

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
18 JANUARY 2007
(7.30 - 10.15 pm)

Present: Councillors McLean (Vice-Chairman), Beadsley, Mrs Birch, Browne, Earwicker, Edger, Harrison, Thompson, Worrall and Baily (Substitute)

Church Representatives:

Mr G Anderson

Parent Governor Representatives:

Mrs D Whitbread

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

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Leake and Sargeant
Mr O Dempsey

In attendance: Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services
Chris Herbert, Borough Treasurer
Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance and Scrutiny
Andrea Carr, Policy Officer

COUNCILLOR McLEAN IN THE CHAIR

34. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members (Item 1)

The Panel noted the attendance of the following substitute members:

Councillor Baily for Councillor Sargeant.

35. Minutes and Matters Arising (Item 2)

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 23 November 2006 be agreed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

36. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip (Item 3)

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

37. Urgent Items of Business (Item 4)

The Chairman agreed that a proposed overview and scrutiny review of healthcare funding be considered as an urgent item at this meeting pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act, 1972. The reason for urgency was to avoid the delay that would be incurred if this matter was postponed until the next meeting of the Commission.

A paper providing background information and suggesting a two-staged approach to

the review was circulated at the meeting. The wish to undertake the review stemmed from the revelation that Bracknell Forest Borough had been under funded since 2002 by approximately £4m per annum by reference to the Government formula in respect of funding of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). This information was at odds with assurances previously given to overview and scrutiny members by the former Bracknell Forest PCT. Although Slough Borough had been funded broadly in line with this formula, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead had been over funded during the same period by around £11m annually. Whilst the Chief Executive of the new East Berkshire PCT sought to address this imbalance without delay, full equity of funding could not be achieved for approximately three years. Members welcomed the openness of the new Chief Executive of the PCT and indicated that the review should be forward looking and undertaken in a spirit of co-operation to obtain the best health service for the Borough.

Having discussed the merits of conducting the review by a working group of the Commission or of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel, which had a statutory power to summon NHS representatives to its meetings, it was **AGREED** that a working group of the Commission including members of the Panel be established to undertake the review of healthcare funding. Councillors Leake, Browne, Edger and Beadsley were named as the four members of the working group which would agree its scope and terms of reference and report back to the next meetings of both the Panel and Commission.

38. **Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity (Item 5)**

Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The first formal meeting of the above Committee had been held on 10 January 2007 and Councillor Leake had been appointed as its Chairman. Although one Committee Member considered that the meeting had been constructive in some respects, he felt that officers of the Strategic Health Authority and East Berkshire Primary Care Trust had not been forthcoming. However, it was recognised that representatives of these newly formed bodies may be conscious of initial sensitivities and be less circumspect at future meetings.

Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

The Panel Chairman provided an update on the overview and scrutiny reviews being undertaken by its working groups in respect of youth provision and libraries. The review of youth provision, which was aimed at investigating arrangements for youth provision in Bracknell Forest and considering the impact young people can make on the community through their activities, was nearing completion and would be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel for approval. Although the review of libraries, which sought to inform new library provision within the proposed civic hub, was progressing well, some work and library visits remained to be undertaken and it was hoped that the review would be completed on schedule.

Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel

A further meeting of the Supporting People Working Group was proposed to continue monitoring the implementation of the Supporting People action plan. A new group consisting of Councillors Kendall and Ms Wilson had been established to look at the report emanating from the inspection of services for older people by the Commission for Social Care Inspection and to monitor the associated improvement plan. Partnerships, the Police and Justice Act and housing stock transfer ballot were identified as probable areas for future overview and scrutiny activity by this Panel.

Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel

The last meeting of this Panel had been held at Bracknell Leisure Centre with a view to enhancing public access and engagement. Although the previous work of the Panel had concentrated on environmental matters, leisure services had been the theme of this meeting which had commenced with a tour of leisure facilities before giving consideration to the performance of the service and factors for success. Although the Panel had received many positive messages in relation to leisure services, some issues concerning revenue generation had arisen and Members would continue to investigate this area.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Owing to the absence of the Panel's Chairman at this meeting and of its Vice Chairman at the last meeting of the Panel, it was agreed that an update on its activities would be deferred to the Commission's next meeting.

