

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
27 MAY 2010
7.30 - 9.55 PM**



Present:

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

Executive Members:

Councillor McCracken

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs McCracken
Mr G S Anderson, Church Representative
Timothy Wheadon, Chief Executive

In Attendance:

Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting –

- Khan Juna, Chairman, Thames Valley Police Authority, Steve Rowell, Assistant Chief Constable, and Inspector Jon Goosey;
- Alison Sanders in her new capacity as the Council's designated Scrutiny Officer and
- John Harrison on his return after a spell of ill-health.

4. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 25 March and 12 May 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising –

Minute 66, Review of Bracknell Healthspace – the Head of Overview and Scrutiny reported the confirmation by the Chief Executive of NHS Berks that she would attend the next meeting of the Commission in July. Members of the Health O&S Panel had been invited to the meeting.

Minute 69, Executive Forward Plan - the Head of Overview and Scrutiny reported that there would be a Member Briefing on the Town Centre regeneration on 3 June 2010.

Minute 74, Children's Services and Learning O&S Panel - the Working Group on Safeguarding Children held its first meeting last week, when Councillor Mrs

McCracken had been appointed lead member. A programme of work was being mapped out.

Minute 75, Annual Report of Overview & Scrutiny - - the Head of Overview and Scrutiny reported that work was ongoing in attempts to fill co-opted vacancies. Letters would be sent to all Parent Governors, Head Teachers and Children's Social Care representative organisations inviting them to an open evening on 28 June 2010.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

MEETING AS THE CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE

6. **Local Policing**

The Commission, meeting as the Crime and Disorder Committee,

RESOLVED that the Chairman of the Thames Valley Police Authority, Mr Khan Juna, be co-opted onto membership for this meeting.

Steve Rowell, Assistant Chief Constable, Thames Valley Police, introduced Inspector Jon Goosey, deputising for Chief Inspector Simon Bowden, Local Area Police Commander, who was involved in the public meeting relating to the recent sexual assaults.

The Assistant Chief Constable gave a presentation on Local Policing, a copy of which was tabled at the meeting.

Firstly he briefed the Commission on the two recent local events –

Assault on DC Luke Simms – DC Simms was stabbed last week when carrying out inquiries with a colleague at a local bookmaker in Birch Hill when a robbery occurred. He was making a good recovery and had been discharged from hospital today. ACC Rowell expressed his gratitude to staff at Frimley Park Hospital. A man in his late twenties had been arrested on suspicion of robbery and attempted murder.

Sexual assaults – Three recent offences in Bracknell had been linked – one last November and two on Election Day, 6 May, one of which was an attempted abduction. A more recent identikit picture of the suspect was tabled at the meeting.

ACC Rowell reported that there were currently 300 lines of enquiry being led by Supt Rob Mason from TVP Major Crime and involving 40 dedicated full-time officers, with extra resources upon which he could draw.

An A5 leaflet giving safety advice was tabled at the meeting. A public meeting was being held this evening to re-assure the local community. The leaflet would be distributed at the meeting and to all schools. ACC Rowell commented on the effective method of getting messages out on networking websites such as Facebook and said that these assaults should be featured on BBC TV Crimewatch next month.

ACC Rowell expressed appreciation of the help of the local authority.

He then gave his presentation which included –

- Police targets, where nine of the ten targets had been exceeded in 2009/10.
- Seven 2010/11 strategy objectives, split into 48 delivery actions.
- Details of the delivery plan in relation to engagement, anti-social behaviour, communications, special constables, satisfaction levels, managing offenders, young people and speeding and driving. Particular reference was made to –
 - The successful ‘Have your say’ events, giving an informal opportunity to speak to local officers.
 - Looking to work with the local authority to identify vulnerable and repeat victims of anti social behaviour.
 - There were 78 Special Constables in Berkshire East and the increase in the numbers of volunteers in Berkshire East was against the national trend.
 - Young people were not always being automatically taken through the justice system – in some cases restorative justice was being implemented as an alternative.
 - For speeding and driving offences, the police were looking to increase their powers in relation to seizure of vehicles.
- Neighbourhood Policing in Bracknell Forest. Particular reference was made to –
 - Delivery plan actions addressed local issues.
 - Public confidence that the police and local authorities in the Thames Valley were dealing with ASB and Crime Issues that Matter had increased and was increased in Bracknell Forest more than in the rest of the areas.
 - Serious acquisitive crime had reduced by 18.9% in the year to 31 March 2010.
 - Assault less serious injury (non domestic) had increased by 2%, against the overall trend in the year to 31 March 2010. Chief Inspector Bowden was giving this issue close and continuing attention.
 - The performance statistics for 1 April to 24 May 2010 in relation to the targets set showed the following results for Bracknell Forest –
 - An excess of 25% over target in reducing the level of serious acquisitive crime.
 - A deficit of 2.9% in the detection rate for serious acquisitive crime.
 - A deficit of 7.7% in the detection rate for violence against the person with injury, including domestic abuse.
 - An excess of 1.7% over target in the detection rate for serious sexual offences.

