

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
29 JANUARY 2015
7.30 - 9.18 PM



Present:

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

Mrs L Wellsted

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Baily, Sargeant and Mrs Pile
Mr R Briscoe

Executive Members:

Councillors McCracken and Ward

In Attendance:

Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Overview and Scrutiny)
Kirsty Hunt, Principal Democratic Services Officer (Governance)
Sarah Kingston, Revenue Services Manager
Alan Nash, Borough Treasurer
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Helen Pennington, Group Accountant, Corporate Services
Amanda Roden, Democratic Services Officer
Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services
Abby Thomas, Head of Community Engagement and Equalities

36. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 20 November 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

In relation to the actions from the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 20 November 2014, Councillor Ms Brown commented that she was presenting concerns regarding car parking at Garth Hill on behalf of residents. Councillor Ms Brown was pleased to see car parking at the site as there were a higher number of pupils than average travelling to the college by car. The Chairman suggested that Councillor Ms Brown raise any further concerns regarding this issue with the report author, Neil Mathews.

37. 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.

38. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

39. Public Participation

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

40. The Council's Budget Consultation

The Panel considered the Council's draft budget proposals for 2015/16 in relation to the Corporate Services Department and the Chief Executive's Office, and received feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Panels and overall conclusions.

The Executive agreed the Council's draft budget proposals for 2015/16 at its meeting on 16 December 2014 as the basis for consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Overview and Scrutiny Panels and other interested parties. The consultation period would run until 27 January 2015, after which the Executive would consider the representations made at its meeting on 10 February 2015, before recommending the budget to Council.

Attached to the report were extracts from the 2015/16 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme. The extracts were comprised of Revenue Budget Report, Commitment Budget, Draft Revenue Budget Pressures, Draft Revenue Budget Savings Proposals, Proposed Fees and Charges, Capital Programme Report and Summary and Proposed Capital Schemes.

The Borough Treasurer gave an update on changes to the budget since it was published on 10 December 2014. The Government had announced provision of Local Government Finance Settlement which would result in further loss of central government grant of £195,000. Current forecasts on collection funds showed a £100,000 surplus; the take up of the Council Tax Benefit Reduction Scheme had not been as high as anticipated. There had been savings in relation to waste as tonnages sent to landfill had been revised giving a saving of £260,000, and inflation had continued to fall giving a saving of £200,000 in the budget. There had been changes to the capital budget in relation to schools and the town centre.

The budget gap had fallen from approximately £4.7 million to approximately £4 million. Risks made forecasting more unpredictable, such as the introduction of the Care Act from April and variations in relation to older people and looked after children. There had been a legal ruling in relation to Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards which would pose a cost, and the planned closure of Coral Reef at some point during the year would mean a short term loss of revenue from this site.

There had been some minor changes to the capital budget which included uncertainty regarding schools. There was usually an allocation for schools maintenance of approximately £2 million but the Council had not been advised of this allocation yet, so could not include it in the budget at present. The consultation on the budget had been active for six weeks and there had been a limited but positive response so far.

In response to Members' questions, the following points were made:

- There were funding constraints for young people post-16 with high needs and attention was drawn to a Councillor's concerns in this regard. Proposals had been considered by the Schools Forum regarding how to accommodate young people with high needs. Actions had been considered and it was possible to put more funding into the schools' budget but the Council had so far chosen to fund at the level of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). It was a policy issue; there was a separate budget for schools and for education. The Schools Forum made suggestions to the Council on the allocation of funding for schools. Cuts would need to be made in other service budgets in order to increase funding in the schools' budget, and so far the Council had chosen not to do this. Local authorities who had chosen to do this had then struggled to provide other services.
- A number of local authorities had started the budget consultation process earlier, before more detailed plans had been developed. The Council had chosen not to do this in the past but it could be considered. A short statistical analysis and the themes of comments from the consultation would be included in the report to the Executive on 10 February 2015. Members were welcome to see this information.
- There was a need to ensure that information provided in consultations for the public was understandable and simplified where ever possible.
- Members of the public were aware of the amount of money due to be spent on a new school and grant funding would be used where available.
- There had been an anticipated increase in income at the Peel Centre in Bracknell, of which Bracknell Forest Council had an interest and received some income from this.
- The Council was aware of where asbestos was sited in council buildings as the Council was required to undertake a more in depth survey after changes to the regulations in this area. There would likely be a three year programme to survey council buildings which would start with the schools in the borough.
- Public car parks in Bracknell were considered to be accessible to disabled people but they needed to be checked against the latest regulations. Public car parks did not meet the previous list of defined properties which were accessible and the aim was to add public car parks to this list. An audit had been undertaken and minimal changes were expected.
- The Council used open source technology for its website and was looking into reducing costs in this area. Licences were expensive but the Council used large legacy systems with a range of functions, many of which were integrated with Microsoft suite. Many suppliers had said they did not provide the integration function. Integrations in the council and their impact were being analysed, and the current ICT Strategy was being reviewed. The aim was to include this work in the next ICT Strategy. It was more sensible for the council to operate on the same system rather than different systems.

41. **Review of Business Rates and Discretionary Relief**

The Commission received a report presenting the review of Business Rates and discretionary relief undertaken by a working group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Angell for his hard work as the Lead Member of the working group. Councillor Angell asked for the names of the councillors involved in the working group to be added to the Foreword of the report. Excellent work had been identified and there was a 98% collection rate on business rates. The recommendations from the working group would be considered by the Executive if

adopted. The aim was to support small business efforts in the borough of 25 people or less. One recommendation would be for a cap amount of funding to be available for small businesses.

