

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
22 NOVEMBER 2012  
7.30 - 10.15 PM**



**Present:**

Councillors Leake (Chairman), Angell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Angell, Mrs Birch, Finnie, Harrison, Heydon, McLean and Turrell

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Councillors Ms Brown, Gbadebo and Virgo  
Mrs C Murray, Parent Governor Representative

**In Attendance:**

Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview and Scrutiny  
David Cook, Chairman, Economic and Skills Development Partnership  
Simon Heard, Assistant Borough Solicitor  
Bobby Mulheir, Chief Officer, Customer Services  
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive  
Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services

**28. Minutes and Matters Arising**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 13 September 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Councillor Mrs Birch declared a personal interest as the spouse of the Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing.

Councillor Leake declared a personal interest, as a Binfield Parish Councillor, in the Executive decision relating to Binfield Nursery (see Minute 35 below).

**30. Public Participation**

There were no items submitted under the Public Participation Scheme.

**31. Economic and Skills Development**

David Cook, Chairman of the Economic and Skills Development Partnership (ESDP) and Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive, gave a presentation on the work of the Partnership. The Chairman commented that the Executive Member, Councillor Brunel-Walker, had been invited to the meeting but had been unable to attend due to work commitments abroad.

They reported that the Partnership had increased its business representation and had identified five priority areas:

- Education and Skills
- Infrastructure
- Inward Investment
- Community
- Communications

Mr Cook reported that, since becoming Chairman, he had tried to bring business process to Partnership meetings. Each Sub-Group had a Chair who reported back on progress to the Partnership with the work being done outside of the meetings.

Arising from Members' questions and comments, the following points were noted:

- Two careers events had been held this year (in January and October) and all of the Borough secondary schools had sent all of their Year 9 and 11 pupils to at least one of the events.
- The relationship between the ESDP and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was positive. Mr Cook was also Director of the LEP and reported that the LEP sought to persuade government of the need to invest in the economic powerhouse of the South East of England, and attracted inward investment into Berkshire, whilst the ESDP sought to bring that investment into Bracknell
- The ESDP was working with the National Apprenticeship Service to encourage greater take up of apprenticeships as there were currently more apprenticeships available than applicants.
- It was acknowledged that the long rail journey time to London put Bracknell at a disadvantage that would be exacerbated with the advent of Crossrail. However the ESDP was promoting Bracknell as a good place to do business with good links to Heathrow, good road connectivity and vacant office space with relatively low rents. Superfast Broadband was a significant initiative to improve local infrastructure. One member commented on patchy broadband connectivity along the train route to Waterloo, and the Assistant Chief Executive undertook to follow that up.
- There was a mismatch between employers' requirements and the skills of students leaving schools and colleges. The UK did not value engineering and technical qualifications as highly as other countries, and some employers said that job applicants were not 'work ready' in terms of essential skills such as communication and team working. There needed to be more dialogue between business and education but there was no short term solution as schools were measured by performance indicators which were not based on the world of work.
- Current employment opportunities included logistics, hospitality and catering. Such services tended to be sourced locally, unlike recruitments from Higher Education, which tended to be met at a national level.
- It was noted that the Principal of Bracknell and Wokingham College and a representative of the Local Education Authority were members of the ESDP.

With regard to future action it was agreed that the Partnership and the Local Authority should do all they could to generate confidence and positively market the whole Borough of Bracknell Forest as a place to do business. It was also suggested that Mr Cook should attend the Annual Bracknell School Governors Conference.

The Commission thanked Mr Cook and the Assistant Chief Executive for their informative presentation.

### 32. **Customer Contact Channel Strategy**

The Chief Officer: Customer Services gave a presentation on the Customer Contact Channel Strategy which had been approved by the Executive in May. She also tabled a summary of work completed, in progress and to begin in order to implement the Action Plan.

She reported that the overarching aims of the Strategy were:

- To review inbound customer contact and to develop and implement a channel strategy so that customers are encouraged, where appropriate, to make maximum use of online services.
- To realise the potential of outbound proactive communication to promote services, maximise income and reduce inbound “avoidable” contact.
- To take advantage of existing and emerging technologies to support customer service delivery.
- To provide quality customer services which are cost efficient and value for money.

Arising from Members’ questions and comments, the following points were noted:

- Whilst new technology could be used to contact the public, it was for the customers to determine what information they received and the means of communication.
- Whilst customers would be encouraged to use new technology to contact the Council, existing channels would still be available.
- The Council was looking to upgrade/replace its Customer Relationship Management software to improve performance and the quality of service provided to the public (see also Minute 34 below).
- Whilst the increasing use of new technology rather than face to face or telephone contact would inevitably lead to a reduction in staffing, the emphasis was on adding real value to the service provided and reducing the time spent on routine inquiries.

Members congratulated the Web Team on the new website layout.

Members were invited to visit the Customer Contact Centre to find out more about the inquiries received and the service provided.

