the committee's purposes. There is obviously little purpose in burying councillors beneath a morass of reports filled with technical jargon. This may provide you with an opportunity to reappraise how internal reports could be drafted in a more accessible style and made more widely publicly available. You could assign a named link officer in your organisation to liaise with the scrutiny committee, to ensure that communication is swift and effective, and that requests for information can be dealt with smoothly.

If you are a councillor, or are an officer supporting councillors, you should ensure that requests for information are well focused and thought through. Requests should avoid duplication (with requests made quite recently, or requests being made by neighbouring councils which might impact on the same partner organisations).

### Information requests and data protection

The information provided by responsible authorities and co-operating bodies must be depersonalised, unless the identification of an individual is necessary or appropriate in order for the committee to properly exercise its powers. The information should also not include information that would be reasonably likely to

prejudice legal proceedings or current or future operations of the responsible authority or co-operating body.. In practice, it is unlikely that the committee which will need to receive reports relating to specific individuals, or where specific individuals are mentioned in respect of crime and disorder matters.

Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 should not be used as a method to bypass the requirement to depersonalise information by placing reports which are not depersonalised onto Part II of a committee agenda, as an item to be heard without the press or public present.

### Making and responding to recommendations

If a committee drafts a report or recommendations which have an impact on community safety issues, the following should occur:

- Copies of the reports and recommendations should be sent to the such responsible authorities or co-operating bodies as are affected by the report or recommendations, or as otherwise appropriate in accordance with section 19(8) of the Police and Justice Act 2006;
- The relevant partner (or partners) should submit a response within a period of 28 days from the date the report or recommendations are submitted (or if this is not possible as soon as reasonably possible thereafter); and
- Following the receipt of the response, the committee will need to agree with the relevant partner(s) how progress in implementing the recommendations will be monitored.

As we have already suggested, a protocol might be helpful to define how these arrangements will work in practice. Such a protocol could well make provision for the scrutiny function to consult the partnership informally on a report, or recommendations, before the report is formally submitted. This consultation will make it more likely that recommendations, when they are formally made, are relevant and realistic.

With this provision there is a clear link between the Police and Justice Act and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, which also requires partners to respond to requests for information, and to respond to reports and recommendations made by an authority's scrutiny function. Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act complements these existing powers.

### **Section 3.6 Attending committee meetings**

From time to time, the committee may request the attendance of a representative of the partnership.

It is common practice in local authority overview and scrutiny work for people to attend to give evidence to scrutiny enquiries. It is often good practice for those attending to receive details of why they are attending such meetings.

If you are a community safety partner, and you receive such a request, you are obliged to send a representative to attend unless reasonable notice has not been given to the person of the intended date for the meeting. What is meant by "reasonable notice" is not clarified in the regulations or legislation and is something which could be defined in a local protocol on crime and disorder scrutiny as agreed by the committee and local partners.

You should not consider such an invitation as a threat. Instead, it is an opportunity for crime and disorder partners and the committee to discuss issues of mutual concern or to highlight positive work to help reduce crime and disorder. The attendance of officers/employees can also help support local public scrutiny. It will generally be more appropriate for more senior employees/officers to attend, mainly because they are likely to have the general expertise to enable them to answer policy questions at the meeting itself.

Likewise, if you are a councillor, you should not consider the power to invite representatives of the partnership to attend to discuss community safety issues as a power that you can exercise without regard to the capacity constraints of the partners you are inviting, or the value they are likely to be able to add to a committee discussion.

### **Glossary**

Here are some terms you may come across that have not been mentioned elsewhere in this document:

- **Activity Based Costing (ABC)** –an approach taken in the police which tries to measure how police time is spent, in order to improve efficiency. It is being scaled back for being too bureaucratic, but will still be used in a more limited way.
- **Assessment of Policing and Community Safety (APACs)** – is the assessment framework for the police and community safety, and has been designed to link with Comprehensive Area Assessment. It replaces the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF).
- **Justice Reinvestment** – is a concept from America that aims to reduce re-offending by moving resources down to the local level. There is a pilot currently being run to test this idea in London called “Diamond Districts”.
- **Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB)** – is the partnership board that oversees criminal justice. Though it is called “local” it usually operates at a higher level than the local authority.
- **National Intelligence Model (NIM)** – is a business model for policing that uses intelligence about crime patterns to inform how resources, including across partnerships, are deployed.
- **Prolific and other Priority Offender scheme (PPO)** – is a scheme run by all CDRPs to provide a focus on offenders who have been identified as posing the highest risk to communities.
- **Restorative Justice** – is an approach used alongside criminal justice to help victims gain a sense of closure, help offenders recognise the impact of their crime and reduce the chance they will re-offend.
- **Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)** – is legislation that gives local bodies powers to use covert techniques such as surveillance.
- **Serious and Organised Crime Agency (SOCA)** – is the national agency with responsibility for tackling crimes such as drug trafficking, money laundering and major fraud.

- **National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA)** – is the policing equivalent of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), producing guidance, learning and development, and providing some national infrastructure.
- **Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)** – is the inspectorate for policing which works alongside the Audit Commission on Comprehensive Area Assessment, and delivers APACs (see above).
- **Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)** – is the national body representing Chief Constables, but has a wider role in developing policy than most professional associations.

**First Step Resources**

**Crime Reduction Website**

[www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk)

This website is the Home Office's one stop shop for information on crime reduction. There are some interesting sources of information – for example, at [www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/toolkits](http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/toolkits), topics cover a range of areas which might arise in a scrutiny review, such as Fear of Crime or Alcohol Related Crime. The toolkits include facts and figures and policy context for each topic, which could be a useful shortcut for desk based research. There is also a collection of research on a wide range of topics, from Neighbourhood Watch, to Street Sex Work to Taxi Robberies.

The research tab also has a page providing direction to all the latest sources of crime statistics.

***Delivering Community Safety: A guide to effective partnership working (2007)***

This is the official guidance for Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. It sets out statutory requirements, suggested practice, potential barriers and possible solutions and implementation checklists. If scrutiny function is looking to test a partnership against the standard for good practice, this resource is the best place to start.

***Flanagan Review Final Report (2008)***

In 2007 the Home Office announced an independent review of policing by Sir Ronnie Flanagan to look at neighbourhood policing, bureaucracy, accountability and managing resources. Flanagan was then Chief Inspector of Constabulary and is well respected in the policing community. His review was widely welcomed though he explicitly refused to make any positive recommendations about changes to structural accountability in the police. This is a readable report and is a useful insight into concerns and priorities in the policing community.

***Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime (2008)***

This independent review was led by Louise Casey, the former 'Respect Tsar.' with a reputation for toughness and plain speaking. The review focuses on why communities have lost confidence in criminal justice, and why they don't take a

more active role in fighting crime. It is a useful read for those involved in scrutiny because it focuses on public perceptions, is written in a conversational style and makes practical and interesting recommendations, including for local authorities.

***From the Neighbourhood to the National: policing our communities together (2008)***

This is the latest Policing Green Paper, which paved the way for the Policing and Crime Bill. It provides the most recent expression of the current Government's perspective and intentions on policing and community safety. Readers should be aware, however, that the expressed intention to legislate for new Crime and Policing Representatives will not come to pass, as it was dropped from the Bill shortly before publication. Instead an internal Labour party review was set up under David Blunkett to look again at the difficult issue of local accountability of the police.

**Integration Neighbourhood Policing and Management**

There is no publication to support this, but information about the project is available on the IDeA website. The IDeA and National Policing Improvement Agency are co-ordinating a group of 'exemplar sites' to help progress the integration neighbourhood policing with neighbourhood management – one of the key recommendations of the Flanagan Review.

**Tackling Anti-social Behaviour Website**

[www.respect.gov.uk](http://www.respect.gov.uk)

Anti-social behaviour is a key issue, and one that has particular importance for members of the public, and therefore for councillors. This website is a one-stop resource on everything to do with tackling anti-social behaviour. One resource that is particularly practical and interesting is the collection of step-by-step guides to tackling a ranges of very specific problems, from graffiti to mini-motos to fireworks. Scrutiny committees doing themed reviews may find resources here to help them assess performance and identify positive recommendations.

***National Community Safety Plan 2008-11***  
***Cutting Crime: A new partnership 2008-11***

These two documents were published together – one is the overarching strategy on crime, the other is a more focused document on community safety which replaces an earlier plan. The Community Safety Plan reflects the general drive across government to reduce the central burdens on local delivery, though councillors will note there is still a significant focus on national priorities which partnerships will be reacting to. These documents may not be as user-friendly for councillors as some other resources.



S T A T U T O R Y I N S T R U M E N T S

2009 No. 942

CRIMINAL LAW, ENGLAND AND WALES

The Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny)  
Regulations 2009

*Made*

6th April 2009

*Laid before Parliament*

8th April 2009

*Coming into force in accordance with regulation 1(2)*

The Secretary of State makes the following Regulations in exercise of the powers conferred by section 20(3) and (4) of the Police and Justice Act 2006<sup>(1)</sup>.

In accordance with section 20(4) of that Act, the Secretary of State has consulted with the Welsh Ministers<sup>(2)</sup> regarding the provisions in relation to local authorities in Wales.

**Citation and commencement**

1.—(1) These Regulations may be cited as the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009.

(2) These Regulations shall come into force in respect of local authorities in England on 30th April 2009 and in respect of local authorities in Wales on 1st October 2009.

**Interpretation**

2. In these Regulations—

“2006 Act” means the Police and Justice Act 2006;

“depersonalised information” means information which does not constitute personal data within the meaning of the Data Protection Act 1998<sup>(3)</sup>.

**Co-opting of additional members**

3.—(1) The crime and disorder committee of a local authority may co-opt additional members to serve on the committee subject to paragraphs (2), (3), (4) and (5).

(2) A person co-opted to serve on a crime and disorder committee shall not be entitled to vote on any particular matter, unless the committee so determines.

(3) A co-opted person’s membership may be limited to the exercise of the committee’s powers in relation to a particular matter or type of matter.

(4) A crime and disorder committee shall only co-opt a person to serve on the committee who—

(a) is an employee, officer or member of a responsible authority or of a co-operating person or body; and

(b) is not a member of the executive of the committee’s local authority (or authorities).

(5) The membership of a person co-opted to serve on a crime and disorder committee may be withdrawn at any time by the committee.

#### **Frequency of meetings**

4. A crime and disorder committee shall meet to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions as the committee considers appropriate but no less than once in every twelve month period.

#### **Information**

5.—(1) Where a crime and disorder committee makes a request in writing for information, as defined in section 20(6A) of the 2006 Act(4), to the responsible authorities or the co-operating persons or bodies, the authorities, or persons or bodies (as applicable) must provide such information in accordance with paragraphs (2) and (3).

(2) The information referred to in paragraph (1) must be provided no later than the date indicated in the request save that if some or all of the information cannot reasonably be provided on such date, that information must be provided as soon as reasonably possible.

(3) The information referred to in paragraph (1)—

(a) shall be depersonalised information, unless (subject to sub-paragraph (b)) the identification of an individual is necessary or appropriate in order to enable the crime and disorder committee to properly exercise its powers; and

(b) shall not include information that would be reasonably likely to prejudice legal proceedings or current or future operations of the responsible authorities, whether acting together or individually, or of the co-operating persons or bodies.

#### **Attendance at committee meetings**

6.—(1) Subject to paragraph (2), a crime and disorder committee may require the attendance before it of an officer or employee of a responsible authority or of a co-operating person or body in order to answer questions.

