

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
15 MARCH 2007
(7.30 - 10.40 pm)

Present: Councillors Sargeant (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Beadsley, Mrs Birch, Earwicker, Edger, Leake, Thompson, Baily (Substitute), Kendall (Substitute) and North

Church Representatives:

Mr G Anderson

Also Present:

Councillor North, Executive Member for Public Protection and Services
Councillor Piasecki

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Browne and Worrall

In attendance:

Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance & Scrutiny
Alan Nash, Head of Finance
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Vincent Paliczka, Director of Environment and Leisure
Alison Sanders, Direct of Corporate Services

46. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Commission noted the attendance of the following substitute members:

Councillor Baily for Councillor Browne
Councillor Kendall for Councillor Worrall

47. Minutes and Matters Arising

Minute 41 – Smartcard Transport Pilot Scheme – further to the request for additional information, the Director of Corporate Services introduced the Director of Environment and Leisure who provided the Commission with a brief overview of the Scheme, the national context in terms of a national travel card and answered Members' questions in respect of this issue. The Commission indicated that it might wish to return to this issue at a future meeting.

Minute 41 – Digitv Scheme – the Director of Corporate Services advised that additional information about Digitv had been circulated to Members.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 18 January 2007 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

48. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

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

49. Internal Audit Plan 2007/08

The Head of Finance (Alan Nash) presented a report which sought the Commission's views on the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2007/08. Members were advised a new approach had been taken for this Audit Plan, which was heavily influenced by an assessment of risk. Consequently the Audit Plan focussed on those areas of the Council's business which would have the greatest influence on the achievement of its objectives. Also highlighted was the need for flexibility in the Plan, so the number of days shown for each audit area was purely indicative and subject to change as required by circumstance. The Council's Head of Finance was confident that the Audit Plan could be delivered within budget. If significant changes to the Plan became necessary, it was proposed that these would be discussed with those members nominated by the Commission to have specific responsibility for audit matters and reported to the Commission in the regular internal audit assurance reports.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- i) Contingency Planning – the basis for the proposal of 40 days included for contingencies was queried and Members were advised that previous experience would suggest that this would be a realistic level of contingency provision;
- ii) Transport – Members queried the allocation of 10 audit days to transport, which had been identified as an area of weakness in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter. It was clarified that the Annual Audit & Inspection letter referred to the Local Transport Plan. The proposed audit was largely concerned with tenders for Home to School transport, to carry out a review of procurement and the financial consequences of this;
- iii) Housing Stock Transfer – it was noted that a large allocation had been made to this issue (20 days), which reflected the substantial amount of work which would be required, irrespective of the final outcome of the vote
- iv) Schools – Members were asked how schools were selected for audit and were advised that factors such as previous experience, limited assurance, changes in bursars or head teachers were all considered in addition to a cyclical approach based upon a controlled risk self assessment prepared by schools which identified high levels of risk;
- v) Bracknell Forest Services (BFS) – BFS would be audited under the Social Services and Housing audit area and would also be linked to the Housing Stock Transfer;
- vi) Total Audit Days – comparatively speaking, Bracknell Forest's planned audit days were less than neighbouring authorities and members were assured that this was reflective of the lower level of risk within Bracknell Forest compared to other authorities;
- vii) Internal and External Audit – Members were advised that audit work was carried out internally as much as possible as this was done at a lower cost than external audit. This relied upon the external auditor being satisfied with the standard of internal audit, which was currently the case. There was also co-ordination between internal and external audit to minimise duplication;
- viii) Housing Management – members were advised that if the housing stock transferred to a Registered Social Landlord (RSL), audits would become the responsibility of the RSL; and
- ix) Sheltered Housing – this did not present a substantial risk, which was reflected by a low audit day allocation. This would be used to audit fewer sheltered housing facilities in rotation but in more depth.

