

Notice of Meeting

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Councillor Angell (Chairman), Councillor Virgo (Vice-Chairman),
Councillors Mrs Birch, Brossard, Gbadebo, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle,
McLean, Mrs Mattick, Mossom, Porter, Temperton and Tullett

Also Invited:

Councillor Birch, Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Health
and Housing

Wednesday 7 April 2021, 6.30 - 9.00 pm

Online only



Agenda

Item	Description	Page
1.	Apologies for Absence	
	To receive apologies for absence and to note the attendance of any substitute Members.	
2.	Minutes	5 - 10
	To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 17 February 2021. Please note the Blue badges scope which was commissioned at the meeting.	
3.	Declarations of Interest and Party Whip	
	Members are asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary or affected interests and the nature of that interest, including the existence and nature of the party whip, in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting. Any Member with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in a matter should withdraw from the meeting when the matter is under consideration and should notify the Democratic Services Officer in attendance that they are withdrawing as they have such an interest. If the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest is not entered on the register of Members interests the Monitoring Officer must be notified of the interest within 28 days. Any Member with an Affected Interest in a matter must disclose the interest to the meeting. There is no requirement to withdraw from the meeting when the interest is only an affected interest, but the Monitoring Officer should be notified of the interest, if not previously notified of it, within 28 days of the meeting.	
4.	Urgent Items of Business	
	Any other items which, pursuant to Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chairman decides are urgent.	

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5.	Public Participation	
	To receive submissions from members of the public which have been submitted in advance in accordance with the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.	
6.	Scrutiny of new arrangements at Brants Bridge	
	The Commission has invited Fiona Slevin-Brown, Executive Managing Director – Bracknell Forest, NHS East Berkshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to address the meeting before considering the following question: "Are the new arrangements at Brants Bridge meeting the needs of Bracknell Forest residents?"	
7.	Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Report: Registered Providers of Social Housing Review	11 - 26
	To consider the draft Registered Providers of Social Housing review report prepared by the Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel for submission to the Executive on 27 April 2021.	
8.	Wellbeing and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Panel Report: Isolation and Loneliness	To follow
	To consider the draft Isolation and Loneliness review report prepared by the Wellbeing and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Panel for submission to the Executive on 27 April 2021.	
9.	Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report	27 - 44
	To consider the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual review report prepared by the Chairs of the Commission and Overview and Scrutiny Panels for submission to Council on 21 April 2021.	
10.	Work Programme Update	45 - 46
	Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairs to provide a verbal progress updates on the work programme. The Commission to consider any proposed changes to the Overview and Scrutiny work programme such as scope, scheduling or duration and its potential impact on the delivery of the overall programme.	

Date of next meeting

The next Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting is scheduled for 26 May 2021.

Sound recording, photographing, filming and use of social media is permitted. Please contact Kirsty Hunt, 01344 353108, kirsty.hunt@bracknell-forest.gov.uk, so that any special arrangements can be made.

Published: 26 March 2021

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
17 FEBRUARY 2021
6.30 - 9.30 PM**

Present:

Councillors Angell (Chairman), Virgo (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Birch, Brossard, Gbadebo, McLean, Mrs Mattick, Mossom, Porter, Temperton and Tullett

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Mrs McKenzie-Boyle

Executive Members present:

Councillor Mrs Hayes MBE, Executive Member for the Environment

Councillor Heydon, Executive Member for Transformation and Finance

Councillor Turrell, Executive Member for Planning and Transport

Also Present:

Councillors Ms Gaw and Leake

In attendance:

Kevin Gibbs, Executive Director: Delivery

Andrew Hunter, Director: Place, Planning & Regeneration

Ann Moore, Head of Democratic and Registration Services

Hilary Coplestone, Strategic Sites & Design Team Manager

61. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 6 January 2021 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

62. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations made and no indications that members would be participating while under the party whip.

63. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

64. Public Participation

No submissions had been made by members of the public under the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

65. Scrutiny of Planning practices

The Commission invited guests to address the meeting before considering the following question: "Are our current planning practices robust enough to protect Bracknell Forest from developers manipulating viability study process?"

Andrew Hunter, Director: Place, Planning and Regeneration addressed the Commission on the Council's current planning practices. Andrew Jones from BPS

Chartered Surveyors explained the viability assessment process. Jim Bailey, representative from Pegasus Planning provided the Commission with a developer's perspective. Councillor Turrell, Executive Member for Planning and Transport summed up what he had heard about members' concerns about planning practices.

In response to questions the following points were made:

- The package of planning policies would be updated following the adoption of the new Local Plan these would be published in advance of Executive in March and as such were not yet available to the Commission.
- Planning decisions which moved away from the Council's approved policy framework would be considered by the planning committee.
- A viability assessment was being developed for the new local plan covered overall plan strategy.
- Delivering all policy requirements on specific applications, was the aim but viability assessments were available for use where developers could identify genuine viability issues which should be considered as part of the planning approval process. Larger allocated sites would be covered by the local plan viability assessment.
- There was a delicate balance between being robust but pragmatic in order to attract housebuilders and work with them to deliver local housing and meet needs.
- Viability studies had been published for applications during the previous few years.
- Technical information to quantify how much potential affordable housing had been lost through the viability study process, would be provided to the Commission.
- Reported that registered providers were becoming more proactive in the local housing market to build more affordable homes on the sites by using government grants.
- In response to the suggestion that affordable housing levels could be set per site rather than across the whole Local Plan it was explained that this would be very complex and was not considered achievable and would require multiple viability assessments.
- Some developments were delivered in phases and when affordable housing was built during the construction timeframe depended on the site size and would be controlled through a S.106 agreement.
- Planning permission was granted on the information available at the determination date and therefore there would not be a reassessment process unless the developer did not undertake the construction before the permission lapsed had reapplication was required. Section 106 agreements could also see reassessment if a long period of time lapsed between decision and implementation.
- Noted that the issue of affordable housing was high on the political agenda.
- The Commission were welcome to make a submission to the consultation but at this stage in the process responses would go directly to the examiner.
- Advised that some policies were nationally set but local authorities could produce guidance on how the policy was interpreted locally.
- Following the implementation of the new Local Plan it was anticipated there would be fewer viability studies submitted as up to date policies would be in place.

The following points were concluded by Director: Place, Planning and Regeneration:

- The Council's approach was to use a District Valuer to assess viability assessments with knowledge from across the south east to ensure

independence and relevant expertise. Further alternative assessors could be investigated to build elected members confidence in their technical advice.

- Further training could be provided to the Planning Committee and comments regarding complexity of the reports would be taken onboard and reviewed. It was acknowledged that reports needed to be clearer on viability issues and an executive summary to viability reports could be introduced.

RESOLVED that the Commission required specific guidance on viability process to be prepared and the Commission to scrutinise it before it is published.

66. Education, Skills and Growth Panel Review Report: Apprentices

Councillor Mrs Birch, Chair of the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel presented the Commission with the findings and proposed recommendations within the Apprentices review report.

The Commission endorsed the recommendations within the Apprentices review report for submission to the Executive on 16 March 2021.

67. Work Programme Update

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer highlighted to the meeting that the work programme had successfully been brought back on track so when commissioning future reviews or considering amendments to active reviews the Commission would need to consider the implications for the programme as a whole. Each Panel Chair provided a verbal update on work programme progress.

Environment and Communities

The Registered Social Landlords review was in the process of being concluded and the review report would be brought to the next Commission meeting.

The scope for the Food Waste review was proposed to the meeting and was focusing on how food waste could be implemented for flats and houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs).

Wellbeing and Finance

The Isolation and Loneliness review was progressing, would be concluded shortly and the review report would be brought to the next Commission meeting.

The Chair proposed that the Panel's next review should be on Blue Badges to investigate whether the process was fair for non-visible disabilities. The scope for the Blue Badge review was proposed to the meeting. The Chair requested that he was provided scrutiny support earlier than was currently proposed.

Education, Skills and Growth

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) review was being developed and the scope would be shared with the Commission when available. Planning officers were focusing on the Local Plan process and therefore the witness programme was being revised to delay their participation until they had more capacity. The review would initially focus on the CIL process with parish and town councils.

The deadline for the implementation of the recommendations agreed by the Executive from the Careleavers review are due to be implemented by February 2021. Progress would be followed up and reported back to the Commission.

