

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
27 JANUARY 2011
7.30 - 10.30 PM**



Present:

Councillors Edger (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman),
Mrs Birch, Finnie, Harrison, Leake, Mrs McCracken, Phillips (Substitute), Mrs Shillcock,
Turrell, Virgo and Worrall
Dr P Joseph-Franks, Parent Governor Representative
Miss V Richardson, Teacher Representative

Executive Members:

Councillors McCracken and Ward

Also Present:

Councillor Mrs Angell and Mrs P Ridgway (Safeguarding Children Working Group members)

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Ms Whitbread
Mr G S Anderson

In Attendance:

Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services
Victor Nichols, Assistant Chief Executive
Alan Nash, Borough Treasurer Designate
Keith Woodman, Chief Officer: Customer Services
Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview and Scrutiny
Sue Hills, Democratic Services Officer

44. Substitute Members

The Committee noted the attendance of the following Substitute Member:

Councillor Phillips for Councillor Ms Whitbread

45. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Commission held on 28 October and 1 November 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising:-

Minute 29, Report on the Review of the Council's Response to Severe Weather – members had been sent by email about working arrangements between the Council and the Town and Parish Councils. Members had received a link to the Department of Transport guide and the Council had expanded their website to include advice on winter weather issues.

Councillor Ward informed the Commission that:

- work on the salt barn was underway;
- in December 2010 he had released £72k of funding for slough clearance equipment;

Minute 32, Report of the Review of Preparedness for Public Health Emergencies – Councillor McCracken had written to the Ambulance Service asking it to review its contingency arrangements with other strategic health authorities and had received a positive reply which would be submitted to the next meeting of the Health O&S Panel.

Minute 33, Executive Forward Plan, 1020064 Office Accommodation Strategy – The Director of Corporate Services advised that the decision had been deferred until June, and therefore there would not be a presentation at today’s meeting.

Minute 34, Performance Monitoring Reports, Chief Executive’s Office – Production of the ‘Welcome to the Borough’ booklet had been delayed but should be issued soon.

46. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

In accordance with the Members’ Code of Conduct, Part 4, Section 12 of the Council’s Constitution:

Councillor McCracken declared a personal interest in item 7, Safeguarding Children and Young People O&S Report, as the spouse of Councillor Mrs McCracken.

47. The Council's Budget Consultation

The Borough Treasurer Designate presented his report on the draft budget proposals for 2011/12. The proposals had been agreed by the Executive in December 2010 as the basis for consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Panels and other interested parties.

The proposals were prepared prior to receipt of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, details of which were received the day before the Executive met, and therefore did not take account of the settlement. The Commission noted that it may be necessary to reduce spending next year by up to £2.25m, in addition to the £3.7m identified in the original budget proposals. Around £1m had been fully anticipated as it related to grant funded work that had been due to end on 31 March, leaving just over £1m further savings to find from balances or further expenditure reductions. Work on this was underway and the outcome would be fed into the budget consultation process as soon as possible.

The annexes set out the budget proposals in detail:-

<u>Revenue Budget</u>	A	Commitment Budget
	B	Budget pressures
	C	Suggested savings
	D	Proposed fees and charges
<u>Capital Programme</u>	A	Capital Programme
	B	Corporate Services/Chief Executive
	C	Council wide

Extracts of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels’ consideration of the budget papers were also included.

The Commission scrutinised the budget proposals for Chief Executive’s Office, Corporate Services Department and non-Departmental/Council wide items, including

budget pressures, budget savings proposals, proposed fees and charges and capital programme.

The Commission noted that, following the spending review announcement, the Executive would look again at the Capital Programme, as a significant amount of grant funding had been made available to the Council. The Director of Corporate Services referred to the committed items and budget pressures which had been kept to an absolute minimum, also to the maximisation of savings, and particularly different ways of providing technology to members and the Thin Client desktop refresh.