50. **2006 Comprehensive Performance Assessment Results**

The Head of Performance and Scrutiny advised members that Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) results for all unitary authorities had been published on 22 February 2007. Bracknell Forest's CPA results were supported by an Annual Audit and Inspection Letter (AAIL) which had been presented to the Executive in draft and the final AAIL would be being brought to the Commission at its next meeting in June 2007. Key features were a retained overall CPA rating of 3, however the assessed direction of travel had moved from improving well to improving adequately largely because of issues around:

- Adult social care
- Supporting people
- The operational leadership of these areas

It was **AGREED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission consider the CPA results in more detail at its meeting on 7 June 2007

51. **Report of the Working Group on Anti-Social Behaviour**

Members were advised that the Berkshire Healthcare Trust (PCT) was now considering the provision of mental health care for 16/17 year olds, and the Commission would be kept informed of any further developments. As agreed at the previous meeting of the Commission, the Executive Member for Public Protection and Services attended to seek clarification around some of the recommendations made in the final report of the Working Group on Anti-social Behaviour and discuss issues and concerns relating to anti-social behaviour, prior to giving the Executive's response to the report. The following conclusions were reached with regard to the recommendations made in the Working Group report (page 28 of the agenda pack):

Recommendation 1: Non Executive Members were not involved enough in existing processes which deal with anti-social behaviour. Members were advised that the new Local Area Agreement guidance would affect current ways of working, particularly in relation to partnership working.

Recommendation 2: The removal or abstraction of Neighbourhood Police Officers was an issue and Thames Valley Police would be invited to clarify the reasons and processes for such abstractions. It was agreed that it would be helpful to also invite the Town and Parish Councils to this presentation.

Recommendation 3: The School Liaison Officer (SLO) had been appointed and there had been positive feedback on the progress of the work achieved by the SLO. Fuller details of this would be provided at the next Adult, Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting on 20 March, with a report by the SLO on activities to date.

Recommendation 4: As already detailed, the PCT were considering the issue of mental health provision for 16/17 year olds. It was unclear whether the main issue was the selection criteria for existing services or a lack of resources. The Executive Member for Public Protection and Services agreed to investigate this further.

Recommendation 5: It was agreed that as a report on the issue of supporting ex-prisoners was due out in June, this issue could be reconsidered at a later stage, with a watching brief in the meantime.

Recommendation 6: The Draft Alcohol Strategy was to be presented to the Adult, Social Care & Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel next week.

Recommendation 7: This issue was being considered by Councillor Leake as Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel, with a report back to the Executive to clarify matters.

Recommendation 8: It was apparent that largely because of differing performance reporting frameworks and service aims, partnership working did on occasion encounter difficulties. It was recognised that effective partnership working in the future was crucial and this was something to work towards. Again, the recent Local Area Agreement guidance would influence future partnership working.

Recommendation 9: There were already targets in place in relation to anti-social behaviour as part of the Local Area Agreement. It was acknowledged that an agreed definition of anti-social behaviour for the purposes of performance reporting would be useful.

Recommendation 10: There was agreement that this discussion had been very helpful and had provided additional detail for the Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel to incorporate in its review of this report in November 2007.

The Executive Member thanked the Working Group for their report.

52. **Report of the Working Group on Youth Provision**

Councillor Mrs Birch and Councillor Beadsley presented this report and highlighted the following issues:

- i) the Working Group was very pleased to report that the young people of Bracknell Forest were an asset to the community and a press release had been prepared and issued to draw attention to this fact;
- ii) the young people of Bracknell Forest were found to have good social skills;
- iii) the report identified and listed a substantial number and variety of activities available to young people within the Borough, however young people were keen to have more facilities and activities made available locally;
- iv) the Town Centre redevelopment was seen as key with a recommendation from the Working Group that the Town Centre Regeneration Team consult the Youth Forum on and work to deliver facilities for young people in the Town Centre;
- v) most of the activities listed were relatively inexpensive which was very positive;
- vi) opportunities for young people to volunteer needed expanding and making accessible to all young people; and
- vii) access and transport were both issues for young people for which there were no easy answers.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- i) Perceptions of Young People – this report reflected a very positive and realistic view of young people within Bracknell Forest which was often undermined by the actions of a few young people;

- ii) The Activities List – this list within the report needed to be made available and publicised throughout the Borough;
- iii) Awards – awards schemes such as the recent Bracknell Awards for Teenagers were to be encouraged as a useful way of recognising the many achievements of young people;
- iv) Parenting – good parenting was very important for most young people to provide the attention, opportunity and encouragement necessary to help them achieve; and
- v) Transport – the need to provide transport links to enable young people to attend activities.