Overview and Scutiny Commission

The cross-party advisory panel for Climate Change would be set up with and the Commission proposed eight representatives.

The Commission agreed that:

- i) the proposed scope for the Food Waste review be approved and the review commissioned;**
- ii) the proposed scope for the Blue Badge review be approved and the review commissioned;**
- iii) progress of the implementation of the Careleavers review recommendations would be checked and reported back to the Commission;**
- iv) further discussions on scheduling and support capacity would be held offline with the Statutory Scrutiny Officer; and**
- v) the proposed representatives for the Climate Change Advisory Panel were Councillors Ingham, Mrs McKenzie, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle, Mossom, Parker, Temperton, Tullet and Virgo.**

CHAIRMAN

Blue Badges Review Wellbeing and Finance Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Reason for review

- Multiple complaints
- Info arising from SI&L review (can't get out)
- Primary legislation to help those with hidden disabilities – outcome different
- Ombudsman involved – albeit stated protocols followed – appeal process was criticised (since improved) – improved processes but need monitoring data - same outcome?
- Local media involved – comparisons with others BFC at lowest end (disparity between visible and non-visible disabilities – BFC is 16th highest disparity).

Objectives/scope

The review is aiming to understand why:

- Outcomes are so poor, in relation to other Councils
- A disparity exists between the intended outcomes of the primary legislation and the outcomes delivered

The review will do this by enquiring about (not an exhaustive list):

- What BFC is doing differently
- The evidence needed for a positive assessment of those with a hidden disability
- The training of awarding officers regarding hidden disabilities
- Comparison with questions regarding PIP grants

At the conclusion of this work the Panel will produce a report highlighting its findings and proposing recommendations to the Executive, with a view to improving the internal evaluation process and enhancing the reputation of BFC, in relation to support residents with hidden disabilities.

Delivery methods:

- Interviewing relevant witness, including those affected
- Consulting other local authorities to understand how their schemes are run
- Desktop review of relevant data and any comparisons between legislative intentions and internal BFC protocols

Council theme:

- Caring for you and your family
- Value for money

Council team:

- Democratic services officer
- Blue badge Officer

Review due:

- April 2021

Proposed by:

- Cllr Malcolm Tullett, Chair Wellbeing and Finance Panel

Equality Impact Assessment

- Potential for unintended discrimination
- Potential for enforced isolation and loneliness

Financial and legal implications

There are potentially legal and financial implications of any recommendations arising from this review which will be fully addressed in the review report.

Climate change implications

Unknown, at this stage, although the implications of any recommendations arising from this review which will be fully addressed in the review report.

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To: **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**
7 April 2021

Registered providers of social housing Overview and Scrutiny Review Report **Cllr John Porter, Chair Environment and Communities Panel**

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission the findings of the Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel's review into registered providers of social housing and ask them to endorse their recommendations.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the findings of the panel and the recommendations as set out in the report (attached as Appendix A) and paragraph 5.2 are endorsed.**

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission directed the Environment and Communities Panel to conduct a review into registered providers of social housing in Bracknell Forest. All permanent social housing in the borough is provided by registered providers who play a significant role in shaping places, fostering communities and contributing to the health and wellbeing of the area.
- 3.2 The review aimed to understand the stated service provision from registered providers and compare this with the experience of residents, looking for the best ways to support residents if required. The review also looked at how the registered providers engage with their residents to foster community health and wellbeing, identifying gaps and opportunities to improve. The review maintained a focus on developing good relationships with local registered providers for the benefit of residents and communities.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel assessed several options as part of the review.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel carried out the review into registered providers of social housing as part of the overview and scrutiny work programme. The review activity took place between December 2020 and February 2021, reviewing a wide range of evidence and speaking to relevant witnesses. The panel spoke to the three largest and the sixth largest registered providers locally, representing 85% of social housing in Bracknell. They also spoke to seven residents, covering a mix of tenures across the three largest providers. The findings and recommendations are set out in the attached report
- 5.2 The recommendations are listed below:

- That the Executive commissions member development training that supports strong community leadership for residents in social housing, including the governance of registered providers and the role of environmental health in investigating hazards and enforcing statutory checks. Training to be delivered by December 2021.
- That the Executive establishes a quarterly all-member briefing for councillors delivered jointly by Housing officers and the Public Protection Partnership to discuss housing activities across tenure, initiatives and any matters arising by October 2021.
- That the council provides information on its website about what tenants should expect from their landlords, including statutory health and safety requirements by July 2021.
- That the Assistant Director: Customer Experience, Digital and ICT establishes relationships with digital departments in the registered providers to identify opportunities to align digital transformation programmes where practical, and to share learning and good practice by December 2021.
- That the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing writes to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government to express Bracknell Forest's support for the strong, proactive consumer regulatory regime set out in the Social Housing White Paper by May 2021.

6 Commentary from Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chair, Councillor John Porter

- 6.1 This review was prompted by residents contacting councillors for intervention following unsatisfactory responses from their registered providers of social housing. The panel wanted to understand what residents should expect, what they were experiencing and what processes were available to seek improvements. The review also wanted to focus on opportunities to enhance relationships between communities, registered providers and the council.
- 6.2 The panel recognised a lot of good practice within the registered providers and were very encouraged by their level of engagement with this review. Their openness contributed to a much better understanding amongst panel members and their commitment to continued good relationships with the council was clear. The panel identified opportunities for registered providers to improve their service to residents, which are detailed in the report.
- 6.3 The panel were pleased to find that environmental health officers will investigate any complaint against a landlord regardless of social rent, private rent or shared ownership, putting social housing on a level with other tenures. As the panel heard evidence of ongoing issues for residents, this was a key finding of the review which can immediately help residents in difficulties and any councillors supporting them.

7 Response from Assistant Directors

7.1 Response from Assistant Director: Early Help and Communities

- 7.1.1 The review has clarified the current regulatory regime for registered providers of social housing (also known as housing associations) and has highlighted changes to the regime proposed in the Social Housing White Paper. The review has also assisted members of the panel to understand the role which the council can and cannot take in respect of housing management issues arising in social housing provision in the borough.
- 7.1.2 Training for members more widely is welcomed and will help to ensure the most effective routes to resolution of issues for residents in social housing seeking advocacy support from their local councillors. Improving information on the council's website for tenants (and landlords/potential landlords) empowers local residents and should play a part in ensuring that those in rented accommodation live in accommodation which is safe and legislatively compliant. There are limited resource implications for housing in supporting these recommendations

7.2 Response from Assistant Director: Contract Services

- 7.2.1 The review and report have clarified areas of responsibility in relation to registered providers of social housing and where the Public Protection Partnership will investigate resident or member concerns. The recommendation for quarterly member briefing sessions so that they can raise specific concerns will improve links with the environmental health team and ensure issues are addressed efficiently. These quarterly sessions will be supplemented by the recommended member development training which is particularly helpful in identifying the role of our Environmental Health Officers and where they can support residents. The recommendations align with existing plans and will be delivered within existing PPP resources.

7.3 Response from Assistant Director: Customer Experience, Digital and ICT

- 7.3.1 This recommendation sits well with the work programme emerging from the new Digital & ICT, and Customer Experience Strategies, and the Ways of Working Programme. A closer relationship with registered providers in relation to digital access will support the redevelopment of our website and the aim to achieve simplified access to services, as well as reducing unnecessary hand-offs for residents. It will also be useful to look at opportunities for sharing development of ICT infrastructure or digital services with borough partners.
- 7.3.2 The Heads of Customer Services and Digital, alongside the Assistant Director, will be tasked with building relationships with providers, identifying opportunities for joint working, and sharing best practice from their sectors to enable shared learning and development. This will be monitored through the Ways of Working programme board and officers' one to ones and appraisals.