39. Draft Annual Report to Council on Overview and Scrutiny (Item 6)

The Head of Performance and Scrutiny advised that, in accordance with Constitutional requirements, an annual overview and scrutiny report for 2006 had been prepared in agreement with the Chairman for submission to the next meeting of the Council. Individual sections had been forwarded to Panel Chairmen for approval and the composite document would be forwarded to all members of the Commission and agreed by the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Commission in the light of comments and feedback from Commission Members.

It was **AGREED** that the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Commission be given delegated authority to agree the final version of the 2006 annual overview and scrutiny report for submission to the Council on 28 February 2007.

40. Report of the Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group (Item 7)

The Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel presented the final report of the A-SB Working Group to the Commission for approval. Members noted that A-SB was wide ranging and of considerable concern to the public and that the review had focused on how the Council should respond to it and deliver the associated strategy. Some terms of reference of the review had not been pursued as they had been pre-empted by an academic study undertaken by two university colleges in respect of A-SB in all wards of Bracknell Forest.

The review had concentrated on the solutions available to tackle A-SB which fell into the three distinct areas of prevention, intervention and enforcement. A wide range of partners involved in A-SB had been interviewed as part of the review which had concluded that partnership working was essential to combating it. The Commission's attention was drawn to the facts that families with A-SB Orders had been unwilling to discuss the matter with the Working Group, A-SB was not a recognised area of police work and that there were unresolved mental health issues associated with it. The ten recommendations stemming from the report were noted by the Commission.

The following matters arose from discussion of the report:

- Success in tackling A-SB would be increased by greater collaborative working between associated agencies and partners.

- The recommendation to address the shortage of suitable accommodation for ex-prisoners on their return to the community referred to the benefits of providing a suitable item of shared accommodation, such as a 'half-way' house, with a view to preventing re-offending.
- Although schools and the Thames Valley Police's Schools Liaison Officer could assist in tackling A-SB through early intervention, Members supported the report's conclusion that many of the issues around A-SB stemmed from poor parenting skills. In addition to the activity being undertaken by the Youth Offending Team in relation to parenting orders and contracts, the extended schools scheme offered parenting classes and worked with Parents and Children Together in Reading. It was suggested that a greater emphasis be placed on such classes and work.
- In response to a suggestion that a central register of A-SB offenders be compiled, the Commission was advised that this matter had been considered by the Working Group but dismissed owing to the differing approaches of agencies/partners and potential confidentiality issues.

Gratitude was expressed to the Working Group for the time and effort it had invested in the review and resulting report. It was **AGREED** that the report be forwarded to the Executive Member for Public Protection and Services and that he be invited to attend the next meeting of the Commission to provide some initial feedback thereon and discuss issues and concerns relating to A-SB.

41. **Corporate Services Budget Consultation (Item 8)**

The Commission considered the 2007/08 draft budget proposals in respect of the Corporate Services Department and Chief Executive's Office noting the challenges experienced in identifying the required levels of savings.

Capital Programme

The Director of Corporate Services explained the capital programme items relating to her Department. The following points were made in response to Members' questions:

- The Customer Relationship Management/Telephone Integration upgrade would facilitate hot desking and remote working at home and off-site and be particularly beneficial in the civic hub;
- With regard to transport routing and scheduling software, Members were advised that the Oyster card application could not be integrated with the Council's smartcard as it was not compliant with the recommendations of the Department for Trade and Industry regarding transport outside London. Development of a travel card for the Borough was at a pilot stage pending the agreement of a national technology standard. The Director undertook to provide further information in respect of the smartcard transport pilot scheme;
- Although the Council did test some cutting edge ICT equipment, it utilised well proven and tested systems for mainstream work which had an asset life of three to five years requiring investment of £1m per annum. The current hard wired systems would be replaced by portable equipment in the civic hub;
- Unavoidable capital programme items regarding asbestos management, water

hygiene and fire safety related to surveys and resulting necessary work.

General Fund Revenue Budget

Members were advised of details of the revenue budget including changes in the commitment budget and some pressures and savings. It was noted that some items comprised changes for 2007/08 that had been anticipated in the previous year. As the potential to generate associated income was currently limited, the advertising budget had been suspended until the redevelopment of the town centre.

Arising from consideration of the revenue budget, Members sought further information in relation to the following areas:

- Savings arising from the fundamental review of the Communications Section of the Chief Executive's Office;
- The Digitv scheme which would offer the Council potential to deliver information and services through digital television sets and mobile telephones.