(2) The crime and disorder committee may not require a person to attend in accordance with paragraph (1) unless reasonable notice of the intended date of attendance has been given to that person.

#### **Reports and recommendations**

7. Where a crime and disorder committee makes a report or recommendations to a responsible authority or to a co-operating person or body in accordance with section 19(8)(b) of the 2006 Act, the responses to such report or recommendations of each relevant authority, body or person shall be—

(a) in writing; and

(b) submitted to the crime and disorder committee within a period of 28 days from the date of the report or recommendations or, if this is not reasonably possible, as soon as reasonably possible thereafter.

*Vernon Coaker*  
Minister of State

Home Office  
6th April 2009

#### **EXPLANATORY NOTE** *(This note is not part of the Regulations)*

These Regulations are made under section 20(3) (in respect of local authorities in England) and 20(4) (in respect of local authorities in Wales) of the Police and Justice Act 2006. The Regulations supplement the

provisions in section 19 of that Act by making provision for the exercise of powers by crime and disorder committees of local authorities.

Regulation 3 provides that crime and disorder committees may co-opt additional members from those persons and bodies who are responsible authorities within the meaning of section 5 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and from those persons and bodies with whom the responsible authorities have a duty to co-operate under section 5(2) of that Act (the “co-operating persons and bodies”) subject to the provisions set out in that regulation.

Regulation 4 provides that a crime and disorder committee shall meet to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions, no less than once in every twelve month period.

Regulation 5 provides that responsible authorities or co-operating persons or bodies must provide such information as is requested of them by the crime and disorder committee, subject to the provisions in that regulation.

Regulation 6 provides that a crime and disorder committee may require the attendance before it of a representative of a responsible authority or of a co-operating person or body in order to answer questions, subject to the provisions in that regulation.

Regulation 7 provides that where a crime and disorder committee makes a report or recommendations to responsible authorities or co-operating persons or bodies in accordance with section 19(8)(b) of the Police and Justice Act 2006, the responses to such report or recommendations of each relevant authority, body or person shall be in writing and within 28 days of the date of the report or recommendations or, if this is not reasonably possible, as soon as reasonably possible thereafter.

(1)

2006, c. 48. Section 20 has been amended by section 121 and has been prospectively amended by sections 126 and 241, and part 6 of Schedule 18 to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act [2007 \(c. 28\)](#). [Back \[1\]](#)

(2)

The functions of the National Assembly for Wales were transferred to the Welsh Ministers by virtue of paragraph 30 of Schedule 11 to the Government of Wales Act [2006 \(c.32\)](#). [Back \[2\]](#)

(3)

[2008 c.29](#). [Back \[3\]](#)

(4)

Section 20(6A) was inserted by section 121(2) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act [2007 \(c. 28\)](#). [Back \[4\]](#)

## Appendix D

### Local Government Involvement in Public Health Act 2007 - Extract

#### Section 126

##### 126 Reference of local crime and disorder matters to crime and disorder committees etc

(1) The Police and Justice Act 2006 (c. 48) is amended as follows.

(2) In section 19 (local authority scrutiny of crime and disorder matters), for subsections (3) to (8) substitute—

“(3) A local authority must—

(a) ensure that its crime and disorder committee has power (whether by virtue of section 21(2) of the Local Government Act 2000 or regulations made under section 32(3) of that Act or otherwise) to make a report or recommendations to the local authority with respect to any matter which is a local crime and disorder matter in relation to a member of the authority, and

(b) make arrangements which enable any member of the authority who is not a member of the crime and disorder committee to refer any local crime and disorder matter to the committee.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (3)(b), arrangements enable a person to refer a matter to a committee if they enable him to ensure that the matter is included in the agenda for, and discussed at, a meeting of the committee.

(5) Subsections (6) and (7) apply where a local crime and disorder matter is referred to a crime and disorder committee by a member of a local authority in accordance with arrangements made under subsection (3)(b).

(6) In considering whether or not to make a report or recommendations to the local authority in relation to the matter, the committee may have regard to—

(a) any powers which the member may exercise in relation to the matter by virtue of section 236 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (exercise of functions by local councillors in England), and

(b) any representations made by the member as to why it would be appropriate for the committee to exercise any power which it has by virtue of subsection (3)(a) in relation to the matter.

(7) If the committee decides not to make a report or recommendations to the local authority in relation to the matter, it must notify the member of—

(a) its decision, and

(b) the reasons for it.

(8) Where a crime and disorder committee of a local authority makes a report or recommendations to the authority by virtue of subsection (3)(a), it must—

(a) provide a copy of the report or recommendations to any member of the authority who referred the local crime and disorder matter in question to the committee in accordance with arrangements made under subsection (3)(b), and

(b) provide a copy of the report or recommendations to such of—

(i) the responsible authorities, and

(ii) the co-operating persons and bodies,

as it thinks appropriate.

- (8A) Subsection (8B) applies where the crime and disorder committee of a local authority—
- (a) makes a report or recommendations to the authority by virtue of subsection (3)(a), or
  - (b) provides a copy of a report or recommendations under subsection (2) or (8)(b).
- (8B) Where this subsection applies—
- (a) the crime and disorder committee must notify the authority, body or person to whom it makes the report or recommendations or provides the copy that paragraph (b) applies, and
  - (b) the authority, body or person must—
    - (i) consider the report or recommendations;
    - (ii) respond to the committee indicating what (if any) action it proposes to take;
    - (iii) have regard to the report or recommendations in exercising its functions.”
- (3) In subsection (9)(b), for “subsection (1)(b) or (6)” substitute “this section”.
- (4) In subsection (11)—
- (a) after the definition of “crime and disorder functions” insert—
 

“electoral area” has the meaning given by section 203(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983;”, and
  - (b) for the definition of “local crime and disorder matter” substitute—
 

“local crime and disorder matter”, in relation to a member of a local authority, means a matter concerning—

    - (a) crime and disorder (including in particular forms of crime and disorder that involve anti-social behaviour or other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment), or
    - (b) the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances,

which affects all or part of the electoral area for which the member is elected or any person who lives or works in that area.”
- (5) Section 20 (guidance and regulations regarding crime and disorder matters) is amended as follows.
- (6) In subsections (1) and (2), after “under” insert “or by virtue of”.
- (7) In subsection (5), omit—
- (a) paragraph (f); and
  - (b) sub-paragraphs (i) to (iii) of paragraph (g).

Drugs and Alcohol Directorate (DAD)  
Partnership Development Unit  
Home Office  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

May 2009

Produced in partnership with:



**ISBN:** 978-1-84726-912-6

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION 16 JULY 2009

---

### REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT PLAN - REPORT FROM A WORKING GROUP OF THE ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

(Working Group Lead Member)

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report asks the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to note its earlier adoption of the report of a working group of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel relating to the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Improvement Plan. As the recommendations in the report apply to the Improvement Plan from April 2009, it was necessary to agree this report with Members of the Panel and the Commission separately, in advance of this meeting. The report was subsequently sent to the Executive member on 3 July 2009.

#### 2 SUGGESTED ACTION

- 2.1 **To note the previously agreed report of the review of the Implementation of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Improvement Plan undertaken by a working group of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.**

#### 3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The key objectives and activities of the working group of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel are in the attached report.
- 3.2 The report was sent formally to the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing on 3 July. The Executive is due to consider its response to the report at its meeting on 15 September.

#### Background Papers

'Review of the Implementation of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Improvement Plan' – report of the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group, June 2009.

#### Contact for further information

Richard Beaumont – 01344 352283  
e-mail: [richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

Emma Silverton – 01344 352325  
e-mail: [emma.silverton@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:emma.silverton@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

This page is intentionally left blank



# Housing and Council Tax Benefit Improvement Plan

Review of the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit  
Improvement Plan by a Working Group of the  
Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny  
Panel



June 2009

## Table of Contents

	Page Number
1. Foreword by the Lead Member	1
2. Background	2
3. Investigation, Information Gathering and Analysis	3
4. Conclusions	17
5. Recommendations	20
6. Glossary	22
Appendix 1 – The Scope of the Review	23
Appendix 2 – Draft Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service Improvement Plan	26
Appendix 3 – The Staff Structure of the Bracknell Forest Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service	37
Appendix 4 - Housing and Council Tax Benefit Benchmarking Group Membership	38

## Acknowledgements

The Working Group would like to express its thanks and appreciation to the following people for their co-operation and time. All those who have participated in the review have been thanked for their contribution and will be provided with a copy of this report.

Name	Position
Councillor Birch	Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing
Margaret Kempster	Welfare Benefits Caseworker, Citizens Advice Bureau
Leona Rees-Tucker	Social Policy Secondment, Citizens Advice Bureau

The following officers from Bracknell Forest Council:

Name	Position
Shanaz Alam	Benefits Service Manager
Richard Beaumont	Head of Overview and Scrutiny
Simon Hendey	Chief Officer: Housing, Environment, Culture & Communities
Nicola Jolly	Assessment Officer - Housing Benefits
Emma Silverton	Overview and Scrutiny Officer

## 1. Foreword by the Lead Member

- 1.1 In the current economic climate access to benefits has become of concern to more of our residents. It was appreciated that this review comes at an interesting time for all concerned. The members of the working group were taken through the complex calculations and processes that connect the client to the Council (and often Department of Work and Pensions).
- 1.2 The scheme for evaluating the effectiveness of Benefits Departments has changed, and is changing. The Members were taken through the internal processes expected to be looked at in the forthcoming inspection regime. Members had some concerns over the external interfaces to the DWP, and the potential for a change in circumstances for a client to go unreported for a length of time.
- 1.3 The Members were pleased to read and receive positive messages about the Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) Benefits Service from the recipients, and support groups. The working group also noted that previous reviews and a mock inspection showed that Bracknell Forest's Housing and Council Tax Benefits Service provides high performing services at a reasonable cost.
- 1.4 The working group had excellent co-operation, from both the BFC officers, and from the Citizens Advice Bureaux. The group looks forward to its continuing review of the Benefits Improvement plans.
- 1.5 Details of the Brief we worked to are in Appendix 1.
- 1.6 The Working Group comprised:
  - Councillor Finch (Lead Member)
  - Councillor Beadsley
  - Councillor Burrows

## 2. Background

- 2.1 Due to a change in the Audit Commission inspection regime for the Benefit Service it has been anticipated by the Bracknell Forest Borough Council's (BFC) Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) Service that the current inspection rating of 4 out of a possible 4 may decrease to a 3 at the next inspection.
- 2.2 A Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability (CIPFA) benchmarking study and a mock inspection were carried out to identify any areas for improvement needed for the Council's Housing and Council Tax Benefit (H&CTB) Service. The actions for improvement have been identified by officers in the form of an improvement plan which can be seen in Appendix 2.
- 2.3 The Chief Officer for Housing requested that Overview and Scrutiny comment upon and be involved in monitoring the implementation of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service Improvement Plan. This was agreed by the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, which set up a Working Group (WG) to consider this in detail.
- 2.4 The Working Group welcomed undertaking this review as Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit is an important service for many Bracknell Forest residents, particularly in the current economic downturn.
- 2.5 The main purpose of the review was to look at the scope and coverage of the H&CTB Service Improvement Plan, to ensure it adequately addressed all points of concern raised by the mock inspection.
- 2.6 Key objectives of the review were to ensure that the improvement plan for the H&CTB Service is properly targeted at securing improvements to: benefits administration; take up; cost effectiveness and customer satisfaction.
- 2.7 As well as providing input into the improvement plan for 2009/10 the Working Group will receive regular monitoring reports on the achievements of the improvement plan and continue to provide advice and guidance when appropriate.
- 2.8 The current H&CTB improvement plan runs until the end of March 2009. The WG has agreed to monitor both the implementation of this short term improvement plan and then contribute to developing and monitoring an annual improvement plan.
- 2.9 The WG determined the scope of its review, as set out in Appendix 1.