8 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 8.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Financial Advice

- 8.2 It is not envisaged that there will be any material financial impact arising from the proposed recommendations.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.3 An initial equalities screening has been completed and is attached at Appendix B.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 8.4 There is still a perception that the council is responsible for the management, maintenance and repair of social housing, meaning that complaints may be misdirected and that resident satisfaction with housing performance may be lower. Setting clear expectations on the respective responsibilities of landlords and the council and on enforcement options should create a more direct path to resolution and reduce frustration for residents.
- 8.5 Part of a councillor's role is supporting residents and improving communities. By understanding more about the responsibilities of registered providers and the enforcement options for social housing, councillors are in a better position to advocate effectively for their residents. This aligns with the member development strategy focus on community leadership.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

Jen Lawson, Governance and Scrutiny Officer - 01344 353071
jen.lawson@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Overview and Scrutiny Panel Recommendations Report

REVIEW TITLE	O&S PANEL	DATE
Registered Providers of Social Housing Review	Environment and Communities	7 April 2021

“This review began due to residents contacting councillors for intervention following unsatisfactory responses from their registered providers of social housing. The panel wanted to review the stated service provision from registered providers and compare this with the experience of a sample of their residents. We also looked at how the registered providers engage with their residents to foster community health and wellbeing, especially during Covid-19. In addition, the panel looked for opportunities to support productive relationships between the registered providers and housing and environmental health officers at the council.”



**Councillor John Porter, Chair:
Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Recommendations

1. That the Executive commissions member development training that supports strong community leadership for residents in social housing, including the governance of registered providers and the role of environmental health in investigating hazards and enforcing statutory checks. Training to be delivered by December 2021.
2. That the Executive establishes a quarterly all-member briefing for councillors delivered jointly by Housing officers and the Public Protection Partnership to discuss housing activities across tenure, initiatives and any matters arising by October 2021.
3. That the council provides information on its website about what tenants should expect from their landlords, including statutory health and safety requirements by July 2021.
4. That the Assistant Director: Customer Experience, Digital and ICT establishes relationships with digital departments in the registered providers to identify opportunities to align digital transformation programmes where practical, and to share learning and good practice by December 2021.
5. That the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing writes to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government to express Bracknell Forest’s support for the strong, proactive consumer regulatory regime set out in the Social Housing White Paper by May 2021.

Key findings

The panel recommends that all registered providers review their complaints procedures to create clear and unambiguous timelines for resolution that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound for all levels of complaints. Registered providers are reminded of the requirement of Protocol 1, Article 1 (protection of property, entitlement to peaceful enjoyment) of the Human Rights Act 1998.

The panel suggests that registered providers consider the effectiveness of their general communications to residents, particularly regarding community events and opportunities.

Good practice

The panel were pleased to find that environmental health officers will investigate any complaint against a landlord regardless of social rent, private rent or shared ownership, putting social housing on a level with other tenures.

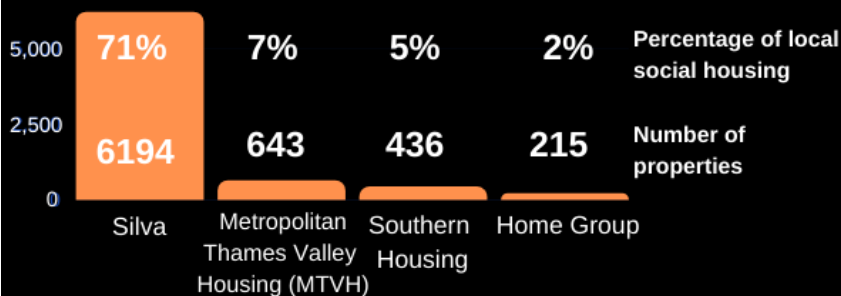
Registered providers demonstrated the following good practice in support of community wellbeing:

- membership of TPAS (a tenant engagement service) to support and train residents who are keen to engage with their communities, and
- resident-led initiatives, such as Southern Group's newsletter which is created and delivered by residents, which the panel agreed creates stronger bonds in the community.

Registered providers described very good working relationships with council officers. The willingness of registered providers to work openly with Bracknell Forest Council and other partners for the benefit of their residents was a real positive observed throughout this review.

Background information

REGISTERED PROVIDERS



Did you know?

There are 18 registered providers of social housing in Bracknell Forest. In total, they provide 8785 social rent, affordable rent and shared ownership properties

We spoke to 4 of them, representing 7488 properties or 85% of Bracknell's total.

The white paper on social housing sets out a new charter for social housing residents



To be safe in your home



To know how your landlord is performing



To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly



To be treated with respect



To have your voice heard by your landlord



To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in



To be supported to take your first step to ownership

Review findings

How well are residents' needs being met by registered providers?

Basic needs are met as all the registered providers (RPs) the panel spoke to confirmed that all their homes meet the decent homes standard. They all have a complaints process that is available to residents. Most of the residents who gave evidence knew about the complaints procedures, and they were all aware of the different ways to contact their landlord.

The panel noted there are no timeframes for resolution in the RPs' complaints procedures. Residents described having to chase issues, multiple teams being involved, lost reports and long periods of no contact from their RP. The panel observed this can cause anxiety, uncertainty and in some cases has a significant effect on the mental health of residents. The panel recommends that clear timelines for resolution are established to give residents more certainty that their concerns will be addressed.

Residents gave examples of unsatisfactory repair or maintenance works, which is also reflected in the complaints to the Public Protection Partnership (PPP). The RPs inspect a percentage of works to ensure quality but clearly some issues remain. In some cases, this may be down to differing expectations of the final outcome.

The panel had concerns over the completion of statutory gas safety checks as one resident mentioned a missed gas check. They were reassured by the robust compliance processes described by the RPs when questioned about this, and later confirmed that the property had been inspected. The review learnt that there is no statutory frequency for electrical safety checks in properties managed by RPs but notes that good practice recommends a full inspection and test at least every five years and on every change of occupancy. The panel recommends that the council provides guidance on what tenants can expect from their landlord on the council website.

All the RPs carry out satisfaction surveys after a repair or customer contact, and most do annual or quarterly surveys. In the most recent quarter, Silva had an overall satisfaction score of 89% (exceeding their target of 85%). In their 2019/2020 survey, Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing (MTVH) had a customer satisfaction for renters (their largest group of residents) of 70%. The panel were pleased to hear that surveys are carried out and commented that both of these represented very good results.

Apart from one, all the RPs who gave evidence are members of TPAS, a not-for-profit tenant engagement service, which provides support and training for tenants who want to get more involved. It also provides residents with opportunities for peer networking and insights into what other RPs are doing. The panel recognised the benefits that membership of TPAS brings for both residents and RPs.

The review heard that RPs are increasingly using digital methods for customer contact and communications. Bobby Mulheir, Assistant Director Customer Experience, Digital and IT at Bracknell Forest, explained the council's approach to digital engagement and how this might interact with RP activities. The panel recommends that officers look for opportunities to align digital transformation programmes and share good practice.

Registered providers communicate with their residents using:



social media



their website



email



newsletters

How do registered providers engage with residents to foster community health and wellbeing?

RPs use the initial property viewing to tell residents about the area, facilities and activities. They noted that most of their new residents already live in Bracknell and are familiar with the area. They also use approval interviews and settling in visits to identify any support needs such as education, training or employment advice, furniture assistance information or referrals to support agencies.

All of the RPs have funds and initiatives to support community wellbeing. These include fun days, skip days, litter picks, a hoarding support group, a garden assistance scheme and Community Connectors – a role created at Southern Housing to bring together residents who want to be more involved in their community. They have invested over £12,000 establishing these connectors in Bracknell.

Residents of Southern Housing produce and deliver their own newsletter. They note that resident-to-resident contact (pre-Covid) has increased local understanding and brought communities together. The panel were impressed by this initiative and the level of social cohesion described.

Residents gave mixed responses about whether they felt part of a community. Overall, there wasn't a strong sense of community cohesion and the residents we spoke to hadn't been involved in community events. They all felt that social events were beneficial and that communication about them could be improved. The panel recognised the benefits of resident-led initiatives and suggests that RPs review their approach to community communications.

In response to Covid, all the RPs are making welfare phone calls to vulnerable customers and providing tailored support, including help with shopping and medicines, weekly phone calls to combat isolation, support with energy bills, digital equipment to get online or wellbeing activities such as games for children. MTVH have supported 951 residents so far and Silva report that their safeguarding referrals are at their highest ever.

The panel recognised this important layer of support for vulnerable residents in these very difficult times.

What are the governance and enforcement arrangements regarding registered providers?

Bracknell Forest Council does not hold any housing stock¹ and all social housing in the borough is provided by RPs. RPs must be registered with the Regulator of Social Housing whose remit is set by Government. Local authorities have no jurisdiction over or ability to monitor the performance of RPs. The panel also heard that the council has no ability to influence the choice of RP for new developments.