Arising in discussion and from members' questions:-

- NHS learning disability budgets and associated commissioning responsibility for social care for adults had transferred to local authorities.
- If there was no increase in Council Tax the Council would receive additional grant of £1.212m. The Executive planned to accept this offer but may need to revisit in the light of the final settlement.
- Budget assumptions had been based on low interest rates continuing throughout 2011/12.
- A pay increase of £250 for employees earning less than £21,000, in line with the Chancellor's budget statement. A pay freeze for employees earning £21,000 and above.
- The Council-wide pressures were in areas where the departmental allocation was not yet known but would be implemented in due course.
- There was pressure on staff to review business processes in order to save money.
- Regulations did not permit the Council to recover from schools the cost of the purchase of allowances to cover CO² emissions by schools. The government was, however, being pressed to introduce changes enabling Councils to pass on the cost to schools.
- Roof work at Time Square had helped mitigate energy costs and improved the environmental efficiency.
- The Freedom March was a Royal Military Academy Borough event.
- There was a request for an investigation into the possibility of members accessing agenda papers without paper copies.
- Decisions relating to refresh of computers were scrutinised by ICT Steering Group, Corporate Management Team, Executive and O&S Commission.
- The Chief Officer: IT to present to the next meeting on the desktop refresh programme and the member ICT kit proposals. Consultation on these proposals would be undertaken with members when a potential way forward had been determined
- The risks associated with deferring repairs to properties and assets.
- The Capital Programme external funding proposals for community centres would extend to the halls operated by Town and Parish Councils. The Director of Corporate Services explained that, as this external funding source for those facilities was Section 106, they would be considered as part of the usage of Section 106 monies, where the section 106 agreement identified that particular area as having need.
- A request to involve non-Executive members as far as possible with the process of spending section 106 money.
- Members expressed concern that over £2million of urgent repairs was being deferred.

The Commission noted the draft minutes of the O&S Panels and commented as follows:-

- Adult Social Care – no comment.
- Environment, Culture and Communities –
 - Officers were investigating Development Control fees for retrospective planning applications.
 - Easthampstead Park Conference Centre was a Bracknell Forest asset. If disposed of within the next six years, a share of any profit, after deducting new investment, would have to be distributed to the other Berkshire authorities.
- Children, Young People and Learning – no comment.

The Commission agreed that those members interested would meet as a Working Group to look at late changes made to the proposed budget. The Executive agenda would be published on 7 February after which there would be a window of opportunity for the Commission to comment on the revisions. The Working Group would meet on 9 February at 7.30pm.

The Chairman expressed the Commission's appreciation of the officers' hard work in the preparation of the budget.

48. **Customer Contact Strategy**

The Director of Corporate Services informed the Commission of the refresh of the current Customer Contact Strategy. Work had been undertaken with members and officers and the views of local residents had been sought. The views of the Commission were welcomed to help determine the priorities for the next strategy.

Keith Woodman, Chief Officer: Customer Services, gave a presentation on the issues involved in producing the draft strategy for 2011 – 2014. He updated the Commission on:

- progress to date of the 2007 – 2010 strategy
- Customer enquiries
- Customer Service support
- Customer feedback
- The public website
- Use of other technologies
- Key themes from the current strategy to take forward to the new one
- Emerging themes to add to the strategy, particularly the channel strategy in which an attempt was made to channel people to communication ways that were less costly to provide.

Arising from questions or discussion:-

- A suggestion was made to locate a customer service advisor in libraries as 28% of people surveyed in the Bracknell Forest 1500 and 23% surveyed in the Older People's Communications Audit preferred contact in person. The Commission noted that librarians do assist the public regarding customer service and the Benefits service did attend Sandhurst Library on one occasion but take up was so low that continuing it could not be justified.
- Text alerts Would be considered as a means of communication but the officers explained that charges would be levied per text and it would be difficult to predict usage and cost. In comparison, there was a monthly charge for email alerts. A member suggested trying to negotiate a monthly charge for text alerts which she felt were an effective means of communication but it would be necessary to determine the correct business case. Text alerts were specific to one person whereas email alerts were general.

