

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
28 MARCH 2013  
7.30 - 9.55 PM**



**Present:**

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

Parent Governor Representative Member: Mr R Briscoe

**Executive Members:**

Councillors Mrs Ballin and McCracken

**Also Present:**

Councillor Baily

Chief Inspector Dave Gilbert

Councillor Anthony Stansfeld, Police & Crime Commissioner

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Councillor Virgo

**In Attendance:**

Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview & Scrutiny

Ian Boswell, Community Safety Manager

Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive

Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services

**48. Minutes and Matters Arising**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 30 January 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**49. 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.

**50. Urgent Items of Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

**51. Public Participation**

There were no items submitted under the Public Participation Scheme.

**52. Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner**

The Chairman welcomed the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, Councillor Anthony Stansfeld to the meeting.

Councillor Stansfeld made the following points:

- He had now been in post for four months and it had been a very busy period, he had visited all of the Police authorities in his area, as well as MP's and Council leaders. The area covered by the Police and Crime Commissioner was vast and stretched from Hungerford to Heathrow and included Oxford. The Thames Valley Police force was the largest in the Country outside of the Metropolitan Police. He planned to meet more members of the public in future.
- The Commissioner had now produced a five year Police and Crime Plan for the Thames Valley, which had been widely consulted on. The budget to fund the Plan had also now been approved and would ensure that no cuts were made to frontline policing, however this had entailed a small rise in council tax across the Thames Valley area. When elected, he had pledged that he would not change funding in the first year unless central government reduced their funding and he had been able to stand by this commitment. He would need to justify spending in the following year.
- The Police and Crime Plan 2012-2017 included three main priorities:
  - 1) To reduce burglary and improve burglary detection rates, performance in the area was already good and detection rates high, however it was still an issue for the area.
  - 2) Safeguarding vulnerable people, this was a major issue. In particular, the human rights of children often hindered safeguarding and work would be undertaken to consider how this could be addressed.
  - 3) Rural crime, this was also a major issue. There had been a significant number of incidents relating to organised crime in the countryside which often involved expensive heavy equipment being stolen. This was having a huge detrimental commercial impact on the countryside.
- He reported that anti social behaviour and domestic abuse were also underlying priorities for the area.
- He stated that there had been criticism that his priorities were unambitious; however he believed that they were realistic and addressed the major issues in the Thames Valley area. Rates of crime often related to the economy and the large fall in crime over the last 18 months couldn't be expected to be repeated over the next 18 months.

In response to members' queries, the Commissioner made the following comments:

- A large proportion of violent crime was fuelled by excessive alcohol consumption. Drugs were also a major issue and were often related to a large proportion of acquisitive crime.
- It was noted that Bracknell Forest would be moving to an 18 hour economy following the regeneration of the town centre and that this was likely to have implications on the level of crime locally. The Commissioner stated that he would offer his support wherever possible, for example in relation to commenting on licensing applications.
- The Commissioner stated that he would do his utmost to communicate with local councils and local communities through visits, the media and his very comprehensive website. In addition, the Commissioner would be supported by his deputy, David Carroll.
- The Commissioner stated that to maximise economies of scale, he felt that policing should be undertaken on a large regional basis and Thames

Valley Police had many shared services with adjoining police forces. However the large area he covered did present challenges.

- The Commissioner reported that the thrust of his five year plan did support Bracknell Forest's medium term objectives and there was close contact with Community Safety partnerships.
- The low turnout at the elections for the Police and Crime Commissioners was due to shortcomings by central government. The next elections were likely to be held in May, together with local elections and the turnout was anticipated to be higher.
- In relation to the Commissioner's target to achieve a 'percentage of crimes solved' detection rate for violence with injury of 45%, he reported that 90% of offenders were known to their victims where violent crime was concerned. He would be considering the use of video conferencing to support victims. In addition, the closing down of a number of magistrates courts had led to victims having to travel a long distance to court and sometimes being in the position of having to share public transport with their offenders, this was clearly unsatisfactory. In response to members' queries, he stated that he would try to address the issue of fewer magistrates courts.
- The Commissioner reported that central government set the Police pension scheme and the level of contributions made to the scheme was therefore outside of his control. Similar concerns applied to increasing National Insurance costs.
- He stated that all police forces were currently reviewing their accommodation, it was clear that more neighbourhood police posts were needed and these could be co-located with councils and libraries. Policing had changed enormously since large police stations were built, police officers now carried Blackberry's that could provide them with all the information they needed.
- Effective crime prevention required wide partnership working well beyond the Police, for example in schools and through good parenting.
- Looking ahead, opportunities would include improvements in technology such as Automatic Number Plate Recognition as well as GPS tagging of people which was hugely effective. Some of the major challenges that lay ahead included the economy and the floods of people entering the country from Eastern Europe.
- The volume of resources, manpower and cost dedicated to tackling terrorism was quite considerable. Resources were allocated on a regional basis and it was an area of work that was taken very seriously.
- He felt it was extremely important to work with young people who were at risk of offending. Local youth offending teams would play a key role in this and schools, jobs and poverty also impacted this.

The Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection thanked the Commissioner for his presentation and acknowledged that drawing up the budget would not have been an easy feat. He also commended the outgoing Police authority for providing a good template for the Commissioner to work on. He reported that over the last five years, Bracknell Forest had seen rates of crime successively drop. Actual numbers of crime were now extremely low and exceeded the targets in the Commissioner's plan. The targets in the Commissioner's Plan would therefore be used as a baseline and stretch targets would be used.

Chief Inspector Gilbert reassured the Commission that the partnership working that existed with Bracknell Forest was one of the strongest partnerships he had worked within and everyone had the same focus of reducing crime.

The Chairman wished the Commissioner well for the future and stated that Bracknell Forest would support his work wherever possible.

**53. Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel**

The Commission meeting as the Crime and Disorder Committee received an update on the work of the Police and Crime Panel for Thames Valley, with reference to the report by Buckinghamshire County Council, being the host council for the Panel.

The Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection as the Council's representative on this Panel, made the following points:

- A shadow meeting of the panel had taken place in February 2013 in Reading. Buckinghamshire County Council had secured the chairmanship of the Panel and as a result had been allocated £53,000 to administer this work.
- The Panel had two statutory functions; to approve the precept and to agree an approach to the handling of non-criminal complaints against the Commissioner.
- The Panel had determined their terms of reference and decided how the £53,000 should be allocated. The majority of this funding would be taken up by the clerk who would look after the running of the Panel.
- The Panel had now met three times with meetings being webcast. Two task and finish groups had been set up. The Panel had also considered the appointment of the Commissioner's then proposed Deputy. It was still early days for the Panel and they would continue their role as a critical friend and make recommendations to the Commissioner. In the longer term the Panel would consider future budget proposals and commissioning.

The Commission noted that the focus and nature of the Police and Crime Panel had a much narrower remit than the previous Police authority. In addition the challenges of having one democratically elected person as opposed to ten remained to be seen.

The Executive Member reported that the Chief Constable had attended the first Panel meeting; however the Panel's primary role would be to hold the Commissioner to account.

**54. Community Infrastructure Levy**

The Commission considered the Executive's response to the report of its working group which reviewed the preparations for the Community Infrastructure Levy.

The Executive Member for Planning and Transport thanked the Commission and working group for their work on this, it was a large task and key policy issue for the Council.

The Commission expressed disappointment that of the ten recommendations made, five of these were only partially or mainly agreed.

The Executive Member assured the Commission that the Executive's response to this work had been hugely positive. A cautious approach to the response had been taken by officers and the Executive.

The Commission felt that there needed to be mechanisms and frameworks in place to ensure non-executive members were able to engage in the CIL process in a

meaningful way. With the introduction of a new system it was imperative to seize the opportunity and ensure there was maximum meaningful participation for all councillors, including parish councillors. This would demonstrate to constituents that members had a meaningful contribution to make. The Chairman agreed to draft a letter in consultation with Commission members to be sent to the Chief Executive and the Leader.

The Chairman raised three specific issues:

- i) Paragraph 5.9.2 of the agenda papers, the Borough Solicitor be asked to confirm this.
- ii) Paragraph 5.10.2 of the agenda papers, this needed to be considered further to ensure that the CIL risk was appropriately shown in the Strategic Risk Register. The Director of Corporate Services stated that this would be considered when finalising the risk register.
- iii) Paragraph 5.11.2 of the agenda papers, a report be brought back to the Commission on arrangements for strategic leadership.

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

Councillors Harrison and Leake declared a personal interest in the disposal of Binfield Nursery as they had both participated in deliberations around this item.