The panel noted that the current regulatory approach puts little emphasis on consumer standards, with no clear benchmarking on performance across RPs. The panel agreed that visible performance metrics create accountability so this review welcomes the White Paper on Social Housing for the strong, proactive focus it puts on consumer standards, including easily accessible tenant satisfaction measures.

Environmental health officers from the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) are responsible for enforcing health and safety standards with RPs. They have a duty to investigate any complaint raised with them, regardless of tenure. Most of their cases involve inadequate responses from landlords or unsatisfactory works from contractors. They assess risks using the [Housing Health and Safety Rating System](#) and the 29 hazards included within it. The PPP reported good success rates once they are in contact with the RP.

The role of the PPP in investigating social housing complaints was a key finding of this review. They will take on any complaint where the complainant feels they are not getting support from their landlord (whether RP or private). Councillors are encouraged to direct any residents needing this type of support to the PPP.

The panel observed that governance and enforcement is complex and involves officers across central government, the PPP and housing. They felt they could now signpost and advocate for residents more effectively. The recommended training will help all councillors understand this complex area, allowing them to better support residents having difficulties. This report doesn't pre-empt the detailed training, but a quick guide to supporting residents' complaints is included at the end.

¹ The Council does hold a portfolio of residential property which is used primarily for temporary accommodation with some being used to permanently accommodate people with learning disabilities in shared houses.

Due to the interactions, this review also recommends regular briefings across housing and PPP to keep councillors updated on current issues.

Most of the RPs described good working relationships with Bracknell Forest Council, and many were involved in multi-agency groups to ensure a holistic approach.

All of the RPs involved in the review were very open to developing further relationships with the council. This panel has established valuable contacts in the RPs and details have been shared with all councillors and relevant officers.

“After interviewing the main registered providers in the borough, the panel are confident that the results of our scrutiny will bring changes and better communications, not only between the registered providers and their clients but between the providers and Bracknell Forest Council.”

Cllr Tina McKenzie-Boyle, Vice chair

Quick guide to residents’ complaints about rented and shared ownership properties

		Social rent	Private rent
1	Residents should raise any issues about their property, environment or personal safety using the landlord’s published complaints procedure in the first instance.	yes	yes
2	If it is not resolved, the issue should be reported to the following for further investigation: PPP for health and safety and environmental issues, Community Safety Team for anti social behaviour.	yes	yes
3	If the RP doesn’t resolve the issue the resident can escalate it to the Housing Ombudsman (this is not a requirement to proceed to step 4)	yes	no
4	If the issue is still not resolved, residents may consider taking their landlord to court under the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018	yes	yes

I would firstly like to thank my vice chair Cllr Mrs McKenzie-Boyle for her support, as well as all the members of the panel who helped form a fantastic report due to their enthusiasm and knowledge. Our thanks also go to the registered providers who gave honest and open information about their organisational structure and commitment to ensuring a continued excellent working relationship with the officers of Bracknell Forest. I would also like to thank the residents who gave an insight into their relationships with the registered providers. Finally I would like to give praise on behalf of all the panel to Jen Lawson who has supported this review with her hard work and passion.

Councillor John Porter, Chair: Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Review panel

Councillor Ian Kirke	Councillor Moira Gaw
Councillor Isabel Mattick	Councillor Robert Angell
Councillor John Porter (Chair)	Councillor Sandra Ingham
Councillor Mary Temperton	Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle (Vice chair)
Councillor Michael Brossard	Councillor Tricia Brown

Contributors to the review

Bobby Mulheir	Assistant Director: Customer Experience, Digital and ICT
Damian James	Assistant Director: Contract Services
Home Group Alan Daniels-Smith Ronika Cunningham Kayleigh Gorrell	Local Housing Manager Group Engagement Manager Community Housing Assistant
Jen Lawson	Governance & Scrutiny Officer
Lisa Jones	Senior Housing Resources Officer
Mary Glome	Principle Environmental Health Officer, Public Protection Partnership (PPP)
Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing Glyn Jones Kelly Adjetey	Regional Director, North London & Central Area Manager
Residents from Silva, Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing and Southern Housing	
Rosalynd Gater	Strategic Manager, PPP
Sarah Gee	Assistant Director: Early Help and Communities
Sean Murphy	PPP Manager
Silva Andrew McDonald Tom Mason	Lead Customer Relations Partner (Tenancy) Lead Customer relations Partner (Revenue)
Southern Housing Group Tony Hughes Alice Webster Emma Barnett-Warden Jeremy Barkway	Head of Home Management – North Region Community Investment Services Manager Area Services Manager Partnerships Manager – New Business & Regeneration
Victoria Blades	Housing Enabling Officer

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Initial Equalities Screening Record Form

Date of Screening:	Directorate: Delivery	Section: Democracy and Governance	
1. Activity to be assessed	Overview and Scrutiny Panel for Environment and Communities review of registered providers of social housing		
2. What is the activity?	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy/strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Function/procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Service <input type="checkbox"/> Organisational change		
3. Is it a new or existing activity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New		
4. Officer responsible for the screening	Jen Lawson, Governance & Scrutiny Co-ordinator		
5. Who are the members of the screening team?	Jen Lawson, Kirsty Hunt, Cllr John Porter, Cllr Tina McKenzie-Boyle		
6. What is the purpose of the activity?	To understand the service provision of registered providers of social housing and how well they perform for their residents, including the promotion of community health and wellbeing.		
7. Who is the activity designed to benefit/target?	Residents of social housing and their local communities		
Protected Characteristics	Please tick yes or no	Is there an impact?	What evidence do you have to support this?
8. Disability Equality – this can include physical, mental health, learning or sensory disabilities and includes conditions such as dementia as well as hearing or sight impairment.	Y	Positive impact identified	The panel heard from residents who believed their physical and/or mental health had been negatively affected by the length of time their registered provider was taking to address issues. The recommendations are designed to reduce this time, and to reduce uncertainty for residents. They also aim to make the enforcement process more accessible and to enable councillors to better support residents.
9. Racial equality	N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact racial equality but should have an overall positive impact on all groups through improved communication and understanding.
10. Gender equality	N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact gender equality but should have an overall positive impact on all groups through improved communication and understanding.

11. Sexual orientation equality		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact sexual orientation equality but should have an overall positive impact on all groups through improved communication and understanding.
12. Gender re-assignment		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact gender re-assignment equality but should have an overall positive impact on all groups through improved communication and understanding.
13. Age equality		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact age equality but should have an overall positive impact on all groups through improved communication and understanding.
14. Religion and belief equality		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact religion and belief equality but should have an overall positive impact on all groups through improved communication and understanding.
15. Pregnancy and maternity equality		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact pregnancy and maternity equality but should have an overall positive impact on all groups through improved communication and understanding.
16. Marriage and civil partnership equality		N	No impact identified.	The recommendations will not impact marriage and civil partnership equality but should have an overall positive impact on all groups through improved communication and understanding.
17. Please give details of any other potential impacts on any other group (e.g. those on lower incomes/carers/ex-offenders, armed forces communities) and on promoting good community relations.	Nationally, approximately 55% of social housing tenants are in receipt of housing benefit (English Housing Survey). The review recommendations are designed to benefit all social tenants, so the review is likely to have a positive impact on those on lower incomes. One recommendation to registered providers specifically mentions improving their communication about events to build community relations.			
18. If an adverse/negative impact has been identified can it be justified on grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group or for any other reason?	N/A			

19. If there is any difference in the impact of the activity when considered for each of the equality groups listed in 8 – 14 above; how significant is the difference in terms of its nature and the number of people likely to be affected?	Low significance		
20. Could the impact constitute unlawful discrimination in relation to any of the Equality Duties?		N	
21. What further information or data is required to better understand the impact? Where and how can that information be obtained?	The panel considered a wide range of data from local and national sources. This was collated in an evidence pack which is available on Bracknell Forest Council website.		
22. On the basis of sections 7 – 17 above is a full impact assessment required?		N	
23. If a full impact assessment is not required; what actions will you take to reduce or remove any potential differential/adverse impact, to further promote equality of opportunity through this activity or to obtain further information or data? Please complete the action plan in full, adding more rows as needed.			
Action	Timescale	Person Responsible	Milestone/Success Criteria
See recommendations contained in report.	April 2021	Cllr John Porter	Recommendations are endorsed by the O&S Commission and agreed by the Executive.
24. Which service, business or work plan will these actions be included in?	Overview & Scrutiny Commission work plan		
25. Please list the current actions undertaken to advance equality or examples of good practice identified as part of the screening?	Please see recommendations contained in the report.		
26. Assistant director's signature.	Signature:	<div data-bbox="1070 1018 1731 1145" style="border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <p style="margin: 0;">APPROVED</p> <p style="margin: 0;"><i>By AnnMo at 2:25 pm, Mar 18, 2021</i></p> </div>	