- Facebook and Twitter had been used to post information about the bad weather and good feedback had been received.
- Channel preference had been analysed by age and this information could be provided to the Commission.

The Chairman thanked Keith Woodman for a very interesting presentation on the very important front-line face of the Council and the good work done to improve Customer Services.

49. **Safeguarding Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Report**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Councillor Jan Angell and Paula Ridgway, members of the Safeguarding Children and Young People Working Group.

Councillor Mrs McCracken, the lead member of the working group, presented the conclusions and recommendations of the draft 'Being Safe' report, which was agreed at the last Children, Young People and Learning O&S Panel. The full report was available online at –

<http://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=560&MId=3567>

This was an extensive piece of work, spanning six months, involving four councillors, one teacher representative and a voluntary sector representative, with good officer support from Children's Social Care and Overview and Scrutiny. The working group met a wide range of people and received written comments from others. It attended the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) stakeholder conference and reviewed key safeguarding material, eg, Lord Laming's report, safeguarding procedures.

Of the 36 conclusions, the key one was –

'In overall terms, in all major respects we are very satisfied that the Council and its partners have done all they reasonably can to safeguard children and young people' (conclusion 4.33).

The report contained 19 recommendations, mainly addressed to the Council's Executive, including issues around assessment, resourcing, early intervention, publicity, NHS reorganisation, and building member understanding and commitment.

The review was carefully structured and organised and the working group thought there were points of learning that could be applied to other reviews, such as the approach to obtaining the views of service users, research, setting and regularly monitoring a detailed work programme and having a workshop at the end to draw out the conclusions and recommendations.

Positive feedback had been received on the report from the Executive Member for Children and Young People and the Director, Young People and Learning.

Mrs McCracken recorded her personal thanks to everyone involved in the review.

Arising from discussion and questions –

- The effect of the reduction of the teenage pregnancy service on teenage pregnancies in the borough. The possibility of reviewing that decision when the outcome of reducing the service was known.
- The Police would be looking into the lack of provision of safe and secure overnight accommodation for children from 10 to 17 in custody overnight. It was suggested that the possibility of using the Partnership to encourage this

provision should be pursued through the Children, Young People and Learning O&S Panel.

- A new Chief Officer: Children’s Social Care would be appointed later in the year. It was suggested that the new officer be given a copy of the working group report and invite them to the Children, Young People and Learning O&S Panel.
- Councillor Mrs McCracken would be interviewed by Heart Radio tomorrow, Friday 28 January. The Commission noted that it was the usual practice for the radio station to put interviews on their website.
- Councillor Mrs Shillcock thought this was one of the best review reports presented, both very interesting and informative.

The Chairman thanked all involved with the working group for a very informative piece of work.

The Commission adopted the report of the review of Safeguarding Children and Young People for sending formally to the Executive Member for Children and Young People.

50. **Review of Overview and Scrutiny Activity**

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) presented the Assistant Chief Executive’s report updating the Commission on O&S activity following the reduction in officer resources in March 2010. The report highlighted a range of measures that could improve efficiency and address the reduced level of officer support. In the current financial climate proposed reductions in funding meant that allocating additional resources to the O&S function would be increasingly difficult.

The Commission noted key developments since January 2010 and the impact of changes to O&S. The Commission considered the possible measures to sustain O&S outputs, set out in paragraph 3.8 of the report, and agreed as follows:-

	Area of activity	Possible measure	Decision
1	Structure of O&S		
1.1		Cease involvement in Joint East Berks Health O&S Committee only to be reactivated in the event of a statutory consultation requirement.	Yes. The Committee had reached the end of its useful life. Councillors Edger and Leake would explore how to withdraw.
1.2		With the move of the public health function to local authorities, align with the departmental structure, possibly combining Health and Adult Social Care Panels.	For future discussion when the Government had issued regulations.
1.3		Restore previous frequency of meetings of Commission and Panels to improve the continuity of member involvement.	Yes, the Commission should meet 6 times a year and the Panels four times.