Gratitude was expressed for the time and effort contributed by the Working Group in the production of a very informative and useful report. It was **AGREED** that the report be forwarded to the Executive Member for Children's Services.

53. **Report of the Working Group on Libraries**

Councillor Mrs Birch presented this report which detailed the review of libraries within Bracknell Forest carried out by the Working Group.

Members were advised that all library users placed a high value on libraries and their staff and facilities including ICT. Other findings included the importance of libraries as part of their local communities with users often visiting on a weekly basis and enjoying a high standard of service.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- i) Remit of the Report – this did not deal with the operational side of the libraries service, so issues such as staffing were not considered;
- ii) Home Taught Children – there was an increasing trend towards teaching children at home, for which the library service was essential;
- iii) Social Issues – concerns were raised around the isolating effects of ICT and the inadequate levels by which reading and learning were improving;
- iv) Crowthorne Library – it was felt that the good practice evident at this new library in terms of layout and displays should have been highlighted in this report and shared across the Borough;
- v) Observations/Conclusions and Recommendations – it was observed that all of these required further consideration by the Executive Member rather than just the recommendations alone; and
- vi) Report Format – it was agreed that it would be helpful to agree a standardised format for future working group reports, although a level of flexibility would always be necessary in view of the broad range of issues being considered.

Members thanked the Working Group for the work involved in producing a very informative report. It was **AGREED** that the report be forwarded to the Executive Member for Education and Libraries, and that he be invited to attend the next meeting of the Commission to provide feedback on both the observations/conclusions and recommendations made within the report.

54. **Departmental Overview and Performance**

The Director of Corporate Services presented the Quarterly Operations Report (QOR) in respect of Corporate Services for the third quarter of 2006/07. Highlights included the completion of the Town Centre S106 agreement, the high level of responses to the Disability Equality Scheme consultation, the progress made with the

Community Cohesion Strategy, the 'go live' for the Customer Relationship Management IT System in November 2006 and the ongoing preparation for the elections in May 2007.

Looking forward to the final quarter of 2006/07, substantial work would be needed to support the Town Centre & Civic Centre processes, produce and consult on, the draft Gender Equality Scheme & Community Cohesion Strategy, progress the Customer Relationship Management system, support the Your Homes Project, update the risk strategy and consult on, the IT Strategy.

In discussions, Members raised the following issues:

- i) Elections – the need for sufficient staff and resources to ensure the elections run smoothly;
- ii) Civic Centre – the possibilities for increased Member involvement in processes around the work being done on the Civic Centre. It was acknowledged that the timetabling of the different stages of work for the Civic Centre was tight, so Members needed to be mindful of this, however the Member Development Charter Steering Group intended to have some input into the Civic Centre processes;
- iii) S106 Agreement – clarification was sought and provided with regard to what the Town Centre S106 Agreement with the Bracknell Regeneration Partnership was comprised of and should deliver;
- iv) Neighbourhood Forums – Members queried how effective these were. They were advised that a review of Neighbourhood Forums had been carried out last year which had concluded that the existing format represented the best balance between effectiveness and available resources at the moment. However, a further review was underway in light of concerns that not all residents were able to participate in the forums;
- v) Demographics – Members discussed the issue of the changing population within Bracknell Forest with the introduction of a number of residents of ethnic origin new to the Borough. It was felt that additional provision was needed to support these new residents and communities and Members were assured that mapping was underway to identify what was needed and focus resources accordingly;
- vi) Budgets – Members were pleased to note that the targeted substantial underspend within Corporate Services of £450,000 by the end of the financial year had been met in order to offset overspends in other areas of the Council. However this was not without an effect on performance; and
- vii) Projects – Members were asked how substantial projects such as 'Your Homes' were managed in terms of resources and staffing for example. Members were advised that Corporate Services provided a substantial level of support in such instances with finances, staff and resource management for the areas of the Council involved.