The scheme would be reviewed annually for a three year period, small businesses were independent and the take up of the scheme was unknown. Croydon had been given £1 million by the Government but there had been little take up in the area, so media was used to promote the scheme. The scheme in Bracknell would be available across the borough and not just in the town centre. A number of people had been spoken to regarding the scheme.

Councillor Angell requested that recommendation 5.11 of the report on pages 69 and 91 of the agenda be amended to:

'The draft discretionary Business Rates relief scheme at Appendix 2, along with further considerations and details at Appendix 3, are put forward for consideration and implementation by the Executive during 2015-16.'

In response to Members' questions, the following points were made:

- The report made reference to avoidance schemes. Avoidance was a national issue but the collection rate in Bracknell was 98% which was considered to be good. Representations had been, and continued to be, made regarding avoidance. MPs were being lobbied regarding this and lobbying was undertaken through the LGA. The scale of avoidance was considered and amounted to approximately £1-2 million per year. The government had recently issued a consultation paper on business rate avoidance. Opportunities to liaise with other local authorities to deal with larger firms would be considered.

The Chairman commented on the importance of marketing the scheme and making it part of a package of benefits for small businesses, not promoting it in isolation, but integrated.

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission:

- Adopted the attached report of the review of Business Rates and discretionary relief undertaken by a working group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, for sending formally to the Leader of the Council.
- Stood down the working group.

42. **Residents' Survey**

The Commission received a report on the results of the Residents' Survey 2014. The survey looked at the impact of the last two to three years on residents and the good results from the survey were encouraging.

QA Research had conducted the survey, as they had done for the last survey in 2012. There was a high rate of return and the methodology had been reviewed this time for a representative sample of people in the borough. The 2014 survey was based on the 2012 survey so that comparisons could be made and trends tracked. The Black Minority Ethnic groups were under represented so face to face surveys were undertaken with these groups. The results were detailed in Annex 1 of the report and the differences in responses were analysed. The covering report included the key findings from the survey which showed strong community cohesion. Measures were positively linked with satisfaction in the area.

There was a Member Briefing Seminar on Monday 16 March 2015 to discuss the results of the survey.

In response to Members' questions, the following points were made:

- Areas of dissatisfaction related to areas of the Council such as housing and road maintenance. Some issues such as road delays were outside the control of the Council. Further work would need to be undertaken in each service area, such as with focus groups, to identify the specific issues involved. Where planning was concerned, people may not approve of certain planning applications. A cross Council action plan was being prepared.
- Breakdown of the survey results by Ward would need further analysis to further understand people's views.
- In 2012, the Council identified people's preference for using social media and had moved more services online and increased the use of social media.
- Low levels of crime were popular in the previous survey and low levels of crime had been achieved in the Thames Valley.
- A representative sample of young people aged 16 to 24 years was surveyed. There was a separate Children and Young People's Survey conducted by the Children, Young People and Learning department and the Children's Society. Youth Services and Children's Services did ongoing engagement work with the Youth Council.
- The Residents' Survey was an overarching survey and each service area did its own engagement. Surveys were undertaken with businesses; there was a draft response to the infrastructure survey and a skills survey would soon be undertaken.

The Chairman suggested that further work could be undertaken in the area of dissatisfaction levels in the borough at a relevant point in the future.

43. **Corporate Performance Overview Report (CPOR) 2014/15**

The Commission considered the Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Report for the second quarter of 2014/15 (July to September).

An analysis of the 72 council related Performance Indicators that made up the different national Outcome Frameworks was undertaken for the 16 member authorities of South East Strategic Leaders Group (SESL). Bracknell Forest was third highest overall when comparing performance across the 16 SESL member Councils.

In response to a Members' question, the following point was made:

- Overspend was as predicted and was being managed.

44. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Panel noted the forthcoming Key and Non-Key Decisions of a corporate nature.

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

The Panel noted the progress against the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for 2014-15, and the reports from Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairmen on each Panel's progress against the work programme.

The report of the Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel working group which had reviewed regulated Adult Social Care services had been considered by the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing and the recommendations from the group had been largely accepted. The Group was pleased with the response from the Executive Member. This Panel was hopeful that there would be a review of homelessness in the future but this would likely be after the Elections in May 2015. This topic was in the forward plan for consideration and all reviews and working groups would be channelled through the Commission.

The issue of the current shortage of GPs surgeries was raised and it was mentioned that there was a lack of a strategy to generate new GP practices in the area. Representatives of NHS England and the Bracknell and Ascot Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) had presented recently at the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel and mentioned that there was a need to save 24% of their costs and re-organisation would be undertaken. The report of the inspection of GP surgeries had indicated some required improvement. The Panel had requested that its frustration over the provision of GP capacity to meet the demands of an expanding population in Bracknell Forest be conveyed to NHS England.

The Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel's progress against its work programme was completed or on course for completion. It was agreed that the Commercial Sponsorship Member Reference Group be reconvened to assess the trial of commercial sponsorship in the Borough. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission expressed an interest in joining the Group.

Representatives from Broadmoor had attended a previous Commission meeting regarding the change of provision in relation to their sirens. A letter was expected confirming that the existing sirens would remain in place until the new hospital was opened in 2019, which would be circulated to Members. Then along with the two other hospitals in the UK it was proposed that the sirens be discontinued. Broadmoor was expected to present a proposal to a future Commission meeting.

46. Overview & Scrutiny Progress Report

The Panel noted the bi-annual Progress Report of the Assistant Chief Executive on Overview and Scrutiny activity over the period June to November 2014 and local and national developments in Overview and Scrutiny.

47. 2015/16 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

The Panel considered its Work Programme for 2015/16. No suggestions for additions to the Work Programme were made.

CHAIRMAN