2	Public meetings	Cease off-site O&S meetings.	Yes
3	Approval of working group reports	Commission to delegate power to approve reports to respective Panel.	No. The Commission had an important role in commissioning O&S reviews and in approving O&S reports.
4	Agenda management	Chairmen of Commission and Panels, advised by Directors, to reverse some of the 'creep' in agendas, so as to be able to concentrate time on the most important topics.	Yes
5	Working Groups		
5.1		If members were to 'level up' their input to reviews it would reduce officer requirements and enable more reviews to be carried out.	Yes
5.2		Exercise tighter control over taking on new reviews.	Yes
5.3		Respond flexibly to run short focussed reviews on matters of topical interest and concern.	Yes
5.4		Reduce number of O&S reviews and refocus more towards contributing to policy development.	Yes
5.5		Adopt different approach to the format and operation of reviews, particularly in terms of reducing research, evidence gathering and analysis.	For future discussion. The current approach worked well.
6	Miscellaneous		
6.1		All members to use Outlook calendar and appointment function to save officer time in arranging meetings.	Members to look into further.
6.2		Members be more discerning in their requests for officer assistance.	Noted and agreed.
6.3		Tighter control over informal or additional meetings requiring O&S officer support.	Noted and agreed.

The Commission also noted that –

- (i) the Commission outputs had been largely maintained since March 2010;
- (ii) under the current structure and processes, the O&S outputs could be expected to decline in the future; and
- (iii) it was unlikely that three O&S reviews planned for 2010/11 could now be resourced; and
- (iv) the consequences of having more meetings of the O&S Commission and Panel would have to be fewer O&S reviews.

The Commission agreed that the O&S structure and work programme should be kept under review.

51. **Updates from Panel Chairmen**

Adult Social Care O&S Panel

Councillor Turrell updated the Commission on the Panel, including

- a positive budget meeting.
- A positive response from the Executive to the review of Personalisation – Safeguarding Adults.

Environment, Culture and Communities O&S Panel

Councillor Finnie updated the Commission on the work of the Panel, including

- the budget meeting.
- The working group reviewing Highway Maintenance.
- A positive response had been received to his letter sent to South East Water about the flooding in London Road.

Children, Young People and Learning O&S Panel

Councillor Mrs Birch updated the Commission on the work of the Panel, including

- The budget meeting.
- The review of Safeguarding Children & Young People.
- The continuing review of school meals. Visits planned to Kennel Lane Special School and hopefully all secondary schools.
- Some work on exclusions.
- A follow-up of 14-19 education.

Health O&S Panel

Councillor Leake updated the Commission on the work of the Committee which included

- The report on hospital car park charges had been sent to the Hospital Trust.
- The report on Bracknell Healthspace had been completed and would be submitted to the next meeting of the Panel.

52. **Work Programme**

The Commission considered and agreed the draft work programme for Overview and Scrutiny in 2011/12. The work programme would be added as an appendix to the Annual Report for 2010/11 and submitted to Council in April 2011.

The Commission noted that there were currently insufficient resources to carry out 'future proposed reviews'.

53. **The Review of Partnership Scrutiny**

The Commission noted the report of the Assistant Chief Executive on the Review of Partnership Scrutiny and considered the responses of the Council's Executive and the Bracknell Forest Partnership Board. Of the 14 recommendations to the Partnership Board, The Board accepted 10, partly accepted two and did not agree two.

The Commission noted that the Assistant Chief Executive could not see that the Localism Bill would impact to any great extent on the Partnerships.

The Commission specifically confirmed that, as additional resources had not been provided, -

- The Partnership O&S Group would henceforth exist in a reference capacity only, meeting exceptionally if required.
- Future O&S reviews of partner organisations' activities should only be carried out when they form an integral part of an O&S review of the Council's own activities, or the NHS services.