The Commission thanked the Chief Officer: Customer Services for her presentation.

### 33. **Community Right to Challenge**

The Commission considered a report on the steps being taken to respond to the requirements of the Community Right to Challenge, discussed some implications for the Council’s procurement timetables and proposed a means of complying with those requirements while affording relevant bodies a proper opportunity to make Expressions of Interest in running services for the Council.

The Assistant Borough Solicitor reported that it was proposed to set out a timetable of the windows in which the Council would be prepared to consider expressions of interest and to align the window with planned procurements for the following year for services which were not currently outsourced or provided externally. It was anticipated that there would be a three month window commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> January

and ending on 31<sup>st</sup> March each year. It was also intended to publish the timetable of future contact renewals on the web site giving a similar window for a period of three months, ending one year before the renewal date of the contract to be renewed. This was to give sufficient time for all the procedural requirements of procurement to be undertaken, in the knowledge that a local community or voluntary organisation may wish to bid for a service.

Arising from Members' questions and comments, the following points were noted:

- No expressions of interest had been received to date.
- Receipt of an expression of interest triggered the procurement process. This would involve an assessment of what constitutes value for money.
- The operation of the timetable would be subject to review.
- In response to a Member's question about the grounds on which expressions of interest could be rejected, it was agreed to send him a copy of the previous report on this matter submitted to the Committee on 12 July 2012.

The Commission agreed to the proposed approach and timetable of the windows in which the Council would be prepared to consider expressions of interest, and asked for a progress report at a future meeting.

#### **34. Quarterly Service Reports (QSR) 2012/13**

The Commission noted the Quarterly Service Reports for the Chief Executive's Office and Corporate Services for the second quarter, July to September, 2012/13

Arising from Members' questions and comments, the following points were noted:

##### **a) Chief Executive's Office**

- The target detection rate for domestic abuse assaults with injury had not been achieved. The Assistant Chief Executive reported that the reasons for this were unclear but might be partly due to increased reporting. Four police officers were to receive specialist training to work with the most prolific repeat perpetrators of domestic abuse and it was anticipated that this would help to improve the detection rate.

It was agreed that the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley should be invited to a future Commission meeting.

##### **b) Corporate Services**

- It was noted that there were no current performance targets for Legal Services. The Director of Corporate Services reported that this was because it was not possible to predict activity (e.g. the number of s106 agreements completed) for a particular period. Actual performance data would continue to be provided.
- The target date for completion of the Section 106 Agreement for the town centre redevelopment was the end of January 2013.
- It was noted that the income received from the indoor market continued to fall. It was reported that a different form of market would be provided within the new town centre. Existing stall holders had been offered the temporary use of currently vacant shops but had not accepted.

- The Charter Plus Direction of Travel Assessment for Member development had been completed and South East Employers had confirmed that they were happy with the progress made. Members complimented the officers who had worked to achieve this.
- The vacant ICT posts had been filled.
- Customer Services were continuing to experience difficulties with the Customer Relationship Management system which had slowed the speed of response to customer calls. Consideration was being given to procuring a new software supplier.

### 35. **Executive Key and Non-Key Decisions**

The Commission considered scheduled Executive decisions relating to corporate issues and the following points were noted:

- The Director of Corporate Services reported that the recommendation regarding Binfield Nursery would be to continue negotiations with preferred bidders. It was agreed to amend the schedule to more accurately reflect the nature of the decision.
- It was agreed to circulate details of proposed changes in the Council's policy on directed surveillance and use of covert human intelligence sources, which had arisen from revised government regulations, to Members of the Working Group.
- The public consultation on the draft revenue budget 2013/14 would make reference to the uncertainty around future Government support.
- The Executive would be recommending to Council proposed changes to Council tax discounts and exemptions. It was agreed to amend the schedule to more accurately reflect the nature of the decision.
- Members were to receive a private briefing on changes being made to the office accommodation strategy

*Councillor Leake declared a personal interest, as a Binfield Parish Councillor, in the Executive decision relating to Binfield Nursery.*

### 36. **Work Programme Update**

The Commission received a report setting out a summary of progress made against the work programme for 2012/13 together with verbal updates from Panel Chairmen.

It was agreed to circulate the Community Infrastructure Levy project timetable to Members.

Adult Social Care and Housing

- The Substance Misuse Working Group report would be published before the next Panel meeting.

Health

In the Chairman's absence, the Head of Overview and Scrutiny responded to Members' questions as follows:

- The Health Scrutiny Panel had not met formally with Patient Participation Groups but they had met General Practitioners, and a representative of the Bracknell Forest Local Involvement Network had been co-opted onto the Panel.

- The Working Group had met yesterday to agree their approach to producing a joint response with the Executive to the “Shaping the Future” consultation. A series of public meetings were to be held. The Joint East Berks/Bucks Scrutiny Committee would be meeting in January to formulate its response.

**CHAIRMAN**