## Investigation, Information Gathering and Analysis

### Scoping meeting with the Chief Officer of Housing

- 3.1 The Working Group commenced its review with a meeting to obtain background information on Bracknell Forest's Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (H&CTB) Service and the draft improvement plan.
- 3.2 The Chief Officer for Housing briefed Members on the H&CTB Service at Bracknell Forest Council and the H&CTB Service Improvement Plan developed from a benchmarking exercise to improve performance and cost, and a mock inspection that took place to compare the Benefit Service against the Audit Commission's new key lines of enquiry for their assessment of Local Authority Benefits Services.
- 3.3 BFC's Benefit Service currently employs 24 staff; there is 1 vacancy due to internal recruitment. Currently two positions within the team are being filled by external contractors, who process some claims off-site. The work of the external contractors is assessed by the Benefit Service to make sure it is completed to a high standard. The officer structure of the team can be seen in Appendix 3.
- 3.4 The Benefit Service currently has 5,600 claimants. This figure relates to the number of households, not the number of individual customers.
- 3.5 When calculating a resident's entitlement to H&CTB all the benefits that a customer is claiming for are taken into account. The exceptions include Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and War Disability Pensions.



A selection of leaflets on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are available from <http://www.benefit-leaflets.org>

- 3.6 There are concerns that the revised assessment methodology for H&CTB Services may cause Bracknell Forest's Benefit Service's current 4 star rating to fall, but it was known that some other 4 star benefit services in other local authorities would be likely to fall to a greater degree than that of Bracknell Forest.
- 3.7 The benchmarking study compared the Benefit Service at Bracknell Forest against 18 other Local Authorities (listed in Appendix 4) based on similar operating systems, case load and geography. Results showed that Bracknell Forest has significantly above average performance and below average cost. The average cost per weighted case is £70.92 (after the housing stock transfer of BFC's council homes to Bracknell Forest Homes). A key area identified for improvement is the time it takes to process new claims.
- 3.8 The mock inspection of the benefits service identified 6 areas for improvement as follows:
1. Building service around customer needs
  2. Establish a centralised library of procedures, training notes etc
  3. Establish and clarify links with the Local Area Agreement
  4. Establish better ways to benchmark and prove value for money
  5. Establish organisational leadership/ challenge of the service
  6. Ensure defective claim analysis<sup>1</sup> produces positive outcomes for customers.
- 3.9 The latest version of the draft improvement plan developed from the mock inspection can be seen in Appendix 2. The improvement plan has been divided into 7 sections to cover each of the areas identified for improvement.
- 3.10 Benefit Service staff are developing a profile of who is currently claiming H&CTB and potential claimants, to include ethnicity data. It was noted by the WG that a challenge would be to have a set of data that the Benefit Service could evidence is better than the census data, which is what is currently being used to look at the demographics of claimants.
- 3.11 H&CTB is a demand-led service. The service has undertaken business planning to address the changes in circumstances that have started to occur in the current economic climate.

---

<sup>1</sup> Defective claims are those which not completed as sufficient evidence is not produced by the claimant to support the application.

## **Meeting with Staff from the Citizen's Advice Bureau**

- 3.12 Two members of staff, a Welfare Benefits Caseworker and a Social Policy Secondment, from the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) attended a meeting of the Working Group to give an overview of, and advice on, H&CTB issues from the CAB perspective.
- 3.13 From the CAB's point of view the experience of working with Bracknell Forest Council's Benefit Service has improved greatly over the last few years. There was a time when the relationship between the two organisations was combative as the CAB was spending much of its time working on behalf of residents to try to resolve H&CTB claim issues. In more recent years the lines of communication have improved between the organisations and there is now more willingness to help address issues when they occur and to try to resolve them before they develop into bigger problems.
- 3.14 The most common experiences that the CAB has with residents regarding H&CTB can be divided into two types of issue. Firstly residents who have never claimed H&CTB before and secondly residents who have made a claim for H&CTB and something has gone wrong.
- 3.15 In the case of residents who have never claimed any benefit before, the CAB provides advice on which benefits they are eligible for and how to make a claim. The CAB believes that the reason residents do not go directly to the Council to enquire about their benefit entitlement is that residents are often unsure whether they are entitled to benefit and therefore it does not occur to them to contact the Council. Residents often have no experience of dealing directly with the Council and do not know who or how to contact Bracknell Forest Council (BFC). It was noted that residents with Bracknell Forest Homes often go directly to the Council as they have had experience of contacting the Council on previous occasions.
- 3.16 If residents have an issue with their benefit claim the CAB provides help and advice to residents as well as helping them to write letters to the Council to try to resolve the issue. It was noted that problems with benefits other than housing and council tax benefit can have a knock-on effect on H&CTB entitlement as the amount someone is earning directly affects the amount they can claim for in H&CTB.
- 3.17 A common problem for residents is that a 'change of circumstances' (e.g. upon becoming employed) is often not immediately registered, which can lead to an under or overpayment. In some cases it can take up to three months before a change of circumstances is picked up by the system. By this time residents can owe a large amount of money. Residents then receive a letter telling them that they no longer receive the same amount of benefit so have to pay all or a proportion of their rent themselves. This letter also states that the resident needs to pay more money on top of their rent to pay back the overpayment they received. Issues like overpayment can often take a long time to sort out with some cases taking up to a year.

- 3.18 The change in circumstance is particularly difficult for people who move in and out of work and are therefore on and off benefits regularly as the amount they are earning constantly changes. In some cases residents can return to their old level of benefit once they leave work, which is known as a 'link claim'. However in some cases residents can not do this and have to start a new claim which can take time to complete.
- 3.19 An issue commonly noticed by the CAB is verification of supporting documents. New links with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Job Centre Plus are supposed to mean that there is a 'one stop' place for residents to claim benefit. Once residents have completed their application and have taken their identification documents in to the Job Centre or DWP their claim goes to processing and then on to the Benefit Service at BFC. Residents are then often asked to produce their verification documents again at the Council Offices. This can cause a delay in the claim and residents find it hard to understand a delay due to the Benefit Service not having the correct evidence, as they have already produced it when they originally submitted their application.
- 3.20 Another issue noted by the CAB is that there is an imbalance in time given for claims. For example the Benefit Service may issue a letter to a claimant which gives them 4 weeks to produce 3 payslips. The resident may be paid fortnightly so to produce 3 payslips would take 6 weeks which is past the deadline. As a result the claim is stopped<sup>1</sup>. In contrast the Benefit Service can take as long as they like to process the claim once they have received the correct information. It was noted that this is likely to be a legislative issue. In some cases information is requested from non-dependants. This can cause problems as residents are then responsible for producing other people's information which can take time and is difficult if they do not want to give up their personal details such as how much they earn.
- 3.21 The CAB believe that the time it takes to process new claims has greatly improved over the last few years and that the process involved to make a straightforward claim now works very well.
- 3.22 It was noted that the exchange of information between organisations such as the Council's Benefit Service, the DWP and Bracknell Forest Homes may need to be improved. Before Bracknell Forest Homes was created checks could be done to see whether residents had an H&CTB claim outstanding, this can no longer be carried out due to data protection rules. The idea of developing a way around this problem such as residents of Bracknell Forest Homes signing an authorisation form to allow checks to be carried out was mentioned<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> BFC Officers have said that they would not end a claim if they were asking for future payslips. They would just ask for them as and when received.

<sup>2</sup> BFC Officers have said that they already have 3<sup>rd</sup> party consent form for them to be able to discuss claims with landlords etc, and Bracknell Forest Homes already sign an authorisation form.



- 3.23 The CAB often post enquiries to Bracknell Forest Council's H&CTB Service on behalf of residents. It was suggested that it would be helpful if the CAB received an acknowledgement that their letter had been received. Often issues may take some time to deal with and the CAB and the resident are left not knowing what is happening. An acknowledgement letter would let the resident and the CAB know that the Benefit Service have received the enquiry and are dealing with it. It was noted that this could be done with a postcard system or that enquires could be submitted by email and once received an automatic response could be sent out to acknowledge receipt of the query<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.24 When the Benefit Service responds to the query they do so directly to the resident. If the CAB were copied in on any correspondence then they may be able to pick up on any points missed by the residents that could impact on the claim.
- 3.25 The CAB mentioned that correspondence from the Benefit Service can often be difficult to understand particularly for residents. The letter sent out to residents to inform them that they have been overpaid and now owe money back are often very difficult to interpret and understand, causing worry and distress to residents. The letters from the Bracknell Forest Benefit Service have improved over the last few years but it is felt more could be done to improve their clarity<sup>2</sup>.
- 3.26 With regard to the H&CTB Improvement Plan the CAB mentioned that events in the borough were a good way of reaching residents and raising awareness of H&CTB.
- 3.27 The CAB would also be interested in the outcome of the customer survey to see if residents' issues highlighted in the survey match the CAB's understanding of residents' issues.



**Members of the working group met with staff from the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) to gain their views on the Benefit Service at Bracknell Forest Council and how well it works for local residents.**

From the left: Margaret Kempster - Welfare Benefits Caseworker for the CAB, Leona Rees-Tucker – Social Policy Secondment for the CAB and Councillors Burrows, Finch and Beadsley.

<sup>1</sup> BFC Officers have said that they already have an automatic response when an email is received.

<sup>2</sup> BFC Officers have said that this issue has been addressed in the Improvement Plan and that they are reviewing all their correspondence.

- 3.28 The current economic downturn has led to more people seeking advice from at the CAB. Over the last few years debt has been the biggest issue affecting residents however more recently employment issues have been increasing. Many residents are earning less or have been made unemployed which is affecting how much they claim in H&CTB. Since the economic downturn commenced the issues regarding H&CTB have become more complicated with CAB staff spending more time with residents.
- 3.29 The CAB noted that many problems with claiming H&CTB are not due to the Benefit Service. The CAB said it is how these issues are resolved that is important. It was noted that relations between the CAB and Bracknell Forest Council's Benefit Service are good and that communication needs to be kept open to allow for a productive working relationship to benefit Bracknell Forest residents.

### **Visit to Bracknell Forest Council's Benefit Service Offices**

- 3.30 To further the Working Group's understanding of the processes involved in making an H&CTB claim and processing claims and any change of circumstances, a visit to BFC's Benefit Service Office was arranged.

#### An Overview of the Benefit Service

- 3.31 Members received an overview of the Benefit Service structure at Bracknell Forest Council from Shanaz Alam, Benefits Service Manager.
- 3.32 The two external staff that are located in Manchester process claims remotely. BFC only pay for the work that is done by these staff and their work is regularly reviewed to ensure it is meeting the standards set by the Benefit Service. The flexibility of this service means that if the processing workload increases, then an extra member of staff can be employed to help meet the demand.
- 3.33 The Working group noted that H&CTB claims and change of circumstance applications used to come directly to the Council's Benefit Service Offices. Now there are many different channels that residents can make a claim through such as the Job Centre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 3.34 Due to the current economic climate there is a backlog at the Job Centre Plus. This means that it can take up to 3-4 weeks before the Council's Benefit Team is informed of a change of circumstance. This can result in the wrong amount of H&CTB being paid to a resident.
- 3.35 Notifications for a change in circumstances for a resident are received by the Bracknell Forest Benefit Service from the Job Centre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions in electronic format.
- 3.36 The Working Group noted that the Benefit Service are willing to visit or talk with any companies or organisations in Bracknell Forest that are closing down or making a large number of redundancies, to advise staff whether they may be eligible for Benefits.
- 3.37 The Members were given a tour of the Benefit Service Offices and met with members of staff.

