

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
20 NOVEMBER 2014
7.30 - 9.42 PM**



Present:

Councillors Leake (Chairman), Angell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Birch, Ms Brown, Gbadebo, Harrison, Heydon, Mrs McCracken and Virgo
Mr R Briscoe

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Baily, Finnie, McLean and Sargeant
Mrs L Wellstead

Executive Members:

Councillors McCracken, Turrell and Ward

Also Present:

Gabriel Amahwe, The Thames Valley Community Rehabilitation Company Limited

In Attendance:

Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Ian Boswell, Community Safety Manager
Alan Nash, Borough Treasurer
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Justin Whitlock, Enhanced Integrated Offender Management Case Manager

27. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meetings held on 4 September and 22 October 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

Further to Minute 26 of the meeting held on 22 October 2014, the Chairman requested that the Director of Children, Young People and Learning's report on the siren tests and the school cascading system be submitted before the next meeting.

28. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor Mrs Birch declared an interest as the spouse of the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing. Councillor Mrs McCracken declared an interest as the spouse of the Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection.

29. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

30. **Public Participation**

There were no submissions from members of the public in accordance with the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

31. **Thames Valley Probation Service and the Community Rehabilitation Company**

Meeting as the Crime and Disorder Committee, the Commission met with a representative of Thames Valley Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) and council officers to consider:

- the effect of recent changes to the probation service;
- the effects on re-offending locally: and
- future plans and priorities.

Gabriel Amahwe, Head of Operations (South), Thames Valley CRC gave a presentation on the recent changes to probation arrangements resulting in the division of responsibilities between the National Probation Service and regional CRCs, also future plans and priorities. He reported that initially there had been concerns about loss of critical mass and information sharing but, to date, the changes had been made with a relatively limited impact on service delivery in the Thames Valley. This was not to minimise the challenge as it would be essential to maintain and, where possible, improve, multi-agency collaboration. Preventing re-offending remained the top priority.

The Commission was informed that, from February 2015, ownership of the CRC would transfer from the public sector to a private provider, covering around 60% of probation work. The Ministry of Justice would manage that contract, in liaison with local Community Safety Partnerships. Any under-performance by the private sector provider would be transparent, in terms of increased re-offending.

Ian Boswell and Justin Whitlock reported on the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) a multi-agency process to prioritise interventions with offenders who commit the most crime and cause most harm to the community, and described the domestic abuse and other work which the Council does, in active partnership with various organisations

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

- The Police and other agencies had concerns about the impact of fragmenting the probation services, also how a private provider will use the data provided. There was an information sharing protocol in place within the Community Safety Partnership which would be reviewed under the new arrangements.
- The Ministry of Justice will manage contracts with private providers robustly.
- For young people already in the system, arrangements were in place whereby transition from the Youth Offending Service to adult services would begin eight or nine months before they became 18.
- The success of the IOM and other initiatives was measured in comparison with the performance of the Home Office group of comparative local authorities and with other Thames Valley local authorities. By both measures, Bracknell Forest was performing well in reducing crime.
- The IOM process was sensitive to people suffering from autism, and the Community Mental Health service was involved as necessary.
- The most effective way in improving the employment prospects of previous offenders was by working with them to develop a work ethic rather than simply

finding them a job that they might not be able to maintain. Housing for ex-offenders was often difficult to source.

The Commission thanked Mr Amahwe and the officers for the information provided and indicated that they might return to this topic after February 2015.

32. **Council Budgetary Position**

The Borough Treasurer gave a presentation in respect of the emerging budget position for the 2015/16-18 financial years. The presentation included an overview of the underlying principles of the Council's budget setting process, an overview of the assumptions made when initially planning the 2015/16 budget, the projected funding gap to 2017/18, an overview of the approaches adopted by the Council when addressing the funding gap, the usage of reserves, and a timetable setting out the key steps in the approval of the 2015/16 budget.

Councillor Ward reported that the budget proposal to be approved by the Executive on 16 December would go out for consultation and that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Panels would be part of the consultation process.

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

- The election of a new government in May 2015 could have significant impact on the Council's budget, for example the abolition of the New Homes Bonus. However, any legislative changes would be unlikely to take effect before 2016/17.
- A council tax freeze was sustainable in the short term. However the freeze was part funded by the present government, a situation that might change after the general election. Similarly, the New Homes bonus might cease if there was a change of government. More information would be available after the government spending review in June 2015.
- The assumptions made in planning the 2014/15 budget had been proved to have been realistic. There was likely to be a small underspend.
- As the Council's expenditure was increasing faster than its income, savings and/or contributions from balances would continue to be required.
- The contractual waste dispute was currently before the High Court. However, as the contractor had not accepted the previous rulings, it was not possible to say when the matter would be resolved.
- Income targets were set across departments. The underlying principle was that charges should increase in line with inflation but there was flexibility to reflect changes in market conditions.

The Commission thanked the Borough Treasurer and the Executive Member for their informative update.

33. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Commission received and noted a report summarising forthcoming items on the Executive Plan of a corporate nature.

In response to a Member's question, the Assistant Chief Executive reported that the results of the Residents' Survey 2014 would be submitted to the Executive prior to being made available to all Members.

34. **Quarterly Service Reports (QSR) 2014/15**

The Commission noted the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of departmental performance as reported in the QSRs for the second quarter of 2014/2015 (July to September) financial year for the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Services Department.

With regard to the Chief Executive's Office, the Assistant Chief Executive:

- agreed to address the concerns raised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary on the accuracy of recorded crime statistics in a future report.
- reported that the 30 strategically important businesses targeted were identified by the amount of business rates paid and the number of employees.
- agreed to meet with Councillor Gbadebo to discuss his queries about Bracknell Forest's new brand identity.

With regard to the Corporate Services:

- Councillor McCracken undertook to investigate the roof leak at Great Hollands Community Centre and Library.
- the Assistant Chief Executive agreed to ask the Chief Officer: Customer Services to contact Councillor Ms Brown to discuss her concerns about customer services' telephony.
- the Assistant Chief Executive agreed to arrange for the appropriate officer to discuss with Councillor Ms Brown her concerns about the purchase of car park land related to the sixth form block development at Garth Hill College.

35. **Work Programme and Panel Activity Update**

The Commission received and noted a report providing an update on the Overview and Scrutiny Work programme for 2014-2015 and Panel activity, with particular reference to Working Groups of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

The Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Panel reported on the progress of the Panel's work programme.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Overview and Scrutiny outlined the process by which Working Group reports and recommendations were considered by the Executive and the Executive's response reported back.

CHAIRMAN