

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**  
**14 SEPTEMBER 2006**  
**(7.30 - 8.50 pm)**

Present: Councillors Sargeant (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Beadsley, Mrs Birch, Browne, Earwicker, Edger and Mrs Pile

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Harrison, Leake, Thompson and Worrall  
Mr G Anderson, Mr O Dempsey and Mr M Gibbons

In attendance: Councillor Iain McCracken (Executive Member for Leisure and Corporate Services)

Alison Sanders (Director of Corporate Services)

Richard Beaumont (Head of Performance & Scrutiny)

Alan Nash (Head of Finance)

Helen Tranter (Head of Culture and Visual Environment, Environment & Leisure)

Damian James (Head of Transport Provision)

**14. Apologies for Absence and Substitute Members**

The Panel noted the attendance of the following substitute member:

Councillor Mrs Pile for Councillor Thompson

**15. Minutes and Matters Arising**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 20 July 2006 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**16. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

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

**17. Departmental Overview and Performance**

The Commission considered the first quarter Corporate Services Quarterly Operations Report for 2006/07. Allison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services, gave a presentation highlighting the following :

- i. ABC collection – residents' concerns about ABC had resulted in a large increase in the volume of telephone calls received, and the Commission noted that it was possible that performance targets would not be met. In October a temporary call filtering system would be installed to cope with the large number of calls anticipated.
- ii. Increased rental income as there were currently no voids in the Council's commercial properties.

- iii. The successful departmental accreditation against the 'Investors in People' Standard.
- iv. The successful Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act inspection, to ensure that any surveillance was not carried out in breach of the Human Rights Act.
- v. The implementation of Modern.gov by Democratic Services, making savings by reducing the number of paper copies of agendas. However it was noted that the savings target would possibly not be achieved.
- vi. The successful implementation of phase 1 of the management data accessibility via the new 'Yourself' module of the REBU HR system, a self serve way of updating personnel records.
- vii. Bracknell Forest was the first employer in the South East region to be awarded the nationally recognised Member Development Charter.
- viii. Work carried out to develop a health consultation for the Bracknell Forest 1500.
- ix. The 14 Neighbourhood Action Groups, a joint initiative led by TV Police, had held their second round of meetings and progress had been made to deal with the main concerns raised by residents.

Councillor Edger referred to the servicing of the 14 Neighbourhood Forums and 14 NAGS being a pressure on Democratic Services , which should be monitored.

Councillor Browne raised the problem of the Forums being repetitive and it was hoped that different issues would be discussed at the next round.

The Director agreed to seek the views of ward councillors to ascertain the value of the Neighbourhood Forums and how much was being saved by identifying the local problems, although she pointed out that it would be hard to quantify.

- x. Adoption of the updated pay and workforce strategy and combined workforce development plan. The Commission noted that a Disabilities Equalities Statement remained to be produced.

Following his attendance at a recent meeting of South East Employers', Councillor Edger reported that in relation to pay equality Bracknell Forest was further forward than many other Councils.

- xi. Detailed development of the draft section 106 agreement required for the redevelopment of the Town Centre had been complex but this was now nearing completion.

The Director agreed to check with the Environment and Leisure Department the question posed by Councillor Mrs Pile to confirm that ward councillors should be made aware of any section 106s being negotiated in their wards.

In response to questions posed, the Director advised as follows:

- xii. 69 of the 72 tasks in the Community Cohesion Strategy had been completed.
- xiii. Corporate contracts were in place for IT hardware, agency staff, electricity, food purchase, stationery.

#### 18. **Best Value Review of Transport**

Councillor McCracken, the Executive Member for Leisure & Corporate Services attended the meeting to speak to the Commission on implementing the Best Value Review of Transport. Concerns had been raised at the last meeting relating to the establishment of a working group and to the length of time it had taken to implement the recommendations of the BV Review. Councillor McCracken advised the Commission that he would attend whenever invited to and would come to all meetings if they so wished.

With regard to the length of time taken to implement the Reviews' recommendations, Councillor McCracken explained that establishing the Transport Unit was a complex process as it crossed many disciplines. The Transport Manager had been appointed in September 2005 and a feasibility study was submitted to CMT on 13 September after which a decision would be made by the Executive Member.