The following points arose in members’ questions to ACC Rowell –

- A case of anti-social behaviour in North Ascot which had resulted in a planning application to install gates at entrances to an estate. Councillor Worrall would give the details of this case outside the meeting.
- In light of the recent sexual assaults in the area, the question was raised of some schools having a restricted mobile phone policy for students. The police were aware of this but had no power to compel schools to allow phones

in the current circumstances. The police would appreciate the help of the local authority in persuading Head Teachers to have more flexible policies.

- One member referred to an impression that the police were stifled in the way they could use restraining orders. ACC Rowell responded that the police were not above the law and had to operate within the laws of the land. He saw that as a strength as it gave the public confidence. There was a shift away from rigidity and officers were being taught to use their discretion, for example in relation to restorative justice, resulting in better satisfaction on the part of victims of crime.
- In relation to a question about the restriction placed on officers by the great deal of paperwork they had to complete, ACC Rowell responded that there were now a wide range of innovative ways of dealing with matters which although having to be recorded were not so bureaucratic.
- Relating to prospective changes to funding, Khan Juna reported the receipt today of a letter proposing cuts of £3.4 million for TVP.
- Only one target, relating to public confidence, was set by the Government. The rest were set by the Police Authority after public consultation to ascertain what the public wanted.
- ACC Rowell acknowledged that TV Police was slightly behind other similar forces in detection rates.
- Steps taken to maximise time officers spent in the community, included making efficiency cuts and providing more staff.
- The previous problem of losing officers to the Metropolitan Police was declining.

The Chairman thanked ACC Rowell for an extremely interesting and informative presentation. He commented on the bravery of front line officers and asked ACC Rowell to take back to DC Simms the Commission's best wishes for a speedy recovery.

7. **Thames Valley Police Authority**

Khan Juna, Chairman of the Thames Valley Police Authority, gave a presentation on the functions and role of the Thames Valley Police Authority. Also present was Councillor McCracken, Vice Chairman of the Police Authority.

Key responsibilities were summarised as –

- Strategic – identifying local and national expectations with regard to policing, managing those expectations and having regard to the views of local people. Setting clear unambiguous and achievable direction for the Force to deliver those expectations, over at least a three year period.
- Resources - ensuring that the Force had sufficient resources to deliver agreed expectations and had the right leadership to deliver those expectations.

- Performance - to ensure there were adequate business-wide governance frameworks in place to
 - ensure resources were used efficiently and effectively
 - ensure things that went wrong or required improvement were identified and remedied early
 - ensure that such matters were made known to the Authority and that dialogue took place between the Authority and the Force on issues which required a strategic response or which impacted on statutory plans.
- Communication - ensuring the Authority's strategic objectives for the Force were informed by the wishes of the public and were known and understood by partners and local people.
- Values and standards - setting clear standards for the Authority and the Force, including standards of behaviour and service delivery.

Arising from discussion or questions –

- The Thames Valley Police Authority had cross border co-operation agreements with Hampshire, Sussex and Surrey which began three years ago, providing efficiency and economy savings.
- Relating to the possibility of election of certain police chiefs, no clear model had been developed on how this would be delivered.
- The increase in the numbers of officers had all been police officers, not Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). The policy on the percentage of PCSOs to police officers was determined by the Government grant. Currently there were 460 PCSOs in TVP and some vacancies.
- The question of security staff at Wexham Park Hospital instead of PCSOs was raised. This was an operational issue. Wexham Park had withdrawn their part of the PCSO funding and opted for an alternative.

Councillor McCracken referred to –

- The South East Counter-Terrorism Unit, a national asset.
- His chairing of the Police Authority Productivity Panel, established to advise the Authority on potential cuts in funding.
- A good vibrant Neighbourhood Action Group community in Bracknell Forest.
- The number of PSCOs going on to train as police officers.

The Chairman thanked Khan Juna for an interesting presentation.

8. **Bracknell Forest Economic and Skills Development Theme Partnership**

Victor Nicholls, lead officer of the Economic and Skills Development Theme Partnership, attended to discuss the Partnership's governance, performance management, financial management and related issues. He introduced Richard Haynes, Head of Regeneration and Enterprise.

This new partnership was still in its developing stage and Victor Nicholls gave a presentation on the partnership outlining the purpose of the partnership, membership and connections, progress and achievements and next steps for the partnership. Its

purpose was to sustain and promote Bracknell Forest's thriving economy and to promote skills and availability of local people to fill local jobs as a key element of sustaining the local economy.

Members come from different sectors of the borough and included the Council, Bracknell Regeneration Partnership, the Federation of Small Businesses, Bracknell Chamber of Commerce, Government Office for the South East, South East Economic Development Agency, Business Link, Connexions and Grow Our Own.