42. The Council's Budget Consultation (Item 9)

The Commission was formally invited to consider and comment on a report in respect of the draft budget proposals relating to the entire Council which had been submitted to the meeting of the Executive held on 12 December 2006 and been the subject of a consultation exercise. The Borough Treasurer advised that there was a budget shortfall of £5m and that the report assumed increases in Council Tax and inflation, use of balances and provision of Government grants as indicated in November 2006. Although the level of Government grant had now been confirmed without change, there was some grant movement within the overall funds which was explained to the Commission. The Council's Corporate Management Team had been tasked with identifying saving options that would not impact on front-line services.

The Commission noted that the main budget risks and pressures related to additional demand for social services, cost transfer from the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and inflation increases. The contingency fund had been increased to approximately £600k to meet these risks. Although waste disposal and recycling had presented unforeseen risks, the signing of a private finance initiative (PFI) relating to the RE3 project had provided certainty of cost and enabled the transfer of risk to a third party.

The following matters arose from consideration of the budget proposals:

- Whilst income from the sale of waste for re-cycling did not meet the cost of collection, separation and transport, the cost increase resulting from the introduction of the Alternate Bin Collection scheme had been absorbed to date. The RE3 project would cause an initial cost increase, however, expenditure would reduce in the future as re-cycling targets were met and fines avoided;
- Although the fees and charges policy dated back to 2001/02, it was not considered to be in need of review. The policy addressed legal restrictions and set out the criteria by which Members and officers could look into fees and charges levied. The Environment and Leisure Department regularly reviewed its fees and charges against other service providers and a fundamental review of those charged by the Social Services and Housing Department had taken place;

- Delegation of service provision to town and parish councils would not relieve budget pressures for Bracknell Forest as it would have no impact on the overall Council Tax levied;
- Although the budget anticipated an increase of 2.5% in staff salaries, the contingency fund was adequate to meet the gap in the event of a 3% rise;
- The comments and concerns of the Borough Treasurer were sought in respect of the budget proposals and he drew attention to the level of investment in Council assets, delivery of the Decent Homes standard, demand for social services, salary increases and the transfer of costs from the PCT to the Council.

The Chairman noted that this concluded the Overview and Scrutiny consultation process on the Council's 2007/08 budget proposals.

43. **Departmental Overview and Performance (Item 10)**

The Director of Corporate Services presented the Quarterly Operations Reports (QORs) in respect of her Department and the Chief Executive's Office for the second quarter of 2006/07. Highlights from the QORs included the RE3 waste disposal contract, the town centre redevelopment and civic hub, joining of the Community Engagement and Community Cohesion Working Groups, review of progress on the Community Cohesion Strategy, Customer Services support for the introduction of the Alternate Bin Collection scheme and review of the Customer Contract Strategy. Attention was drawn to the technical implementation of the Customer Relationship Management system, development of the ICT strategy, rollout of the pay and workforce strategy, equal pay audit, unification of the Learning and Development function, the Special Protection Area Mitigation Strategy, budget preparations and support for the Sandhurst Royal Military Academy Freedom of the Borough March.

A forward look to the third quarter of 2006/07 featured many of the above matters in addition to the Disability Equality Scheme, support for the "Your Homes" project, procurement savings, budget monitoring, the recruitment and retention initiative, intranet improvements, maintenance and construction programmes, support for Neighbourhood Forums and Local Democracy Week, Nationality Checking Scheme, preparation for the 2007 elections, the unified transport function and a review of support services.

The following issues arose from consideration of the QOR:

- Although the Council had withdrawn from the Renaissance energy project as the private sector had not been in a position to support the scheme, information gained in this connection would be utilised to inform cleaner and greener strategies for the civic hub and central area housing;
- Work was being undertaken to produce a design for the civic hub which would not encroach on land the subject of a restrictive covenant preventing development along the eastern side of its site;
- The Director of Corporate Services was congratulated on her Department joining the Education, Children's Services and Libraries Department in receiving Investors in People Accreditation. The Executive Member for Leisure and Corporate Services advised that he would approach the Environment and Leisure Department in respect of pursuing accreditation under this scheme but pointed out to the Commission the number of Charter Mark Awards recently

gained by this Department.

44. **Corporate Performance Overview Report (Item 11)**

Further to consideration of the Corporate Performance Overview Report relating to the second quarter of 2006/07, further information concerning delayed transfers of care was sought and would be circulated to Commission Members.

45. **Executive Forward Plan (Item 12)**

Members noted forthcoming items of a corporate nature on the Executive's Forward Plan.

CHAIRMAN