The Commission noted the Executive Key and Non-Key decisions contained in the report. In response to members' questions, the Director of Corporate Services reported that the Discretionary Rate Relief Applications related to charities.

#### **56. 2012 Residents Survey**

The Commission considered a report that asked them to note the results of the Residents Survey 2012 and the statistical comparison table attached at Annex Two of the agenda papers.

The Director of Corporate Services made the following points:

- As an outcome of the 2011 Neighbourhood Engagement Review the Executive agreed that the Council would conduct a biennial resident's survey of all households to ensure that adult residents' views continued to shape the Council's strategy and that the Council remained informed of residents' perceptions of services.
- In total there was a total of 5,109 responses, this equated to an 11% response rate. This compared favourably to a national average response rate for this type of household survey of between 3-5%.
- It was noted that the response rate from BME groups and young people was relatively low. Separate mechanisms existed to obtain the opinions of young people, for example and it was hoped to undertake more work with these groups to improve their response rates.
- The Director gave a summary of the results of the survey.

In response to members' queries, the Director of Corporate Services made the following points:

- If available, a breakdown of the satisfaction results for Binfield for Councillor Harrison would be provided.
- An action plan would be created and the Commission's input into what should be included would be welcomed. The Chairman stated that the Commission could consider an action plan in detail at a future meeting.

- The design of the survey questions made use, for example, of the questions used previously in the Place Survey, the Neighbourhood Survey and model questions issued by the Local Government Association.

The Chairman felt that resident's understanding of where services were provided, whether it be by parishes or the Borough was interesting and should be further explored.

The Commission were pleased to see that rates of volunteering had increased in the Borough.

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

The Commission considered the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of departmental performance as reported in the QSRs for the third quarter of 2012/13 (October to December) relating to the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Services Department.

##### The Chief Executive's Office

The Chairman noted that the second sentence of the Director's Commentary related to the level of recorded crime.

The Commission queried the importance of social media communication. The Assistant Chief Executive reported that it was important to maximise ways of communicating with residents, for many people Facebook and Twitter were important channels. It was also a means of gaining feedback from residents very rapidly on Council services.

##### The Corporate Services Department

The Chairman queried the extended time to answer calls. The Director of Corporate Services reported that Nationality checking appointments were also now being undertaken by Customer Services, increasing their calls and workloads. In addition, lots of work around supporting Benefits and Housing reviews was currently underway.

The Director noted that the core benchmark for Customer Service calls being answered was 15 seconds which compared very well with national benchmarking. Customer satisfaction levels continued to remain high at 92%.

#### 58. **Corporate Performance Overview Report (CPOR)**

The Commission considered the Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Report for the third quarter of 2012/13 (October to December).

The following points were made in response to members' queries:

- In relation to Business rate collection suffering as detailed on page 95 of the agenda papers, the Assistant Chief Executive stated that there was a lack of clear legal precedent as to how an unoccupied property was defined for rateable purposes.
- In relation to the number of children remaining on child protection plans being high, this was reported to be positive as more work was being done to identify children at risk and more work around prevention was also being undertaken.

#### 59. **Work Programme Update**

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny reported that the programme that had been agreed at the beginning of the year had been delivered, except that one working group was over-running slightly into 2013-14. The Annual Report for Overview and Scrutiny had now been agreed by Commission members. The Corporate Management Team and the Executive had both been consulted on the work programme for 2013/14 and the report would be submitted to full Council on 24 April.

Verbal updates were received from Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairmen:

Adult Social Care and Housing

Councillor Turrell reported that the working group's report on Substance misuse had gone to the Executive Member and a response was awaited. The Panel had visited the facilities at Waymead and Portland Close. At the next Panel meeting, consideration would be given to the impact of welfare reform and comments on the Older People Strategy.

Children, Young People and Learning

Councillor Mrs Birch reported that the Panel's working group on School Governance had almost concluded its work. At the next Panel meeting it was hoped to begin a working group on allocation of school places.

Environment, Culture and Communities

Councillor Finnie reported that the working group considering the Bus Strategy was still underway.

Health

Councillor Angell reported that the Health and Wellbeing Board had its first public meeting in February and was ready to begin its statutory function as of 1 April 2013. The Minor Injuries Unit would be moving from Heatherwood to Brant's Bridge. Ward 8 at Heatherwood and Midwifery services would also be closed at Heatherwood.

**CHAIRMAN**