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To: **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**
7 April 2021

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2019-21
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Council's Constitution requires the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to submit an annual report to the Council on overview and scrutiny activities and their outcomes. The attached draft report informs members of progress made in respect of the operation and development of overview and scrutiny in Bracknell Forest during 2019-21.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the 2019-21 draft annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission be submitted to Council for adoption.**

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 To meet the requirements of the Constitution.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The activities of overview and scrutiny in 2019-21 are summarised in the draft annual report at Appendix A. The outcomes of individual reviews are reflected in the report.
- 5.2 Overview and scrutiny has established a structure that allows activity to better align with the themes of the Council Plan. The function has established and delivered against a work programme that supports the council objectives over the period. The Commission has carried out research and made recommendations to support the council's climate change targets and has scrutinised the budget and monitored the performance of all council departments through the Council Plan Overview Report.
- 5.3 Overview and scrutiny will continue to embed the positive changes that support effective contribution to the Council Plan, with particular focus on regaining momentum following a pause due to the pandemic. The Commission will continue to develop its programme management role to deliver the work programme in line with council objectives and available resources.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 The Scrutiny function has an important role to play in providing local accountability and transparency in decision-making. It was introduced by the Local Government

Act 2000 primarily to serve as a check and balance on Executive powers. Subsequent legislation has conferred on Councils the responsibility for scrutinising local NHS Trusts, the work of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, and other partners, such as the Environment Agency. It sits alongside the Council's Standards regime in delivering the accountability that constitutes one of the Seven Principles of Public Life.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Statutory Scrutiny Officer

- 6.3 The annual report highlights the work of the council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission and panels and the outcomes of this work. Overview and scrutiny has exercised its functions in order to support the development of policy within the council, to scrutinise the council's financial proposals and to improve services the council and its partners provide with the overarching objective of seeking to benefit local communities. At this time of considerable disruption, the strength of scrutiny is its focus on the long-term development of the council and how the council can meet its communities' needs.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 Throughout all scrutiny activity members are reminded to consider what equality impacts there may be, and review activities are delivered in a way that avoids barriers to wider involvement e.g. timing of review activity, length of reviews and access to information. As part of the scoping process for each review an initial equalities screening will be more explicitly undertaken and a full equalities impact assessment undertaken if required.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 Effective scrutiny is important to the successful functioning of local democracy by securing the efficient delivery of council services and driving improvements. A robust work programme is essential in order to ensure that overview and scrutiny activity contributes successfully to the work of the council. Poor scrutiny can be indicative of wider governance, leadership and/or service failure.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

Councillor Robert Angell, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Commission
Robert.angell@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report



2019 - 2021

Foreword from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Councillor Robert Angell



This report covers May 2019 to March 2021, a period of significant change for the overview and scrutiny (O&S) function within Bracknell Forest Council.

The early period focussed on implementing positive changes to the way we conduct scrutiny,

drawing on a Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) 'healthcheck' in December 2018. Scrutiny is now centred around the themes of the Council Plan, ensuring we direct our efforts into areas that will contribute to the effective delivery of the council's objectives. The section on O&S at Bracknell Forest Council at the end of this report describes what this means for our structure and activities.

We also reviewed the role and purpose of O&S to better reflect the Government's statutory guidance on O&S and the recent council reorganisation. This led to a comprehensive work programme spanning the four-year administration. The work programme was developed in consultation with the Executive, senior council officers and O&S panel chairs and was agreed at the O&S Commission meeting in November 2019.

As with the revised structure, the new work programme aligns with the Council Plan objectives and sets a clear path for O&S to have a positive impact. Work programme activities gained momentum but were paused in March 2020 when the national health pandemic required a cross-council response, meaning changes to priorities and a focus on staff arrangements to deliver them.

The Commission continued to meet but formal panel scrutiny activity was paused. With experience of the pandemic, the Commission revised the work programme in September 2020

to reflect the impact and the recovery process for some services. The programme acknowledges revised priorities and timescales, the need to update some review scopes and new ways of working in some areas.

2020-21 presents an ongoing challenge to work with services to maintain a deliverable O&S programme whilst responding to changes in their capacity due to Covid activities. The Commission and panel chairs recognise the new pressures on services and are keen to manage them carefully by refocussing reviews to support service activity. I must take this opportunity to thank the officers and staff who have maintained a high level of support for the O&S activity in difficult times.

The pandemic has also offered opportunities and the O&S function has delivered several quality reviews using remote meetings. All of the chairs have recognised that remote meetings enable experts to attend more easily and have the ongoing potential to increase the diversity of witnesses.

As well as sponsoring the panel activities and scrutinising the budget, the Commission also took the lead on O&S's response to tackling climate change, which is described later in this report.

O&S benefits from a wide range of experience and viewpoints, and the Commission welcomes input from residents and local organisations via its public participation scheme. I would like to see this used more frequently so increased publicity will be a feature of the coming year to attract wider opinions on the council's performance.



Introduction from Kevin Gibbs, Statutory Scrutiny Officer



Overview and Scrutiny is an important function of Bracknell Forest Council. Its legal powers and duties are set out in the Local Government Act 2000 which created separate Executive and Overview and Scrutiny functions within councils. This legislation also details

the role and duties of Statutory Scrutiny Officer :

- To promote the role of the authority's overview and scrutiny committee(s);
- To provide support to the authority's O&S function and to local councillors;
- To provide guidance to members and officers of the council in relation to O&S's functions.

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer is an important role. It must ensure that scrutiny is taken seriously by members and officers and, in so doing, ensure that the council has effective governance arrangements.

Bracknell Forest Council has assigned the Statutory Scrutiny Officer role to the Executive Director of Delivery, to ensure that the role has a high profile within the corporate organisation, plus the Executive and the wider member community. It is vital that members have the same confidence in the advice given to them in this role as with any of the other statutory posts, such as Monitoring Officer and s151 Finance Officer (Director of Resources).

The powers of the Overview and Scrutiny function are wider than the services provided by the council. A good and effective Overview and Scrutiny function may investigate any issue which "affects the area or the area's inhabitants". This can and does include other partner organisations, in particular local NHS bodies, the community safety partnership and other public / 3rd sector organisations. Such bodies are under various obligations to respond or have regard to the

recommendations of the Commission and its Panels.

It is therefore important that the Statutory Scrutiny Officer is a senior Officer as, from time to time, questions and concerns will arise about the operation of the scrutiny function, and an official will need to make a determination about what the law says and how this should be applied to that particular situation. Members and officers, both working in scrutiny and in other roles, need to understand how the Statutory Scrutiny Officer, Head of Democratic & Registration Services and the Monitoring Officer are empowered to exercise these functions and provide advice in these circumstances. In carrying out this statutory role, there is a need to have a nuanced and meaningful understanding of the scrutiny function in order to accurately make judgments about its operation when disagreements or other issues arise.

Following the council reorganisation in 2019, Bracknell Forest Council's implementation of the role is in line with the recommendations of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee report, Effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees. This Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2019 – 2021 discharges the duty of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer to "...make regular reports to Full Council on the state of scrutiny, explicitly identifying any areas of weakness that require improvement and the work carried out by the Statutory Scrutiny Officer to rectify them".

Council will be aware that on 27th November 2019, Council noted the decision of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission on 5 November 2019 to implement revised arrangements to discharge the overview & scrutiny function (Appendix A). Council also noted the Commission Chairman's encouragement for all non-Executive members to get involved in future overview and scrutiny activity. To guide member involvement in the function, a four-year work programme was developed tracking the themes within the new Council Plan.

I am pleased to report to Council that this report demonstrates that these changes to the function have been highly effective and the function is meeting the highest standards.

This report details the extensive programme of reviews of council services. Reviews have also been undertaken on external organisations, including Thames Valley Police, registered

providers of social housing and contracted service providers.

In support of these reviews, a broad range of witnesses have given evidence to the Panels and Commission. These have included a number of organisations, tenant representative groups, community groups, campaigning groups, service users, academics and individual members of the public. Trade groups and those representing industry have shared insights and learning, putting the Panels and the Commission in the best possible position to use this intelligence to frame their reviews and produce insightful recommendations.