## Mock Application

- 3.38 An Assessment Officer took the Members of the Working Group through a mock application form and explained how this is added onto the Benefit Service system, which automatically calculates the amount of H&CTB that the claimant is entitled to.
- 3.39 When a resident first submits a claim or a change of circumstance application, it is given to a Pre-Assessment Officer. It is the job of the Pre-Assessment Officer to enter the details from the form onto the system and to inform residents of any further details or evidence that they need to submit for their claim to be processed.

**Part 1 About you and your partner – continued**

**An Application form for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit**  
If you are just claiming Second Adult Relate only fill in boxes 1-4

**Bracknell Forest Council**  
Application for Housing and Council Tax Benefit

Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Benefits Section, Time Square, Market Street, PO Box 3781, Bracknell RG12 1HJ

Please fill in this form and send it to the above address. It is your application for help to pay your rent or council tax.  
Send the form back straight away, we can normally only pay you from the first Monday after we receive it.  
If you can't give us the proof that we need send the form in anyway and tell us that your 'proof' will be sent to us when you have it.  
If you need help please contact us by visiting us at Time Square, by telephone on 01344 351866, in writing, or by e-mail at: [benefits@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:benefits@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)  
Our fax number is 01344 351347.  
If you need help filling in this form, or don't know what 'proofs' you need to provide to support your claim please contact a Pre-Assessment Officer on 01344 351877.  
If you would like this form in a different language, or have difficulty reading please contact us on the above number and we will be pleased to help you.  
We are open to the public Monday to Friday 8.30 am to 5.00 pm.

This is your claim for benefit, it is up to you to prove that the information that you are giving to us is correct. This means that you must answer all of the questions that are asked. Please make sure that you mark all the check boxes Yes  or No .

The proofs of your claim that we ask for must be ORIGINAL documents, copies will not be accepted.

If you send us documents that are valuable we will record that we have received them and return them to you by RECORDED DELIVERY.

We want to work out your benefit as quickly as possible, we can do this if you complete the form accurately and provide the evidence that we have asked for, please help us to help you.

Please tear this page off and keep it as a record that you have sent your claim to us.

Date form sent to Bracknell Forest Borough Council:

**Your partner**

When did they claim? / /  
Council did they claim from? / /  
How did they claim in? / /  
Address did they claim for? / / / / / /  
Postcode / /

**Partners abroad**

**Partner**

When did they go in? / /  
When will they come out if they know this? / /

Bracknell Forest Council's Application form for Housing and Council Tax Benefit. The application form is 28 pages.

- 3.40 The original forms submitted by claimants are scanned so that officers can work from an electronic version of the form. This also allows off-site processing staff to see the application form. The original hard copies of the application forms are stored and are shredded after three months.
- 3.41 Claims that already exist on the system have a reference number. This means that for a change of circumstance much of the data is already on the system and does not need to be re-entered. New claims are allocated a reference number by the Pre-Assessment Officers using the online system.

- 3.42 Once all the data has been entered on the system and the evidence has been produced the claim is passed onto an assessment officer who calculates the amount of H&CTB the claimant is entitled to and can authorise payment.
- 3.43 The Working Group noted that electronic versions of evidence such as bank statements can be temporarily accepted as evidence, but that a hard copy does need to be produced and verified.
- 3.44 The current online H&CTB system is called Pericles. This system will be stopped, and the Benefit Service will need to procure a new system as a replacement for use from next year.
- 3.45 The Working Group noted that transferring the data from the hand written form to the online system was a lengthy and cumbersome process.
- 3.46 Each Local Authority has its own H&CTB application form. This means that a resident moving from another borough will have to fill out a new form for Bracknell Forest. The application forms vary widely across different authorities.
- 3.47 The Working Group noted that the H&CTB Application process makes no provision for a person's debt and only takes into account their capital. It was noted that the Government are reviewing the whole of the benefit system and it is possible that this could change.

#### **Meeting with the Executive Member**

- 3.48 The Working Group met with Councillor Birch, Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2009. The Executive Member stated that Bracknell Forest has a very good benefit service. Inspections of the Benefit Service at Bracknell Forest have shown good results with the most recent inspection giving the service a rating of 4 out of 4.
- 3.49 The Working Group noted that due to the Auditors challenging the accuracy of performance indicators the current Benefit Service rating of 4 may be reduced to a 3 at the next inspection. The Benefit Service is challenging this decision of the Audit Commission.
- 3.50 The H&CTB Service provided by Bracknell Forest is well run with good customer relations. The service runs a compliments and complaints system. It was noted that in the last quarter the service received no registered complaints or compliments from service users.
- 3.51 It was noted that the Executive Member and the Chief Officer's key objective in inviting the working group to look at the HB & CTB Improvement Plan was to allow for long term monitoring of the plan as well as input into the development of the new Improvement plan for 2009/10. Part of the improvement plan is for the working group to 'stay in touch' with the improvement plan.
- 3.52 The Executive Member told the Working Group that due to the changing economic times the number of new H&CTB claims is starting to increase. As well as an increase in new claims the service is seeing an increase in number of people with a change of circumstances.

- 3.53 The improvement plan is very timely in that part of the plan looks at informing and engaging members of the public to ensure that they receive the benefit that they are eligible for. The Benefit Service want to ensure that Bracknell Forest residents are receiving the maximum and proper take up of H&CTB that they are entitled to.
- 3.54 It was noted that the increased volume of claims would not interfere with the implementation of the improvement plan. The H&CTB Improvement Plan anticipates capacity issues. Good practice shows that Benefit Services should have processes in place for anticipated capacity issues.
- 3.55 The Chief Officer talked Members through the draft improvement plan (see the table below). The current plan runs up to the end of March 2009, and will inform the plan for the following 12 months.

**Summary of Working Group Consideration of the H&CTB Service Improvement Plan (please see Appendix 2)**

<b>1.</b>	<b>Build a service around customer needs</b>
1 a.	<p>The Bracknell Forest Benefit Team have analysed their caseload and compared it to national figures.</p> <p>Results show that there are a high number of elderly people who own their own homes who were not aware that they were entitled to claim Housing and Council Tax Benefit.</p> <p>Another issue recognised by the Benefit Service is the clarity of written correspondence sent to service users. The letters sent to residents are system generated and as such cannot be made bespoke to individual residents' needs; however it was noted that the system-generated letter could be adjusted to reflect best practice. The Working group noted that an explanation guide is available for residents on Bracknell Forest Council's public website.</p> <p>Members of the working group felt that the letters sent to service users used too many words and had references to Acts and clauses which could cause confusion. This was particularly evident in the first paragraph of the letters. It was felt that this information could be included as a footnote to the letter.</p> <p>The Executive Member and Chief Officer noted this and said that the future review of Bracknell Forest Benefit Service correspondence would try to emulate best practice seen through the benchmarking club.</p> <p>It was noted that the Benefit Service Team will be contacting Winchester City Council to organise a visit to their benefit service to observe best practice.</p>
1 b.	<p>The Benefit Service is looking at using a mosaic database to analyse potential clients in Bracknell Forest. This system can be used to analyse a street in the Borough. The system works out the percentage of residents living in the street who may be eligible for benefit, it will also work out the percentage of residents on the same street who are claiming H&amp;CTB and then compare the two data sets. This will allow for a targeted marketing approach, and help the Benefit Service to engage with residents entitled to claim benefit.</p> <p>This system is expensive as a licence is needed to run the program. The cost to benefit ratio of using the system needs to be looked at to consider the beneficial outcomes against purchasing the mosaic system. The Benefit service are looking at sharing the cost of this with another service area of the Council, as it is possible to use the system to target communities for many different types of targeted marketing.</p> <p>The working group noted that the system will be used only to identify the most vulnerable residents in the borough, and will be used to increase awareness of the benefits that residents are entitled to.</p>

	<p>It was noted that another way to raise awareness may be to use the Council's Community TV system.</p>
1 c.	<p>The H&amp;CTB Service are logging customer complaints and using these to review procedures. The logged complaints will also be used to inform staff meetings. There were no service complaints in the last quarter.</p>
1 d.	<p>The H&amp;CTB Service will be sending a customer satisfaction survey out at the end of April. A customer focus group will be generated on the back of the survey results.</p>
1 e.	<p>The 'benefits 4 you' outreach event was successful, with a large number of residents attending the event. It was felt that even though it is difficult to judge how many people may be benefit service customers, the event has still helped to raise awareness of the service.</p> <p>Whilst it was felt that the event was successful, outreach is very labour intensive and prevents officers from being in the Housing and Council Tax Offices working with service users or processing claims. However on this occasion the staff attending were not frontline staff.</p> <p>The benefit service are looking to hold localised events and 'piggy back' on other Council events to reduce resource input. An H&amp;CTB Service stall is held at an ongoing fortnightly surgery in Sandhurst.</p> <p>It was felt that marketing may need to be considered for future events as there can be a perceived stigma associated with claiming benefit.</p>
1 f.	<p>The working group noted that a Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service Customer Focus Group will be formed once the customer survey results have been compiled.</p>
1 g.	<p>The H&amp;CTB outreach surgeries have been run alongside the Citizen's Advice Bureau. Initially there was a low response to the surgeries however they are starting to generate more response as they become better known.</p> <p>As with the outreach event, the ratio between officers spending time with customers in the community and the time spent travelling to and from locations against being in the office processing claims needs careful consideration. With the current increase in H&amp;CTB Claims processing time is the priority.</p>
1 h.	<p>The Bracknell Forest Benefit Service is currently agreeing a script with West Berkshire Council's Benefit Service to develop a mystery shopper programme. Information gained from this exercise will be shared with other authorities in Berkshire.</p> <p>It was noted that the working group would like to know when the exercise is place, and would like to see the results once the programme has been completed.</p>

1 i.	<p>Results of a customer satisfaction survey looking at the reception area of the H&amp;CTB Service have shown that many customers would be happy to watch a rolling screen of benefit information rather than sit and read through the leaflets available in reception.</p> <p>As a result a television has been ordered and this facility will be available in the reception from the end of March 2009.</p> <p>Results also showed that customers, who had not booked an appointment and had just visited the offices, would be prepared to wait up to half an hour in reception to speak with an officer about Housing and Council Tax Benefits.</p>
1 j.	<p>The reception is run in conjunction with the Council's Customer Service Department. The Benefit Service has an operational agreement with customer services and works with them to set targets that will improve the reception service received by customers.</p> <p>A copy of the agreement has been published on the Council's website and a hard copy will be put up in the reception area so that benefit service users can see the targets and will know how long they may have to wait before being seen. This will allow customers to know if the service they are receiving in reception is not meeting the standards set by the H&amp;CTB Service.</p>
1 k.	<p>The work on the equality impact assessment has now been completed and the Benefit Service Team is waiting to meet with the consultants to discuss the results.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Establish a centralised library of procedures, training notes etc</b>
2.	<p>A programme of review to create a centralised library of procedures has been completed with procedures available to staff currently up to date. This facility will be regularly reviewed.</p>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Establish and clarify links with Local Area Agreement</b>
3.	<p>NI142 – Percentage of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living. If residents fall into this category then they are automatically eligible for H&amp;CTB.</p>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Establish better ways to benchmark and prove value for money</b>
4.	<p>The Housing and Council Tax Benefit Benchmarking Club's membership is still as before (for a full list of members see appendix 3).</p> <p>It was noted that Winchester City Council who are also a member of the benchmarking club have very good processing times. Bracknell Forest's average processing time for new claims is 29 days. Winchester City Council's average processing time is 16 days which is around half the time of Bracknell Forest's. The H&amp;CTB Service will be looking at Winchester City Council's best practice to reduce the</p>