At the last meeting the Commission had agreed the establishment of a Sounding Board comprising three members of the Commission and subsequently Councillors Earwicker, Leake and Worrall had expressed an interest. The Commission discussed the merits of establishing a Scrutiny Working Group but as the BV Review recommended the establishment of a Project Review Monitoring Board, members were mindful of the possibility of duplication of effort.

A Transport Review Group would be established by Councillor McCracken and would comprise officers and members. A suggestion was made for the inclusion of one or two scrutiny members. Councillor McCracken undertook to attend the meeting of the Commission on 23 November to respond to the comment by Councillor Edger regarding the operation of separate transport arrangements by Council Departments.

The Commission **AGREED** not to duplicate processes and to leave the establishment of the Board to the Executive Member. The Commission asked to be kept updated and to be given access to the feasibility report once it had been through the proper process.

#### 19. **Audit Committees and Scrutiny**

The Commission welcomed Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance and Scrutiny within the Chief Executive's Department, who presented his report on revising the terms of reference for the Commission to more explicitly incorporate the functions of an audit committee. Appendix 1 set out the new Article 6.02 (ix), "to reinforce effective governance, particularly through reviewing the activities of the Council's internal and external auditors, in consultation with the Borough Treasurer". Appendix 2 set out the audit committee functions of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

The new arrangements to some extent served to codify current arrangements but a new addition was that of reviewing reports of any major risks faced by the Council, together with associated risk management strategies. The Commission **AGREED** that

- (i) the Commission **RECOMMEND** to the Constitution Review Group an addition to the Commission's terms of reference set out in the new Article 6.02 (ix) in appendix 1 to the report;
- (ii) to adopt the working arrangements set out in appendix 2 to the report;
- (iii) to confirm the nomination of Councillors McClean and Worrall as the members of the Commission to take the lead on these arrangements; and
- (iv) to review the effectiveness of the new working arrangements in one year's time.

## 20. **Tree Policy Review Group**

Councillor Browne presented the draft final report of the Scrutiny Working Group on Tree Policy (Tree Policy Review Group), established by the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel who had recommended that the Commission should refer it to the appropriate Executive Members for consideration.

The report acknowledged that trees were an important feature of Bracknell Forest's landscape and visual environment, but considered the existing policy was due for review. It proposed changes to the Council's current strategic and operational policies to meet the demands of the community, to provide appropriate tree protection, to meet national best practice and to better reflect quality of life issues. The report also proposed a draft action plan for the tree team to take forward the proposals. The Working Group agreed four fundamental principles to guide future work on tree related matters:

- The right tree in the right place
- Quality of life counts
- Give residents more influence
- Resources need to match workload

Views and comments arising in discussion –

- (i) Policy 3, Safety and Subsidence – the Council could take a more sympathetic view to residents whose insurance company declined to provide household building cover because of the proximity and maturity of a nearby tree. The policy suggested the householder should seek a quote from a different company.
- (ii) One member expressed concern that the Council should have stated more clearly that it was a defender of trees.
- (iii) There was no database of approved tradesmen but Helen Tranter indicated that she would contact the Arboricultural Association about improving the information on the website.
- (iv) It was confirmed that the policy as approved by the Executive Member would be reflected in the Local Plan and put on the Council's website.
- (v) Officers were looking at writing Supplementary Planning Guidance on trees and the tree strategy.

On behalf of Executive Members, Councillor McCracken thanked members for their work in the preparation of a timely and comprehensive report and the Commission, in turn, thanked Helen Tranter and her officers. It was

**AGREED** that the report be referred to the Executive Members for Planning and Transportation and Leisure and Corporate Services for their consideration.

## 21. **Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity**

### **Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Councillor Mrs Birch reported on two reviews were currently underway on –

- library provision; and
- youth provision, particularly in relation to how young people in the borough participated and how to raise their profile,

both of which were expected to be complete for the New Year.

### **Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Councillor Edger reported on two reviews currently underway on –

- anti-social behaviour; and
- action group for supporting people,

both of which should be completed by April. In December there was expected to be a report and action plan on older people's services.

### **Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Councillor Browne reported on a joint meeting held with Slough and Windsor and Maidenhead's Health Scrutiny Panels in advance of establishing an East Berks Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel. A decision was still to be made about representation on the joint panel.

### **Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Councillor McClean reported that the last meeting of the Panel endorsed the Tree Policy and received an update on the Local Development Framework. The Panel may soon consider Councillor Beadsley's report on cycling in the borough.

**CHAIRMAN**