The Commission has undertaken pre-decision scrutiny on the budget, the IT strategy, the Customer Experience Strategy and extensive work was undertaken on the Climate Change strategy.

Scrutiny's role in in-year performance and finance monitoring sits alongside the audit function of the authority. Corporate performance management was undertaken with quarterly reviews of the

Corporate Performance Overview Report (CPOR), with all Executive Members having been reviewed in public session of the Commission over the municipal year.

It is worth highlighting to Council that the impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic required the work programme to be reschedule a number of times. The resources assigned to the function have also been spread much more thinly as, initially, the resources needed to mount a remote public meeting were four times that required for a face to face public meeting. However, even with the pause in Commission and Panel meetings in April - May 2020, the end of year will see that the Panels and Commission have exceeded the number of meetings scheduled and will have delivered more review reports than has been the case in the last 3 years.

The support to members for the provision of policy and research support, plus organising and administering meetings, has been set at 86 hours per week since 2018-19. Pre-Covid the 86 hours were delivered by three staff:

Governance & Scrutiny Officer	Governance & Scrutiny Officer	Governance & Scrutiny Manager
1 full time equivalent (FTE)	1 FTE	0.32 FTE

Interim Covid arrangements are in place and the 86 hours are currently delivered by four people:

Governance & Scrutiny Officer	Governance & Scrutiny Officer	Governance & Scrutiny Officer	Governance & Scrutiny Manager
0.75 FTE	0.65 FTE	0.6 FTE	0.32 FTE

Commission		
2018-19	2019-20	2020-21 to date
5 meetings held No review activity	6 meetings held Climate Change review commenced	9 meetings held (1 scheduled for April) 3 reviews completed – recommendations to Executive
2 over 2 hrs	2 over 2 hrs	8 over 2 hours
Average 1.5 hrs each	Average 1:40 hrs each	Average 2:20 hrs each
Total = 7:55 hrs	Total = 9:45 hrs	Total = 20:20 hrs so far

Panels		
2018-19	2019-20	2020-21 to date
16 meetings held across 4 panels	14 panel meetings held across 3 panels	25 review meetings held across 3 panels
3 reviews – no recommendations generated	2 reviews completed – recommendations to Executive 1 review almost complete – on hold	1 review complete – recommendations to Executive 2 reviews close to completion 3 reviews in early stages of pre-review preparation

I am therefore content that the function has adequate resources and that service departments are contributing sufficiently to reviews to ensure these are effective.

Below is my review of the effectiveness of the Panel and Commission, in terms of meeting hours and reports completed.

Kevin Gibbs

Executive Director: Delivery (acting as Statutory Scrutiny Officer)

Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Chair: Councillor Mrs Gill Birch



All the panel members work well together, and I would like to thank them all for their help and support during 2019-2021.

This period has been one of many challenges and new ways of working, not least adopting a theme-based approach to our

scrutiny which allows activity to align more closely to the council's objectives. The coronavirus pandemic impacted on our capacity to carry out scrutiny. Some activities took longer to complete and the four-year work programme has been realigned to account for this necessary pause in activities.

One delayed activity was the care leavers review which was finally endorsed by the Executive in September 2020. The five recommendations were accepted by the Executive and the panel recognised all the good work already in place to support care leavers. Specifically, it was pleasing to see that the council was prioritising the leaving care services to provide support to young people in their transition to independent living. It is vital that members recognise our responsibility as corporate parents and the need to ensure there is sufficient support in terms of housing, education, jobs, and accommodation for care leavers.

The recommendations from the care leavers review are due to be monitored at the O&S Commission meeting in May 2021 to evaluate progress on outcomes.

The apprenticeship review began in November 2020 and completed in January 2021. It followed directly on from the care leavers review as post-16 apprenticeship opportunities for our care leavers and young people are extremely important, especially with the current challenges of the coronavirus pandemic. This review looked at the new government incentives, barriers to undertaking an apprenticeship, employing apprentices and the range of apprenticeship opportunities.

The review findings were endorsed by the Executive in March 2021 and all recommendations were accepted. When implemented, the recommendations will improve the apprenticeship information for both providers and potential apprentices and will increase partnership working across providers and with the council.

The review demonstrated how well the council works with partners and how positive everyone is about promoting apprenticeships. It was interesting to find out that we have 55 apprentices across the borough with ages ranging from post-16 to late fifties..

The next review is the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). This has already been scoped and is commencing in April. The review will look at the mechanisms that govern CIL funding and spend as well as reviewing how parish councils and Bracknell Forest council have used CIL funding to stimulate local growth, with particular reference to communication and including residents in decision making.



(L-R) Councillor Brossard, Councillor Mrs Birch and Councillor Temperton with the fitness equipment at Holly House (taken in 2019)

Findings and observations

- The new shorter report focuses on outcomes by presenting the review recommendations at the beginning. This has been well received and is the preferred format.
- The themed approach has facilitated reviews across departments which has enabled the review of broader topics and helped form policies.
- The reviews have attracted wider participation from members. The apprenticeship review was carried out by ten councillors and three Executive members.
- Due to the coronavirus pandemic, virtual ways of working were established. These allowed relevant witnesses to attend regardless of location, which contributed to high quality reviews. This way of working is efficient and should be continued.
- Although the panel has concluded two excellent reviews, there is a desire to increase our scrutiny focus by making greater use of the performance dashboard .
- The panel has only discussed and decided priorities on one occasion (in June). It would be more effective to have at least one more meeting at the end of the period to evaluate the work done.
- Members who work full-time have found it difficult to attend daytime reviews. Having panel meetings in the evening keeps them in touch and provides an opportunity to contribute to reviews.
- The one-day review was too long and intense. In future, short format reviews should aim for two half days.
- Ideally, meetings should be a maximum of two hours long to maintain focus and engagement.



Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chair: Councillor John Porter



The objective of the panel changed at the start of the new term. The panel will still scrutinise how each service item has been delivered and whether it met its key objectives, and will also now input into reviews of upcoming contracts, initiatives and plans.

This welcome change

increases the influence of scrutiny and allows councillors to make a greater contribution on behalf of residents.

In this period, the panel concluded the findings of the LED lighting review, confirming that the new lighting delivers cost savings for the council and reduces our carbon footprint.

The next review looked at additional burial space within the Borough as the crematorium is running out of space. Having visited various sites and listened to evidence from officers and experts, the panel recommended to the Executive a suitable site for testing. If the testing is successful this site has the potential to support burials in the area for 25 years. The report also identified a second phase to this review - to understand what other burial options could be offered to residents that would increase the number of burials possible as well as increasing choice.

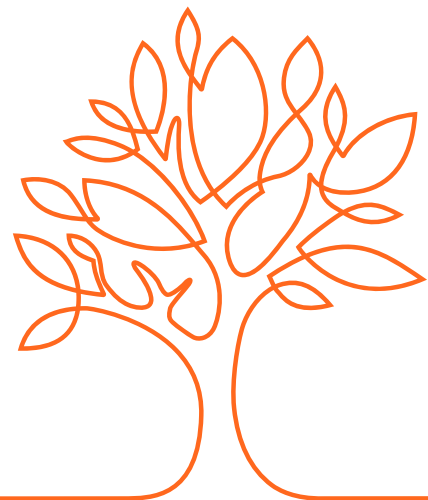
In April 2020, the panel had intended to look at introducing food waste to Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and flats but this was delayed due to Covid-19. I am pleased to report that this review is now starting and I look forward to recommending some key considerations for a successful implementation.

The panel has now looked at registered providers of social housing. The aim of the review was to identify opportunities for providers to foster community wellbeing and assist in individual health and wellbeing outcomes within Bracknell Forest. The review also looked at the service provision for residents to understand how it impacts them and identify any opportunities to improve. The panel spoke to registered providers, tenants, housing officers and the Public Protection Partnership, and made several recommendations designed to improve understanding and speed up processes for the benefit of residents. The recommendations will be considered by the Commission in April and, if endorsed, are due to be reviewed by the Executive in late April.

Registered providers was the panel's first review following the pause due to the pandemic. Covid-19 has demonstrated how important the security of social housing is and the influence that registered providers can have on building and supporting communities.