	<p>average processing time at Bracknell Forest.</p> <p>The working group noted that measuring the output of the Benefit Service was important as it allows for proper resourcing of processing activities. Previously the staff workload was managed on an input basis rather than an output basis. This new system will allow for faster processing times as the number of staff needed and the time need to process the current work load of claims can be identified.</p> <p>It was noted that the benefit service are tendering to procure a new benefit software system. When the system was last changed (three years ago) there were problems with data cleansing. This time the service have a much better knowledge of what is needed and the data is better prepared for transfer. A work flow system has been put in place to carry on scanning data whilst the system is being changed.</p> <p>The Working Group noted that the process of filling in a form by hand and then transferring the data to an online form is cumbersome and time consuming. To improve this, the benefit service's intention is to tender for an online benefit calculator provider who can also provide an online H&amp;CTB Claim application form.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Establish organisational leadership/ challenge of the service</b>
5 a.	An Overview and Scrutiny working group has been established to look at the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Improvement plan.
5 b.	Staff focus groups and brain storming sessions are being introduced at lunch times.
5 c.	A review of communication with staff has been undertaken across the whole service. One result of this is the creation of a staff newsletter which is regularly distributed to all H&CTB staff members.
5 d.	The staff satisfaction survey is ongoing.
<b>6.</b>	<b>Ensure defective claim analysis produces positive outcomes for customers</b>
6.	Defective claims are being recorded by staff and monitored. The main reasons for defective claims can now be addressed.
<b>7.</b>	<b>Review and update improvement plan</b>
7.	Results of the review of the improvement plan will be fed into the new improvement plan for 2009/10.

- 3.56 The Executive Member commended the Benefit Service for doing a thorough job. Business planning is in place which will allow processing times to be decreased.
- 3.57 With reference to the demographic information, the WG noted that with a future increase in the elderly population, provisions may need to be put in place to assist older people in making H&CTB Claims.
- 3.58 It was noted that the benefit service provide home visits to assist vulnerable people with their claims and that various people (such as staff at the DWP) are authorised to verify evidence so that it does not have to be brought into the Benefit Service offices in Time Square, Bracknell.
- 3.59 The WG noted that with the current economic climate the number of H&CTB payments being made directly to landlords may increase if tenants fall into arrears which might cause a drain on resources. It was noted that this should not be a drain on the Benefit Team's resources as this was a standard procedure 12 months ago; therefore processes are in place to allow for this. If a conflict arises between the tenant and the landlord then this should be dealt with by housing staff and not by the benefit staff. If a tenant falls into more than 8 weeks in arrears then the Benefit Service can make payments directly to the Landlord.

## Conclusions

From its investigations, the Working Group has drawn the following conclusions.

- 4.1 The Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service in Bracknell Forest is an important service for residents, particularly in the current economic climate. It is important that the service is run efficiently and that all residents are made aware of the service so that they can claim for any H&CTB they may be entitled to.
- 4.2 The Working Group commend the Executive and the officers for the initiative they have taken to improve the already highly performing Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service by commissioning research and working on an action plan based on the evidence gathered.
- 4.3 The Working Group concludes that the H&CTB Service Improvement Plan is properly targeted at securing improvements to the benefits administration; increasing the take up of H&CTB by residents who are eligible, improving the cost effectiveness of the service and improving customer satisfaction with the service they receive from the H&CTB Service.
- 4.4 The H&CTB service is run independently from other concessionary services run by the BFC.
- 4.5 Using Population Trends in Winter 2008 published by the Office for National Statistics, the Benefit Service have compared the national population benefit household age split to that of Bracknell Forest. The analysis of the live H&CTB caseload (as of 11/02/09) shows that the largest age group of claimants in Bracknell Forest are those over 65. This age group accounts for 54.5% of H&CTB claimants in Bracknell Forest, compared to the national average of 46.9%.
- 4.6 This number of elderly claimants needs careful monitoring as the Borough having an aging population means that the percentage of claimants over the age of 65 is likely to increase. Elderly people may need more help making a claim and provision needs to be put in place to take this into account.
- 4.7 To identify hard to reach claimants in the Borough the H&CTB service have held a Benefits for you event. This event saw a large number of residents making enquiries about H&CTB. It is difficult to judge how many of these people may qualify for H&CTB themselves, however even if they themselves do not they may know of someone who could and pass on the information. This will become an annual event.
- 4.8 It is also hoped that other benefits events may be held along side other future Council events. Particularly those which are being held outside of the town centre.
- 4.9 The WG has decided not to directly seek the views of customers using the H&CTB service. It is hoped that the Customer Satisfaction Survey will meet this need. Evidence from these can then be incorporated in the Improvement Plan if applicable.

- 4.10 Work done during the review has included a meeting with the Citizens Advice Bureau to directly obtain the views of H&CTB customer representatives.
- 4.11 The performance of the Benefit Service has an effect on National Indicator of performance number 142, which is the Percentage of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living. If residents fall into this category then they are automatically eligible for H&CTB. The Benefit Service need to make sure that there is a system in place to identify vulnerable people, inform them of any H&CTB they may be entitled to, and help them to make a claim.
- 4.12 The Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service at Bracknell Forest is a high performing service which is well run. It is hoped that the implementation of the Improvement Plan will address the issues raised in the mock inspection and ensure that the H&CTB services rating does not fall more than necessary at the next inspection.
- 4.13 The WG look forward to reviewing best practice from other local authorities once it becomes available and is reported by officers.
- 4.14 The Working Group has considered the improvement plan in detail and has had an explanation of how and why this plan will deliver improvements to the H&CTB service. The progress made over the last few months shows that the plan is helping to improve key areas of the H&CTB service.
- 4.15 The Improvement Plan is good but key challenges facing the H&CTB services include:
- Data quality
  - An aging claimant population, which may require extra resources.
  - Processing times need to be reduced. The best performing Local Authority processes claims in half the time it takes Bracknell Forest.
  - Clear communication with customers, particularly letters sent to customers requesting further information, or explaining the details of an overpayment.
  - Clarification of the technical information given to claimants, particularly the legislation referred to in correspondence.
  - Localised events to raise awareness of the service, particularly for hard to reach residents.
  - A clearer definition of what exactly constitutes a change of circumstances, how this may affect a residents claim and what they need to do to correctly inform the Benefit Service to prevent any over or underpayment.
  - The plan should take into account lessons from other local authorities' best practice.
  - A provision for circumstances beyond the control of the Bracknell Forest H&CTB service, such as the delay in receiving change of circumstance updates from the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 4.16 The updated 2009/10 Improvement Plan should take into account the points mentioned above. The WG will be monitoring the progress of the future H&CTB improvement plan and look forward to seeing the plan once it has been drafted.

4.17 The WG will review the findings of the first inspection by the Audit Commission using the new inspection regime.

4.18 This review has been useful in furthering Member understanding of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service.

## Recommendations

**It is recommended to the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing that:-**

- 5.1 The new H&CTB Service Improvement Plan should address the communication issues set out in paragraph 4.15. The new plan needs to show clearly how these issues will be tackled in an effective way to improve the service received by Bracknell Forest residents.
- 5.2 The working group recognises the value of the offsite claims processing facility as it is a cost effective and flexible way of dealing with the changing pressures of workload. This facility should be expanded if necessary to meet the increase in demand for processing H&CTB claims due to the current economic downturn.
- 5.3 The improvement plan should include a task to ‘consider how the service could deal with an increase in demand for home visits’ as this could be a consequence of an increase in the number of older applicants.
- 5.4 The Council continues to work with external organisations and claimants to achieve the most timely notification of changes of circumstances.
- 5.5 The clarity of written communication be fully reviewed so that recipients have a clear understanding of what is being asked of them. This could take the form of a summary at the start of the letter very clearly stating the position and what is to be paid to whom and when, separated from the more detailed explanation. The quality and clarity of communication is an important issue that will help to clear up any resident’s confusion, prevent unnecessary worry and speed up claim processes for the H&CTB Service.
- 5.6 Information that clearly defines any technical terms used in H&CTB correspondence should be provided with the letter. This should specifically include a section that provides clarity on legislation referred to in correspondence, define what exactly constitutes a change of circumstance and what the claimant needs to do to make sure that the H&CTB service is correctly informed to prevent any over or under payment. This information is currently available on the H&CTB website; however this facility is not always easily accessed by all claimants, particularly those that are vulnerable and hard to reach. Further information could be provided in the form of an explanatory leaflet or advertised on the Council’s Community TV facility.
- 5.7 The Council should increase awareness of residents’ eligibility for H&CTB. New ways of reaching vulnerable people should be investigated further. Community TV for example, may be a good way of informing residents and encouraging them to take up any benefit they are entitled to.

- 5.8 The H&CTB Service continue to investigate ways of sharing the cost of the mosaic database as the system will help to identify potential claimants who otherwise may not be reached. The Council should investigate the possibility of integrated Council use to reduce the cost to the H&CTB Service.
- 5.9 The Council should investigate the possibility of being linked to other Council facilities such as the Registrar's Office so that when a change of circumstances occurs such as a birth or death a process is triggered that informs the H&CTB Service that a change of circumstance has occurred and therefore that person's H&CTB entitlement may have altered.
- 5.10 The value of holding public events is recognised however this can be time consuming and prevents officers from being in the office. Consideration should be given to the possibility of training outreach workers to inform residents of the H&CTB service and to make these possible claimants known to the H&CTB Service. Training could be given to Health Visitors and staff from voluntary agencies such as Home Start and Age Concern to allow them to inform and identify potential claimants to BFC's Benefit Service.
- 5.11 The H&CTB Service should continue to pursue best practice information from other local authorities, which can be used to inform the improvement plan and be applied to the service at BFC. Members of staff should directly visit other authorities' H&CTB Services to observe at first hand how they run their service. Monitoring of workload needs to take place to ensure that there is time available for staff to visit high performing local authorities.

**It is recommended to the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel that:-**

- 5.12 The Working Group should continue to operate and intend to review the H&CTB Service Improvement Plan for 2009/10 once it has been prepared, and again before the end of the year to review progress on implementing the plans' objectives and how any new processes and/or procedures are affecting the H&CTB Service.