Key aims were to –

- Engage with local businesses
- Tackle barriers to economic success
- Help residents through the recession
- Skills issues forum
- Track local economic information
- Work with surrounding areas to sustain the local/ Thames Valley economy
- Lead the production of an economic assessment
- Help to discharge statutory functions.

The Partnership's action plan themes were –

- Providing community leadership
- Tackling unemployment and developing skills
- Supporting local businesses
- Providing housing advisory services

and members noted the individual action plan items detailed in the presentation.

The next steps were to carry out a local economic assessment, to develop a local economic strategy (which Bracknell Forest had not had since 1998) and to support local residents and businesses.

Members were reminded of the economic indicators published on the website. If they wanted a copy they should contact Victor Nicholls.

Particularly referred to were –

- Bracknell Forest had the highest number of young people not in education, employment or training in Berkshire.
- Job Seekers Allowance claimants had increased significantly to 2016, 2.7%.

Victor Nichols responded to questions about

- Helping smaller businesses through existing networks.
- Credit union development, possibly by expanding an existing one. It was hoped to have something in place within a few months.
- Funding of Future Jobs Fund. This scheme had provided opportunities for young people within the Council.
- Employment for the occupants of the anticipated new houses.
- Diversifying Bracknell Forest's economy.
- Empty office space.
- Loss of manufacturing in the area and the need for more manual and semi-skilled employment. There could be a piece of work for the partnership around encouraging that kind of employment.
- Loss of retail employment.

The Chairman thanked Victor for his presentation. Issues raised would be taken back to the partnership and the Chairman asked for a progress report in six months in relation to business growth.

9. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Commission noted the Forward Plan relating to corporate issues. The following issues were raised –

1020064 – Office Accommodation Strategy – this had been deferred until July 2010.

1021879 – Capital Expenditure Outturn 2009/10 – this underspend would be put into the reserves.

1022646 – Complaints 2009/10 – the Head of Overview and Scrutiny confirmed that there would be no new financial impact arising from this report.

10. **Public Engagement with Overview and Scrutiny**

The Commission noted the Chairman's letter to the Council Leader and Chief Executive with a report outlining measures to improve public engagement with Overview and Scrutiny. It had also been to Corporate Management Team.

The Leader and Chief Executive were happy with the proposals outlined in the report which included -

- Continuing the current arrangements with the exception of the reply paid card in the annual report.
- Councillors actively seeking out public opinion and reporting to the O&S officer team on issues which should be considered by O&S.
- For each O&S review, to actively consider co-opting someone who has expertise in the subject matter, issuing a press release before the review commences, carrying out a site visit to meet directly people connected with the issue under review, and sending a questionnaire to interested organisations.
- Information leaflet for witnesses for O&S reviews.
- Press release to coincide with the presentation to Council of the O&S annual report.
- Design and secure approval for a formal public participation scheme for O&S meetings.
- Refresh the corporate induction material for officers.
- Use the responses to periodic surveys to inform the design of the O&S work programme.

A suggestion to use social networking websites would be considered, when resources permitted.

It was acknowledged that often people would only get involved if it was a subject that affected them but that it should be acknowledged that there were huge areas of committed involvement by numbers of volunteers. Alison Sanders suggested that it might be worthwhile to scrutinise the Community Engagement Strategy, a copy of which she would send to the Chairman.

11. **Updates from Panel Chairmen**

Environment, Culture and Communities O&S Panel

The Panel had not met since the last meeting of the Commission. Councillor Finnie reported that the Housing Benefit Plan was currently before the Audit Commission. The Head of Overview and Scrutiny reported that the Housing and Council Tax Benefits Follow Up O&S Working Group was underway and a draft report would be taken to the Panel in June. The Severe Weather Working Group was coming to a conclusion and its report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel, and then to the Commission. Councillor Harrison thanked members for keeping the working group moving forward in his absence.

Adult Social Care O&S Panel

The Panel had not met since the last meeting of the Commission. It was hoped that the Care Quality Commission would present to the next meeting. The Working Group on Personalisation had its third meeting this month and had interviewed a number of officers. It now needed to meet with service users who had taken part in the pilot, and look to see information from or visit a well-performing authority to learn good practice. Some Panel members had attended consultation meetings at Downside.

Children's Services and Learning O&S Panel

The Panel had not met since the last meeting of the Commission and would next meet on 30 June. Councillor Mrs McCracken was the lead member of the Safeguarding Children Working Group, which had commenced its work.

Health O&S Panel

The Panel had not met since the last meeting of the Commission and would meet on 17 June to decide the work programme for the current year. Councillor Leake said that the Working Group report on preparing for public health emergencies was almost complete.

Joint East Berks Health Committee

Councillor Leake reported that Bracknell Forest would this year chair this committee.

CHAIRMAN