54. **Review of Personalisation - Safeguarding Adults**

The Commission noted the report of the Assistant Chief Executive on the review of safeguarding adults in the context of the personalisation of Adult Social Care and considered the Executive's response to the report. The Chairman asked that progress on the recommendations should be monitored by the Panel. Ten review recommendations had been accepted by the Executive.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Turrell for leading the review.

55. **Executive Forward Plan**

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

I026329, Voluntary Sector Core Revenue Grants 2011/12

The Assistant Chief Executive would ensure that Councillor Finnie was kept informed of this decision which was delegated to the Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection.

I025936, Customer Contact Strategy 2011/14

The decision was likely to be made in July 2011, not March.

I020064, Office Accommodation Strategy

It was likely that the planned decision date, 7 June 2011, would be deferred. Some members expressed concerns about the lack of input from members. The Director of Corporate Services explained that this item was tied to the Town Centre development but that she would be happy to bring it to the Commission for its view. However officers were unable to give an undertaking that the item would be brought to the Commission before it went to the Executive but the Director would consult the Chief Executive and the Executive.

56. **Performance Monitoring Reports**

The Commission considered the Performance Monitoring Reports for the second quarter, July - September 2010 for the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Services Department.

Chief Executive's Office

The Assistant Chief Executive reported highlights from the PMR. Annex C provided details of performance against relevant National Indicators, as well as an update on the operational risks identified in the Service Plan.

In section four, Forward Look, he drew attention to –

- the preparation of the draft Economic Development Strategy
- securing Council approval of the Homes and Communities Agency Local Investment Plan
- completing the Local Economic Assessment for the Reading Diamond authorities
- Engaging with Government and other councils/partners to develop the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership. This would be a significant piece of work which was business-led and had input from the Council's Small Business Champion.

Corporate Services

The Director of Corporate Services drew attention to progress on civic accommodation, the Big Society and the Town Centre and answered a question on the nature of Town Centre Regeneration underspend. The Director undertook to send Councillor McLean a full breakdown.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their reports.

57. Corporate Performance Overview Report

The Commission considered and noted the Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Report (CPOR) for the second quarter, July to September, of the 2010/11 financial year.

The Assistant Chief Executive highlighted –

- Paragraph 3.2 – activity continued on the Town Centre regeneration.
- Paragraph 3.3 – Coral Reef and Bracknell Leisure Centre had achieved the national Customer Service Excellence Award and had held the Charter Mark continuously since 1993.
- Paragraph 3.5 – the Council's registration on the mandatory Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme.
- Paragraph 3.7 - the opening of the newly built Garth Hill College and the completion of the Edgbarrow Post 16 Centre. The best A level results ever achieved in the Borough.
- Paragraph 3.9 – Crime reduction targets had already been met.
- Paragraph 3.10 – the Dementia Team had recently supported a person with end-stage dementia to fulfil their long-stated wish to die at home, and continued to offer this service.

Councillor McCracken referred to changes in Police organisation. Under recommendations soon to be put to the Police Authority the current five Basic Command Units would be replaced by 15 units aligned to local authority areas with a degree of autonomy. Each unit would have a Chief Inspector.

Arising from questions – the Department for Communities and Local Government website lists Bracknell Forest as having already published expenditure, Chief Officers' salaries and procurement information.

58. **Members' Meeting on 23 February 2011**

Referring to this facilitated session to review overview and scrutiny over the past four years, the Chairman asked members to complete the questionnaires and return them to Democratic Services.

59. **Councillor Bob Edger, OBE**

As this was the last formal meeting of the Commission in this municipal year, on behalf of the Commission, the Vice Chairman placed on record the members' appreciation and sincere thanks for Councillor Edger's four year stewardship as Chairman of the Commission.

CHAIRMAN