### 3. Glossary

Abbreviation	In full
BFC	Bracknell Forest Council
CAB	Citizen's Advice Bureau
CIPFA	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability
CTB	Council Tax Benefit
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
HB	Housing Benefit
H&CTB	Housing and Council Tax Benefit
WG	Working Group



The Scope of the Review**BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL****ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
4 FEBRUARY 2009****WORK PROGRAMME 2008 – 2009**

Terms of Reference for

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT IMPROVEMENT  
PLAN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP****Purpose of this Working Group / anticipated value of its work:**

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To further Members' understanding of, and support for the improvement of the Housing and Council Tax Benefits service</li> <li>2. To review the scope and coverage of the Benefits service improvement plan, to ensure it adequately addresses all points of concern</li> <li>3. To receive and consider monitoring reports on the achievement of the improvement plan</li> </ol> |
|---|

**Key Objectives:**

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To meet the purposes set out above.</li> <li>2. To ensure that the improvement plan for the Benefits service is properly targeted at securing improvements to: benefits administration; take up; cost effectiveness, and customer satisfaction.</li> <li>3. To directly elicit the views of customer representatives on the Benefits Service</li> <li>4. To provide input to the development of the future benefit service improvement plan</li> <li>5. To monitor progress on the current and future Benefit service improvement plan</li> <li>6. To review the findings of the first inspection by the Audit Commission using the new inspection regime.</li> <li>7. To review best practice in other local authorities compared to that of Bracknell Forest, as reported by officers</li> </ol> |
|--|

**Scope of the work:**

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bracknell Forest Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service</li> </ol> |
|---|

**Not included in the scope:**

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Matters outside the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service and its improvement plan.</li> </ol> |
|--|

**Terms of Reference prepared by:** Implementation of the Housing and Council Tax Benefits Improvement Plan Overview and Scrutiny Working Group

**Terms of Reference agreed by:** Implementation of the Housing and Council Tax Benefits Improvement Plan Overview and Scrutiny Working Group

**Working Group structure:** Councillors Beadsley, Burrows, Finch

**Working Group Lead Member:** Councillor Finch

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Birch

**BACKGROUND:**

1. Due to a change in the Audit Commission inspection regime for the Benefits service, a CIPFA benchmarking study and a mock inspection were carried out to identify any areas for improvement needed to the Council's Benefits service. The areas for improvement have been identified by officers in the form of an improvement plan

**SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL TO ADDRESS:**

1. What are the key challenges in implementing the improvement plan?
2. Which groups are claiming Housing and Council Tax benefits and who are potential claimants?
3. How is the benefit service making sure it identifies and encourages hard to reach groups that may be entitled to benefits?
4. In which areas have customers indicated that an improvement is needed?
5. Is the service linked to other concessionary services by the Council?
6. Which National Indicators of performance does the Benefits service influence?

**INFORMATION GATHERING:**

**Witnesses to be invited**

Name	Organisation/Position	Reason for Inviting
TBC	Citizens Advice Bureau	To provide an outside customer representative perspective
Councillor Birch	BFC, Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing	To obtain the views of the Executive member on the improvements needed to the Benefits Service

**Site Visits**

Location	Purpose of visit
None	

## Key Documents / Background Data / Research

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 1. | Housing and Council Tax Benefit Improvement Plan |
| 2. | CIPFA Benchmarking Study                         |
| 3. | Mock Inspection report                           |
| 4. | Other Councils' examples of good Practice        |

## TIMESCALE

Starting: 4<sup>th</sup> February 2009

Ending: End of March/ beginning of April 2009, to comment on the scope/ direction of the improvement plan. Continued monitoring of improvement plan.

## OUTPUTS TO BE PRODUCED

1. Provide views on adequacy of the current improvement plan
2. By April 2009, input for next years improvement plan
3. Ongoing monitoring of the future Benefit Service improvement plan

## REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

Body	Date
To the Environment, Culture and Communities O&S Panel	Each Panel Meeting
Interim report	End March/ April
Further reports	TBC

## MONITORING / FEEDBACK ARRANGEMENTS

Body	Details	Date
Reporting to Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel by Executive Member.	Oral or written report	

Draft Improvement plan 2008/09

Recommendation	Action	By when	Lead officer	Outcome	Progress
1. Build service around customer needs	1a Analyse benefit client group via interrogation of existing system by working age , ethnicity and disability	Jan 09	Lead improvement plan officer	Information to target publicity/ promotion activity	<p>Analysed current case load from HBMS &amp; SHBE files. Could only analyse case load by age, disability and tenancy type.</p> <p>Shows that high proportion of customers are pensioners compared nationally.</p> <p>Bracknell have a high percentage of HB claims compared nationally. As HB claims are generally more complex than non-HB this may account for why claims may take longer to process. It could also indicate that more work needs to be done for owner occupiers for CTB only take up.</p> <p>20% of caseload</p>

					<p>receive a disability related benefit. The analysis shows that these claims are actually processed quicker</p> <p>Still looking at ways to analyse caseload by ethnicity as information available quite out of date.</p> <p>Public website has been reviewed &amp; documents updated. Will be adding on to website an 'explanation of notification letters and overpayment letters' to help customers who find these letters difficult to understand</p> <p>To review and update our letters sent to customers to make easier to understand</p>
	1b Use mosaic data base to analyse potential client	Jan 09	Lead improvement	Information to target publicity/ promotion activity	Had a look at demonstration of

	data base		plan officer		<p>Mosaic software. Works by classifying households or postcodes into those that would be more than likely eligible. Can analyse areas/streets that are currently claiming compared with estimates on percentage that may be entitled. If percentage that currently claim is lower than the percentage expected to be eligible then this can help us to target specific areas.</p> <p>Cost of software &amp; the analysis around £7k. Currently looking at whether other departments would be interested in sharing costs.</p> <p>Advert being displayed in Heatherwood &amp; Wexham Hospital Bedside Folders to target those in hospital on low income.</p>
--	-----------	--	--------------	--	--

					<p>Advert has been sent to Age Concern to target elderly.</p> <p>Posters to be distributed around the borough to advertise service</p>	
	1c	Establish customer review programme based on complaints and compliments	Dec 08	Rosie Corah	Service improvements based on programme of change based on response to customers	Spreadsheet created to record complaints & compliments. Rosie is actioning any issues that arise. Advising staff on team meetings on any compliments received
	1d	Consultation programme with 600 current benefit customers	Jan 09	Shanaz Alam	Customer satisfaction and service improvement recommendations	<p>Finalising survey to be approved in next couple of weeks</p> <p>Once sent &amp; received back then can compare with the trial survey on reception and analyse results.</p>

	1e	Hold benefits 4 you outreach event	Jan 09 (subject to date confirmation )	Improvement plan focus group	Face to face engagement with community to promote benefit service	<p>Event took place 5/2/08 at Princess Square from 10am until 4pm.</p> <p>Aim of day was to give help and advice to enable residents to maximise their income.</p> <p>Attending event was Benefits Service; Pension Service; Sustainable Energy Officer; and CAB.</p> <p>Gave away leaflets/info packs on other council services that offer discounts/concessions. Benefit application forms given</p> <p>Free goodies for residents to take; facepainting for children; &amp; free prize draw with prizes donated by Leisure services.</p>
	1f	Establish benefit customer focus group and hold first meeting by April 2009	Dec 08	Lead improvement plan officer	Customer input into service improvements	On customer satisfaction survey is opportunity for



					residents to show their interest in attending customer forum, so will need to await surveys
--	--	--	--	--	---

Recommendation	Action	By when	Lead officer	Outcome	Progress
	<p>1g Develop programme of outreach surgeries including joint surgeries with RSL and pensions service</p>	Complete	Lead improvement plan officer	Increased take up of benefits	<p>Holding regular 2 weekly surgeries at Sandhurst Town Council – to distribute more posters to improve attendance</p> <p>2 Money advise sessions attended with CAB &amp; BFH.</p> <p>Attended workshop with BFH – to be held quarterly</p> <p>Sandhurst surgeries ongoing and other surgeries planned: Age Concern open day 8<sup>th</sup> April; Jubilee court surgery 19/3/09 – initially see how successful this surgery is then approach other Housing Associations</p> <p>Meeting booked on 25<sup>th</sup> March with Pension Service to look at ways of working closer</p> <p>Landlord forum booked for 9<sup>th</sup> April at Council</p>

						Chambers
	1h	Develop mystery shopper programme in partnership with neighbouring LA's	Jan 09	Lead improvement plan officer	Independent verification of service quality	In contact with Joanne England @ West Berks Council. We are devising script/plan for the mystery shopping & then other councils may borrow this
	1i	Develop reception improvement plan based on customer consultation	Jan 09	Reception improvement project group	Improved customer experience and improved access to services	Display boards/plasma TV and interview rooms finished by 31/3/09
	1j	Publish existing service standards and then work with focus group to develop customer focused revised standards	Jan 09	Lead improvement plan officer	Established customer sensitive service standards	Current service standards published in Time Square reception area and on website.
	1k	Complete equality impact assessment of benefit service and publish	Dec 08	Shanaz Alam	Equality improvement action plan	EIA completed – being finalised before published
2. Establish centralised library of procedures,	2a	Programme of review of procedures to be established	Dec 08	Shanaz Alam	Consistent , standardised procedures	Procedures up to date and available to staff. To be reviewed regularly – ongoing

training notes etc					
3. Establish and clarify links with Local area agreement	3a Review LAA priorities	Jan 09	Shanaz Alam	Identified links to LAA priorities	Will analyse National Indicators and establish any links to the Benefits Service
	3b Establish service contributions to LAA targets e.g. NI 142	Jan 09	Shanaz Alam	Identified contributions to targets	
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Lead officer</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Progress</b>
	3c Benefit service planning exercise	Jan 09	Simon Hendey	Service plan based on full staff engagement and ownership	
4. Establish better ways to	4a Establish benchmarking club from CIPFA and	Dec 08	Lead improvement	Improved value for money	Applied for Benchmarking 09

benchmark and prove VFM	Meritec inspection data		plan officer		
	4b,  Establish joint working with neighbouring LA's to benchmark VFM	Dec 08	Lead improvement plan officer	Improved service delivery and VFM in a local context	Arranging meeting to share good practices with Winchester as they showed good performance with a similar caseload  Arranging meeting with good performing neighbouring LA's
5. Establish organisational leadership/ challenge of the service	<b>5a,</b> Report to Environment, culture and communities Over view and scrutiny committee to gain involvement in improvement plan	Dec 08	Simon Hendey	Member endorsed and supported improvement plan	
	<b>Action</b> Over view and scrutiny 18.12.08 – Report and documents in Folder 5a	<b>Complete</b>			
	<b>Action</b> Members to agree to establish a working party to monitor the	<b>Ongoing</b>			