The Assistant Chief Executive presented the QOR in respect of the Chief Executive's Office for the third quarter of 2006/07. Of great relevance to the work of the Chief Executive's Office were the recent Local Government White Paper and Local Government Bill, as these documents essentially set out the future work programme for the Chief Executive's Office. Highlights for the third quarter included the work on the Town Centre with the S106 Agreement signed and development agreement making good progress. The Civic Hub Work Programme was progressing well with the current focus on the designs for the building and procurement issues. The finalised Local Area Agreement had been submitted in January 2007, which should be operational from 1 April 2007 and the work for the CPA in October had already been started.

The forward look was focussed upon the same four areas of work plus the recent Local Area Agreement guidance which indicated that in future the LAA would be the only place where local authority targets would be agreed and a duty of co-operation was placed upon partners to achieve future targets. The implications of the new LAA guidance were therefore far-reaching and would require substantial work in this area.

55. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Executive Forward Plan for items of a corporate nature was noted.

56. **Panel Updates**

Lifelong Learning and Children's Service Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Members were advised that all of the planned work programme had been completed with subsequent improvements made to the school transfer process, an improved situation with regard to school exclusions via the use of special units and the successful launch of the Youth Website.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel

The investigation into the allocation of Primary Care Trust (PCT) funds in the last financial year was ongoing, by a working group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. The Chief Executive of the PCT had been interviewed and the Executive Member for Adult Services and Housing would shortly be consulted with. In addition to this there was consideration of the role of the Health and Social Care Partnership Board. This current work was the first of a two part process, which would produce a report recommending whether or not this matter should be pursued further and the second, more involved part of the process carried out. Members were advised that the use of an external expert had been found to be very beneficial and provision needed to be made in future budgets to allow for this possibility again. A working group of the Panel had also been considering the health implications around extended schools and the way the Council and the PCT worked together on this issue at budgetary and operational levels. The Working Group on the Health Strategy was in place.

Since December 2006, the Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been established and was currently considering issues around CAMHS provision and community health. It was reported that meetings of the Joint Committee had gone well and the health partners considered it important and a prime focus for consultation. It was **AGREED** that the Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would in future have its own heading under Panel Updates.

Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Logistical difficulties prevented a full report at this meeting, however Members were advised that the Annual Audit Inspection Letter had commented on the Supporting People Programme.

Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel

The Local Development Framework was progressing well and the transfer of Parking Enforcement to the Council had gone smoothly. Of particular note were the Design Awards for developments within Bracknell Forest which were to be encouraged to promote high quality and individual design for new developments locally. This was

particularly necessary in view of the forthcoming Town Centre redevelopment and large-scale housing development expected.

57. Scrutiny of External Public Service Bodies

The Head of Performance and Scrutiny presented a report which detailed the principal public bodies external to the Council for the Commission to consider how it and the Scrutiny Panels might extend their scrutiny function to cover. As well as arising from a previously expressed interest in extending scrutiny to public services, by the Commission, the Local Government Bill currently before Parliament would be likely to expand the role for local authority Overview and Scrutiny in relation to other public service providers. Members were advised that it therefore seemed likely that the scrutiny of some public bodies would become a statutory requirement and others may be included via locally agreed governance protocols.

In discussion, Members raised the following issues:

- i) Resources – concerns were expressed that this expanded remit would not be achievable without the commitment of additional resources to Overview and Scrutiny;
- ii) Focussing Work – the increased need for Overview and Scrutiny to clearly identify and focus its work upon specific issues was acknowledged; and
- iii) Internal Issues – the need to ensure that scrutiny of external bodies was not done at the expense of important internal issues such as transport, was regarded as essential.

The Commission expressed its thanks to Councillor Sargeant for his Chairmanship of the Commission and for his commitment and service to the local authority and residents of the Borough. It acknowledged that Councillor Sargeant's wealth of experience would be missed and Commission Members wished him all the best for the future.

CHAIRMAN