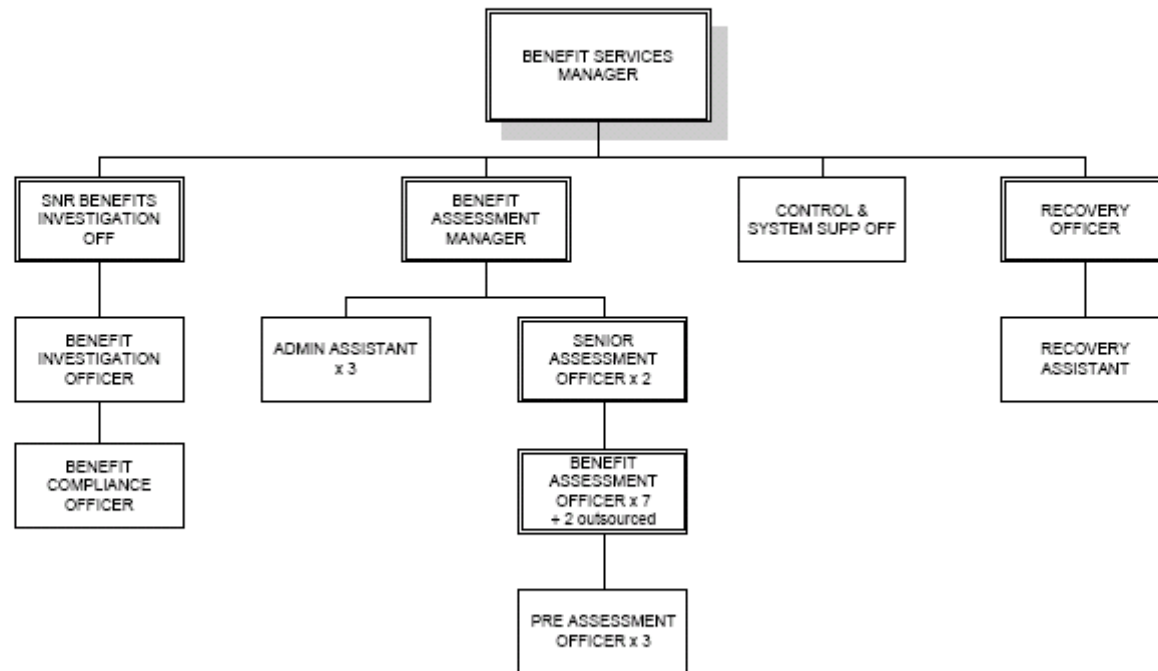
	<p>implementation of the improvement plan.</p> <p>Made up of 3 Members who are:</p> <p>Councillor Beadsley Councillor Burrows Councillor Finch</p>					
	5b	Develop programme of staff focus group activity to implement improvement plan recommendations	Dec 08	Lead improvement plan officer	Staff engagement and ownership of improvement plan	Monthly lunchtime meeting sessions with small groups of staff to get opinions/ideas on recommendations – ongoing
	5c	Review communication strategy with staff and undertake consultation exercise on staff satisfaction	Jan 09	Simon Hendey	Plan to improve two way communication with staff and recognise staff contributions	
	5d	Identify staff satisfaction survey results 2007 for the benefit service and develop improvement plan	Dec 08	Shanaz Alam	Improved responses from 2009/10 satisfaction survey	Staff Survey results received & to be analysed – ongoing

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Lead officer</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Resources</b>
6. Ensure defective claim analysis produces positive outcomes for customers	6a Establish defective claim position	Complete	Sharon Okonkwo	More benefit take up and quicker processing as well as identification of vulnerable groups	Defective claims being recorded by staff & now being monitored by lead improvement officer. Application forms are being sent out to those who would have qualified & covering letter inviting them to book appointment to avoid claims being made defective again
7. Review and update improvement plan	7a Review improvement plan and update for future plan	March 09	Simon Hendey	New improvement plan for 2009/10	

The Staff Structure of the Bracknell Forest Housing and Council Tax Benefit Service

**Housing**  
1 January 2009

---







**Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Benchmarking Group Membership**

- Bracknell Forest
- East Hampshire
- Havering
- Herefordshire
- Macclesfield
- Oxford
- Reading
- Slough
- Solihull
- South Gloucestershire
- South Lakeland
- South Staffordshire
- Sutton
- Swindon
- Torbay
- West Berkshire
- Winchester
- Windsor
- Wrexham

---

*This document can be made available in large print, in Braille or on audio cassette. Copies in other languages may also be obtained. Please contact the Chief Executive's Office, Easthampstead House, Bracknell, RG12 1AQ, or telephone 01344 352122.*

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION 16 JULY 2009

---

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10 Assistant Chief Executive

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to invite Members of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Commission to adopt the O&S work programme for 2009/10 which is attached at Appendix 1 to this report. The earlier indicative programme has been revised to take account of the O&S Panels' consideration of their parts of the indicative work programme, and reviews which have been completed have been removed. The O&S Commission is required by the Council's Constitution to formally consult the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Executive on the work programme.

#### 2 SUGGESTED ACTION

**That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission:**

- 2.1 **adopts the 2009/10 work programme attached at Appendix 1;**
- 2.2 **consults the Corporate Management Team and the Executive on the programme;**
- 2.3 **commences the Commission's working group on sustaining economic prosperity.**

#### 3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Panels during 2008/09 was summarised in the Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny, adopted by Council at its meeting on 15 April 2009. The Annual Report contained an indicative work programme relating to 2009/10 which took account of the views of CMT and the Executive. That programme has been amended in Appendix 1 to: reflect the Council's decision to restructure Overview and Scrutiny; incorporate additional topics put forward since the Annual Report was produced; include changes requested by the O&S Panels; and to remove those O&S reviews which have been completed since the Annual Report was produced.
- 3.2 The work programme aims to continue the strategic and effective approach to Overview and Scrutiny coverage. It recognises that the programme should reflect the limitations on both Members' and Officers' time and it allows some capacity for additional review topics which experience suggests will arise during the year.
- 3.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Panels considered their work programmes at their meetings between 2 June and 23 June 2009. The outcome of those discussions is included in the revised work programme. The work programme will be subject to consultation with the Council's Executive and CMT, as required by the Constitution.

- 3.4 The work programme for the Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, of which the Council is a member, is determined separately by that Committee.
- 3.5 The O&S Chairmen have previously indicated that they would like the Commission and each of the Panels to hold at least one meeting each year at a location outside Easthampstead House. The Commission's last external meeting was at Sandhurst Town Hall in June 2008.

#### Background Papers

Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny – 2008/09

#### Contact for further information

Richard Beaumont – 01344 352283  
e-mail: [richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

Andrea Carr – 01344 352122  
e-mail: [andrea.carr@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:andrea.carr@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

#### Doc. Ref

-

### Work Programme for Overview and Scrutiny in 2009/10

The work programme for O&S in 2009/10 is aimed at maintaining a strategic and coordinated work programme based on major areas of Council and partner organisations' activity, of direct and significant interest to residents. The programme incorporates the routine, on-going work of O&S and the completion of reviews currently underway. It proposes a limited number of new O&S reviews which are seen to be timely, relevant, significant and likely to add value.

The determination of the O&S Work Programme for the forthcoming year is a matter for the newly appointed members of the Commission and its Panels. The work programme will necessarily be subject to refinement and updating. It will also require consultation with the Executive and the Corporate Management Team, as required by the Council's Constitution.

The work programme for the Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, of which Bracknell Forest Council is a member, is determined separately by that Committee.

<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION</b>	
1.	<b>Co-ordination of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels</b>
2.	<b>Routine Monitoring of the Performance of the Council's Corporate Functions</b> To include: the Corporate Performance Overview Reports; the Performance Monitoring Reports of the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Services Department; progress on the regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre; the reports of both internal and external audit; and progress on strategic risk management.
3.	<b>2010/11 Budget Scrutiny</b> To review the Council's budget proposals for 2010/11, and plans for 2011/12/13. Note – each of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels will also scrutinise the budget proposals in their departmental areas.
4.	<b>Exercising pre-decision scrutiny by reference to the Executive Forward Plan</b>
5.	<b>Reviewing the Action Taken on Previous Overview and Scrutiny Reports</b> To periodically review the action taken by the Executive in relation to agreed recommendations from earlier O&S reports.
6. <b>New</b>	<b>The Work of the Bracknell Forest Partnership</b> Building on the 2008/09 O&S review of the Local Area Agreement, to review the role and activities of the Bracknell Forest (Local Strategic) Partnership's Theme Partnerships for: The Town Centre Partnership, The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, and The Economic and Skills Development Partnership.
7. <b>New</b>	<b>Sustaining Economic Prosperity</b> To review the service plans for the Council's new Priority 6, to sustain the economic prosperity of the Borough during the current economic downturn.

## ADULT SOCIAL CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

1.	<p><b>Monitoring the performance of Adult Social Care Services</b></p> <p>To include: a series of visits to adult social care facilities in, and possibly outside, the Borough; on-going review of the Performance Monitoring Reports, receiving statutory plans and reports (such as the annual reports on complaints received) and monitoring the action taken by the Executive to earlier reports by the Panel.</p>
2.	<p><b>Exercising pre-decision scrutiny by reference to the Executive Forward Plan</b></p>
3.	<p><b>2010/11 Budget Scrutiny</b></p> <p>To review the Council's Adult Social Care budget proposals for 2010/11, and plans for 2011/12/13.</p>
4. <b>New</b>	<p><b>Transforming Social Care and Safeguarding Adults</b></p> <p>All-Panel workshops to familiarise Members with distinct areas of the initiative, including Care Homes, after which a working group will be established to undertake more in-depth review work in this regard.</p>
5. <b>New</b>	<p><b>Safeguarding Adults</b></p> <p>To monitor the Annual Safeguarding Adults Annual Reports.</p>
6. <b>New</b>	<p><b>The Work of the Bracknell Forest Partnership</b></p> <p>Building on the 2008/09 O&amp;S review of the Local Area Agreement, to review the role and activities of the Bracknell Forest (Local Strategic) Partnership's Health and Social Care Partnership.</p>

<b>CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL</b>	
1.	<p><b>Monitoring the performance of Children's Services and Learning</b> To include on-going review of the Performance Monitoring Reports, receiving statutory plans and reports (such as the annual reports on the Children and Young People's Plan) and monitoring the action taken by the Executive to earlier reports by the Panel.</p>
2.	<p><b>Exercising pre-decision scrutiny by reference to the Executive Forward Plan</b></p>
3.	<p><b>2010/11 Budget Scrutiny</b> To review the Council's Children's Services and Learning budget proposals for 2010/11, and plans for 2011/12/13.</p>
4.	<p><b>14-19 Years Education Provision</b> To complete the work of the Working Group undertaking a strategic review of education services to the age group 14-19 years.</p>
5. <b>New</b>	<p><b>The Work of the Bracknell Forest Partnership</b> Building on the 2008/09 O&amp;S review of the Local Area Agreement, to review the role and activities of the Bracknell Forest (Local Strategic) Partnership's two Theme Partnerships for: The Children's Trust and The Early Years, Child Care &amp; Play Partnership.</p>
6. <b>New</b>	<p><b>Safeguarding Children</b> To review the Council's plans and performance with regard to safeguarding children, including the role of the Executive Member, and a specific review of child protection practice and procedures.</p>
<b>Reviews to be considered when resources become available</b>	
7. <b>New</b>	<p><b>Transport</b> A strategic review of the procurement and provision of transport used by Children's Services and Learning.</p>

<b>ENVIRONMENT CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL</b>	
1.	<p><b>Monitoring the performance of the Environment, Culture and Communities Department</b></p> <p>To include on-going review of the Performance Monitoring Reports; monitoring the arrangements for securing and applying receipts from Section 106 agreements; and monitoring the action taken by the Executive to earlier reports by the Panel.</p>
2.	<p><b>Exercising pre-decision scrutiny by reference to the Executive Forward Plan</b></p>
3.	<p><b>2010/11 Budget Scrutiny</b></p> <p>To review the Council's Environment, Culture and Communities budget proposals for 2010/11, and plans for 2011/12/13.</p>
4.	<p><b>Monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan for Supporting People</b></p>
5. <b>New</b>	<p><b>Playbuilder Programme</b></p> <p>To contribute to the decision-making process on the allocation of funding, and to monitor the implementation of the Council's participation in the government's 'Playbuilder' programme for transformation and creation of play areas.</p>
6. <b>New</b>	<p><b>The Work of the Bracknell Forest Partnership</b></p> <p>Building on the 2008/09 O&amp;S review of the Local Area Agreement, to review the role and activities of the Bracknell Forest (Local Strategic) Partnership's Theme Partnerships for: The Strategic Housing Partnership, The Cultural Partnership, The Transport Partnership, and The Climate Change Partnership.</p>
7. <b>New</b>	<p><b>Highway Maintenance and Improvement</b></p> <p>To review the Council's plans and performance for highway maintenance and improvement.</p>



<b>HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL</b>	
1.	<b>Monitoring the implementation of the Borough's Health and Well-Being Strategy</b>
2.	<b>Preparedness for Public Health Emergencies</b> To complete the work of the Working Group undertaking a detailed review of the preparedness of the Council and NHS organisations for handling public health emergencies
3.	<b>In conjunction with the Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, monitoring the performance and budget of the Berkshire East Primary Care Trust and the Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust</b> This review will include the linkage with the Operating Framework and the national NHS priorities set by the Department of Health; also the progress of health service providers on infection control, particularly in relation to MRSA and C Difficile.
4.	<b>Contributing to the annual 'Health Check' process and responding to consultations by the PCT and NHS Trusts operating in the Borough</b>
5.	<b>The New 'Healthspace' in Bracknell</b> To complete the work of the Working Group undertaking a detailed review of the PCT's plans and progress towards creating the new 'Healthspace' for Bracknell.
<b>Reviews to be considered when resources become available</b>	
6. <b>New</b>	<b>The New NHS Constitution</b> To review the implementation by NHS organisations of the new NHS Constitution, which brings together a number of rights, pledges and responsibilities for staff and patients.

Note – This programme may need to be amended to meet new requirements arising during the year.

This page is intentionally left blank

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION 16 JULY 2009

---

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY SELF EVALUATION

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Commission of the forthcoming exercise to complete the Centre for Public Scrutiny's self evaluation for Overview and Scrutiny in local authorities.

#### 2 SUGGESTED ACTION

**That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission:**

- 2.1 **Notes the forthcoming exercise to complete the Centre for Public Scrutiny's self evaluation for Overview and Scrutiny in local authorities.**

#### 3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Centre for Public Scrutiny's Annual review of Local Authorities for 2008 states that 23% of responding Councils had completed the self-evaluation. The self-evaluation will be used to inform decisions about how Overview and Scrutiny in Bracknell Forest might be improved.

#### Background Papers

Centre for Public Scrutiny – Self Evaluation Framework for Local Authorities

#### Contact for further information

Richard Beaumont – 01344 352283  
e-mail: [richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:richard.beaumont@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

## **Centre for Public Scrutiny – Self Evaluation Framework for Local Authorities**

### **Introduction to the self evaluation framework**

This self-evaluation framework is a mechanism for all local authorities to demonstrate the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny and to identify areas for improvement.

It can be used by any individual or group and does not presuppose an existing level of achievement. Rather, within a given set of principles, it requires the "evaluator" to:

- demonstrate evidence of achievement,
- identify areas for improvement,
- and highlight potential barriers to improvement

Once completed, the framework will provide a clear picture of how overview and scrutiny operates in an authority. This can then be used to:

- communicate the potential of scrutiny to local communities
- encourage involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
- build confidence of those undertaking scrutiny activities
- demonstrate scrutiny's value to auditors and inspectors

Completion of the framework will also produce an explicit set of priorities for improvement planning.

### **USING THE SELF EVALUATION FRAMEWORK**

The framework has been designed for use according to the needs of each authority.

It does not presuppose any current level of achievement and can be applied to any type of local authority, operating under any of the four options for political management as set out in the Local Government Act 2000.

It is up to individual councils to decide how to use this framework, however, authorities might like to consider some of the following suggestions:

- use the framework as a survey sent to key stakeholders and use results to develop an action plan
- hold a workshop with key stakeholders to complete the framework, using the results to develop an action plan
- contract external consultants to undertake the evaluation and produce recommendations

The framework is in four sections, reflecting the principles set out in CfPS' [Good Scrutiny Guide](#). For each principle there is a set of key questions with prompts to help complete an evaluation

table.

Once the questions have been answered the authority will have identified a series of areas for improvement which can then be built in to an improvement plan.

### **Critical friend challenge**

Answer each of the numbered questions below under three headings:

- Evidence of what we do well
- How can we improve?
- What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?

The bulleted points under each numbered question can be used, as required, to provide more detailed evidence.

#### **1.1 Does scrutiny provide an effective challenge to the Executive?**

- what opportunities are available for scrutiny members to question cabinet members and challenge the executive?
- how does scrutiny provide an effective mechanism for the executive to demonstrate public accountability?
- how do you ensure that challenge is "constructive, robust and purposeful"?
- what evidence is there that scrutiny is able to operate independently of the executive?

#### **1.2 How does scrutiny have an impact on the work of the executive?**

- can you provide an example where challenge to the executive has led to a better decision than would otherwise have been taken?
- can you provide evidence of where scrutiny has had a direct impact on the work of the executive?
- has a cabinet member had a change of mind on a decision due to scrutiny?

#### **1.3 How does scrutiny routinely challenge the authority's corporate strategy and budget?**

- is there evidence of questioning financial priorities and how they meet corporate objectives?
- how can you demonstrate that monitoring and questioning performance has provided effective challenge?

#### **1.4 Are external partners involved in o&s and how are they included?**

- are external partners used to provide challenge?
- can you provide examples where partnerships and partner organisations have been the subject of scrutiny?
- is there a process for external involvement in scrutiny? Have you developed a scheme as outline in [Local Government Act 2003](#)?
- are arrangements in place to support and encourage external challenge?

### **1.5. Does scrutiny work effectively with the executive and senior management?**

- do you have an agreed way of working with executive and senior management?
- could you describe those relationships confidently and provide an example if them working in practice?
- are there examples to demonstrate improved outcomes as a result of these relationships in use?

### **Reflecting the public voice**

Answer each of the numbered questions below under three headings:

- Evidence of what we do well
- How can we improve?
- What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?

The bulleted points under each numbered question can be used, as required, to provide more detailed evidence.

### **2.1. How is the work of scrutiny informed by the public?**

- is there evidence of an ongoing dialogue with the public and its diverse communities?
- what evidence is there to show how diverse/different public expectations have been managed?
- Is there evidence to show where the scrutiny work programme has been influenced by suggestions from both public and partner organisations?

### **2.2. How does scrutiny make itself accessible to the public?**

- what mechanisms are in place to enable/encourage the public to become involved in the work of scrutiny?
- how can you demonstrate that they have been effective?
- how are the outcomes of scrutiny communicated?
- what evidence is there to show how the public has been engaged in the meetings and work of scrutiny?

### **2.3. How does scrutiny communicate?**

- are mechanisms in place to ensure that all members and officers are aware of and understand scrutiny?
- how do you ensure that opportunities for communicating scrutiny are identified and used, including corporate arrangements for media and public relations?
- do you have any specific arrangements for communicating with partnerships and partner organisations?

### **2.4 How does scrutiny make itself relevant to the public and other organisations outside local government?**

### **Leading and owning the process**

Answer each of the numbered questions below under three headings:

- Evidence of what we do well
- How can we improve?
- What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?

The bulleted points under each numbered question can be used, as required, to provide more detailed evidence.

### **3.1. Does scrutiny operate with political impartiality?**

- are you able to demonstrate that the whip is not used?
- is it possible to demonstrate political consensus?
- how have executive members been involved in championing the value and potential of scrutiny?

### **3.2. Does scrutiny have ownership of its own work programme?**

- how have members been involved in developing the work programme?
- do members regularly monitor and evaluate the progress of work programmes?
- can you provide evidence to show how conflicting views in regard to the work programme have been resolved by scrutiny members?
- do scrutiny members set goals for what they want to achieve?

### **3.3. Do scrutiny members consider that they have a worthwhile and fulfilling role?**

- do Members have an opportunity to communicate their views on the development and operation of overview and scrutiny?
- are the views of Members canvassed/collected and evaluated?
- is scrutiny seen as an attractive political career?
- is the scrutiny role seen as one that makes an important contribution to the good management of the authority and quality of life in the community?

### **3.4. Is there a constructive working partnership with officers including support arrangements for scrutiny?**

- can you provide evidence to show that there are arrangements to enable discussion and consensus between scrutiny, the executive and officers?
- how have officers been involved in championing the value and potential of scrutiny?
- what training and development has been provided with a view to improving scrutiny?

## **HOW ARE THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR SCRUTINY SUPPORT EVALUATED FOR EFFECTIVENESS AND APPROPRIATENESS?**

### **MAKING AN IMPACT**

Answer each of the numbered questions below under three headings:

- Evidence of what we do well

- How can we improve?
  - What are the barriers to and opportunities for improvement?
- The bulleted points under each numbered question can be used, as required, to provide more detailed evidence.

#### **4.1. How is the scrutiny workload co-ordinated and integrated in to corporate processes?**

- are you able to use the forward plan to programme the work of scrutiny?
- Is the forward plan fit for purpose?
- what evidence is there that scrutiny contributes to the delivery of corporate priorities?
- can scrutiny demonstrate an involvement and impact in setting performance objectives?
- what evidence is there to show that scrutiny involvement has identified the need to realign resource allocation or objectives?

#### **4.2. What evidence is there to show that scrutiny has contributed to improvement?**

- what evidence is there to show that changes have been brought about as a result of scrutiny activity?
- what arrangements are in place to ensure that recommendations and actions arising from scrutiny are acted upon?
- how does scrutiny monitor routinely the implementation of its recommendations?

#### **4.3. How well is information required by scrutiny managed?**

- how effective are the arrangements for planning and scoping reviews?
- what arrangements have been made to ensure that scrutiny members receive accurate, timely and appropriate information?
- how does scrutiny record, monitor and evaluate its own proceedings?

### **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR SCRUTINY**

This page contains text sourced from the [IDeA website](#)

The indicators below were suggested as part of the work with our pilot group. They lack detailed definition at present but are a useful starting point to building a more robust set of measures. Further examples from local authorities are available at the bottom.

There is an emerging view amongst scrutiny officers that it is difficult to identify meaningful performance indicators for overview and scrutiny and that some of the indicators listed below (and the collection of them) add little value to the O& S function. Indeed there are cases where indicators and their associated targets have actually led to perverse or otherwise unintended outcomes. These views have been discussed in threads on the old forum [here](#) and [here](#).

Alternative suggestions include the use of case studies to demonstrate effective scrutiny and more descriptive statements of achievement of annual ambitions or challenges for scrutiny, usually to reflect national developments. But the information needs to be carefully targeted to the specific audience - whether they are officers, Members, the public, a peer review or a full scale audit or other inspection team.



As with the rest of our improvement pages please feel free to edit these, add your own, or create pages to provide definition.

### **Critical friend challenge:**

- percentage of items on work programmes taken from the forward plan
- percentage of items on the cabinet agenda amended as a result of scrutiny intervention

### **Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities**

- the percentage of items on the work programme suggested by the public or in response to issues raised through surveys, comments or complaints
- number of visits to the authority's scrutiny web pages
- number of requests for scrutiny newsletter

### **Take the lead and own the scrutiny process**

- the percentage of meetings attended by Members at which they were required
- percentage of Members who are enthusiastic about their role in scrutiny
- percentage of Members that have a fairly good awareness of the role of scrutiny and of their role as a panel member

### **Making an impact on service delivery**

- the percentage of scrutiny recommendations approved by the executive
- the percentage of scrutiny recommendations implemented by the executive
- improvements identified by public/stakeholders as a result of scrutiny reviews

This page is intentionally left blank