Observations

During lockdown it was necessary to conduct the registered providers review remotely. The review has not suffered as a result and has probably benefitted as we had more people contribute due to not having to travel vast distances to assist us with the review. My view on future reviews and scrutiny is to have virtual meetings when any contributor has a long journey or other difficulties attending in person. The panel could decide whether it is preferable to have a physical or virtual meeting with officers.



Wellbeing and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Chair: Councillor
Malcolm Tullett



This has been a very unusual and difficult year, dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic and emergency arrangements. However, the panel has discussed and consulted on two work programme topics, while continuing to review the priorities identified by members of the public, outside

organisations, panel members and council officers in a joint workshop in 2019.

Healthy eating, activity and exercise

Although the panel interviewed relevant officers and third-party providers, the first wave of the pandemic forced this review to be halted. Regrettably, it has still not restarted as the officers and organisations involved are either focused on the pandemic response or have closed, respectively. We particularly needed to speak with Officers working with schools, especially regarding the attendance of students at out of school sports clubs and the reasons why others did not attend.

When the situation eases sufficiently, we will review the draft findings to understand where they fit with the current situation and any plans. Officers from Public Health, Children's and School's Services, together with leisure service providers will all need to be invited to give evidence, again.

Social isolation and loneliness

Following the first lockdown, the council's corporate management team commissioned a Community Impact Assessment to understand how residents in Bracknell Forest have been

affected by the virus and the restrictions. Together with the findings of a residents' survey and the Frimley Healthcare Foundation Trust Integrated Care System patient review, the subject of social isolation and loneliness became a high priority for review.

Officers from public health and adult social care had to prioritise our Covid-19 response so, with the approval of the O&S Commission, the panel reviewed the findings of the three reports. Several organisations also expressed a desire to get involved.

The panel heard evidence from carers, carers support groups, faith groups, Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, Community Mental Health Trust and councillors representing self-help groups and day centres. We also heard from the Older Person's Community Champion.

The panel considered the issue of digital inclusion and invited the Assistant Director: Customer Experience, Digital and ICT to take part in the review. Her involvement proved pivotal to the review outcomes, which focus on the need for the Health and Wellbeing Board to prioritise social isolation and loneliness to ensure a holistic approach to statutory, voluntary and charity sector projects. The recommendations include a 'One Stop Shop' for signposting services, and the development of digital solutions to underpin improvements. A scrutiny review into mental health services provision in the borough is also recommended. All of the recommendations from this review will be considered at the Commission in April.

Blue Badge scheme

The O&S Commission agreed that the panel should scrutinise the issue of awarding blue badges in Bracknell Forest, immediately after the completion of the social isolation and loneliness review.

The requirement for scrutiny arose following several complaints to councillors and a local newspaper article highlighting a discrepancy in allocation outcomes between Bracknell Forest Council and other local authorities. The article suggested poor performance from the council in relation to applicants with hidden disabilities. The O&S Commission agreed that, notwithstanding a broadly clean bill of health from the Local

Authority Ombudsman in relation to the process, the underlying reasons for the difference in outcomes need to be understood.

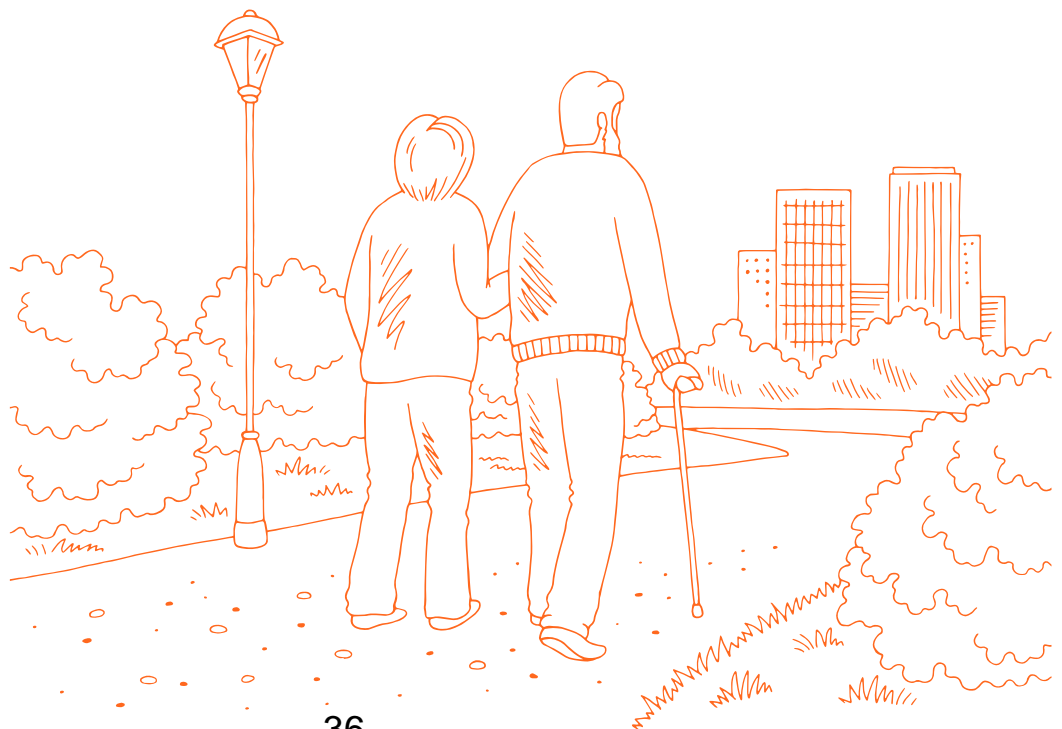
This review is in the planning phase with the scrutiny work being carried out in April.

Observations

The big difficulty this year has been trying to involve the most relevant senior officers and partner organisations when they are leading the Covid-19 response.

In the past, undertaking scrutiny via evening meetings at Times Square may have been a barrier for some participants. Moving to online meetings has meant some meetings have been held at different times (daytime or early evening). This has suited some participants, but not all, and is a change from which we have learned.

In general, remote meetings have allowed a wider range of members and witnesses to attend as there is no need to travel and it is easier to attend for short segments. Reviews are best when there is participation from many outside parties sharing experience that is relevant to the scope. Wide participation also helps outcomes as participants support and implement the agreed recommendations. The practice of remote meetings should be embraced and next year, if regulations allow, meetings could be on a blended face-to-face and remote basis.



Climate change O&S Commission Vice-chair: Councillor Tony Virgo



In support of this, the council hosted a climate change market place in March 2020 where council officers and external partners showcased the projects making a sustainable difference to council services. The Commission workshop that followed identified a number of projects to

be considered in the developing strategy. Several O&S members subsequently took action over the summer, carrying out individual research into areas from air quality to schools infrastructure to water dispensers.

On 2 December, the Commission reviewed this research and further discussed climate change with external experts. The resulting suggestions were presented to Kevin Gibbs, Executive Director Delivery, who is coordinating the council's overall strategy. The Commission endorsed the draft strategy and recommended that an advisory group be set up to focus on driving the strategy forward and to coordinate the expertise amongst parish councillors, action groups and experts in the field. The meeting also commissioned a review into the opportunities to use community leadership to harness the collective contributions required from residents to fight climate change.

The focus on climate change continues and, in February, the Commission proposed eight members to be part of a cross-party advisory panel for climate change being set up by the Executive.

I would like to thank all the members who have made strong contributions to our climate change response over this period for their continued commitment to making a real difference in the fight against climate change.



Overview and scrutiny at Bracknell Forest Council

Overview and scrutiny is structured with an overarching O&S Commission and three O&S panels, as described below.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Membership:

Councillor Angell (Chair), Councillor Virgo (Vice-chair)

Councillors Mrs Birch, Brossard, Gbadebo, Mrs Mattick, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, Mossom, Porter, Temperton, Tullett

Responsibilities:

- Create a focussed work programme to ensure scrutiny activity contributes effectively to the Council Plan objectives
- Continually manage the work programme to ensure the best use of resources, accommodating any necessary extensions or urgent short-term issues
- Act as sponsor for panels as they undertake deep dive reviews or support policy development
- Consider the recommendations from panels' scrutiny activity and, where they are supported, refer to the appropriate decision-maker
- Scrutinise the council's budget proposals
- Hold the Executive to account for council performance according to the Corporate Performance Overview Report
- Carry out the council's crime and disorder responsibilities and strategic health responsibilities.
- Manage call in (the process to scrutinise Executive decisions).
- Review the policy framework.

Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Panel membership:

Councillor Mrs Birch (Chair), Councillor Brossard (Vice-chair)

Councillors Ms Gaw, Mrs Hamilton, Gbadebo, Ms Hayes, Ms Merry, Skinner, Temperton

Parent governor representatives (voting): Mark Glanville, Tracey Wright

Strategic themes:

Education and skills

Economic resilience

Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Panel membership:

Councillor Porter (Chair), Mrs McKenzie-Boyle (Vice-chair)

Councillors Angell, Brossard, Brown, Ms Gaw, Mrs Ingham, Kennedy, Kirke

Strategic themes:

Communities

Protecting and enhancing our environment

Wellbeing and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Panel membership:

Councillor Tullett (Chair), Councillor Mrs Mattick (Vice-chair)

Councillors Allen, Atkinson, Bhandari, Brossard, Finch, M J Gibson, Mrs L Gibson, McLean, Skinner, Temperton

Strategic themes:

Caring for you and your family

Value for money

Each panel is responsible for two themes from the Council Plan. By aligning activity areas with strategic themes, O&S can focus on topics that closely support the council's objectives over the four-year administration period.

These arrangements recognise that scrutiny is most effective when operating the task and finish group model rather than as sub-committee. Panels work flexibly to carry out focussed enquiries and deep dive reviews across a wide range of topics in support of the council's objectives. Panels meet as required to deliver the work programme rather than on a pre-agreed fixed cycle.

The format is also flexible, and activities range from a single scrutiny panel meeting on an issue to a three - six month focussed review. In addition to the core panel membership, all non-Executive members can take part in any review work. This enables the O&S function to tap into the skills and knowledge of members across a wide variety of topics. It also means that councillors who need to balance external responsibilities can be involved effectively based on their availability, interests and knowledge.

This approach recognises the importance of non-Executive members' involvement in policy development and pre-decision input and scrutiny, ensuring that scrutiny not only provides challenge but also actively contributes to the work of the council.

Getting involved

Overview and scrutiny activities benefit from a wide range of knowledge, experience and viewpoints and the Commission is keen to encourage wider participation. Review recommendations help shape the services we deliver for residents. Here are some insights from officers and a resident about what they gained from recent reviews.

"I've been invited to contribute to a couple of O&S reviews this year. Although they can be challenging, the sessions are always valuable and make me and my team think. Panels are keen to look at technology and understand how the council can use it to improve the lives of residents and make services more efficient. They ask relevant questions and give insights we may not have considered before which helps us all achieve a better outcome."

Bobby Mulheir, Assistant Director: Customer Experience, Digital and ICT

"The timing of the O & S review into apprenticeships coincided with the pandemic. It gave us the opportunity to share how we had adapted our services to continue providing effective support to children and young people, as well as to factually present the challenges we were experiencing. The resulting findings and recommendations are closely linked to the Education and Improvement strategy and will support the strategic priorities of the department."

Kashif Nawaz, Head of Children's Support Services

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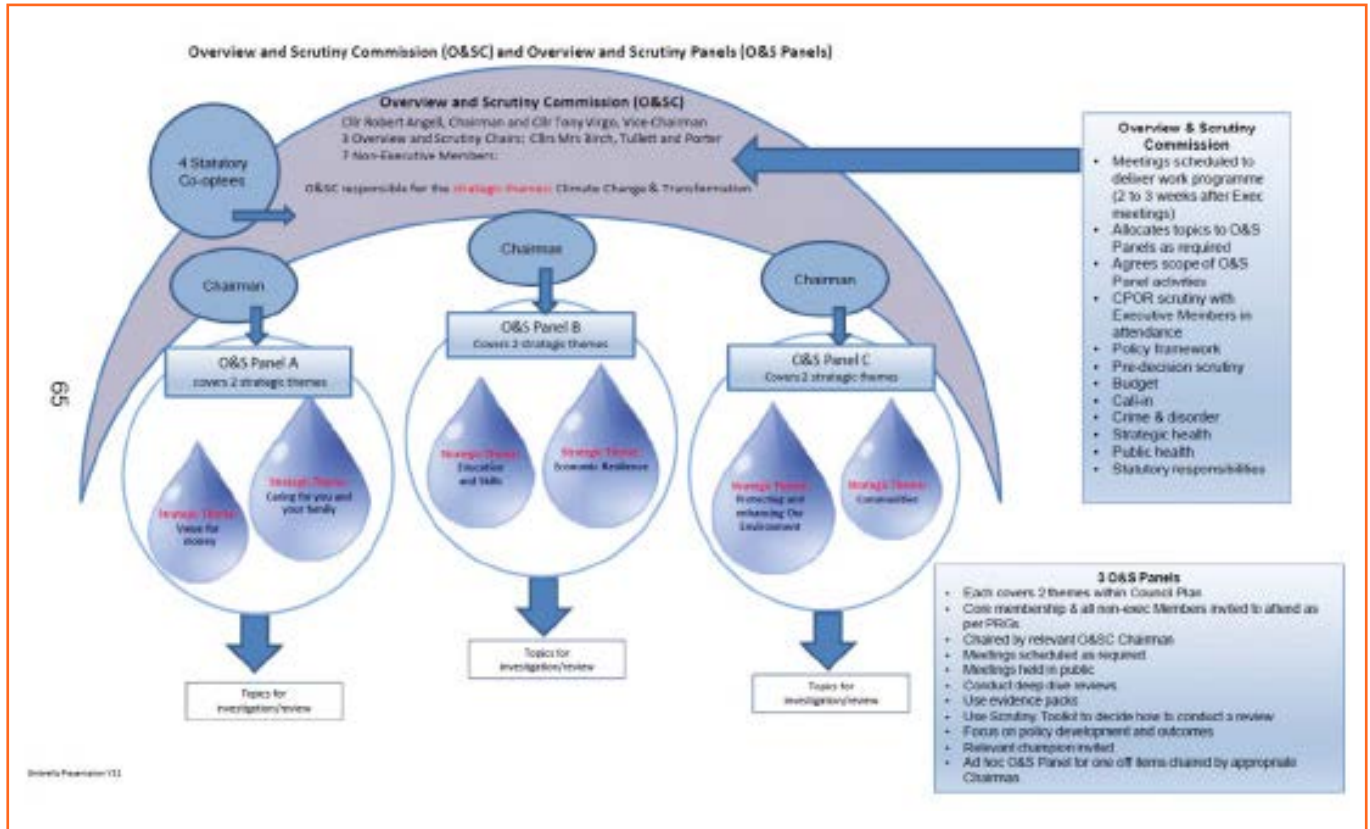
Quote from a resident

Find out more about the overview and scrutiny work programme. If you would like to be involved in future activities contact committee@bracknell-forest.gov.uk.



Appendix A

Revised overview and scrutiny arrangements, in place since November 2019



**Community Infrastructure Levy Review
Education, Skills and Growth Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

Reason for review

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge applied to new local development to help fund local infrastructure needs. Receipts from CIL differ from other local contributions for development (i.e. S106) in that these are not site-specific and can be used to support wider community infrastructure needs in that locality. It was noted by members of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission at a budget scrutiny session that few Parish/Town Councils maximised their CIL funding or achieved project spend in a timely manner. There was an identified need to understand the barriers preventing CIL allocation and spend.

Objectives/scope

The review will look to:

- Identify key principles and practice that should underpin governance arrangements for distribution of the neighbourhood element of the CIL, particularly in relation to how community infrastructure projects are identified, prioritised and authorised;
- Understand how Parish/Town Councils use CIL funding and assess if they achieve maximum impact for residents;
- Assess whether there has been an impact on enacting projects due to COVID-19.

The review Panel will do this by:

- Carrying out a desk top analysis to review the amount of CIL funding given to each Parish/Town Council in the borough and how it has been spent;
- Surveying Parish/Town Councils to capture examples of good practice, facilitated by CIL funding;
- Interviewing a developer
- Interviewing comparator local authorities
- Interviewing BFC officers on how they assist/support Parish/Town Councils with managing CIL funds, including recovery from COVID-19
- Exploring how residents can be engaged in deciding priorities for CIL funded projects.

At the conclusion of this work the Panel will produce a report highlighting its findings and propose recommendations to the Executive about how Parish/Town Councils, in conjunction with Bracknell Forest Council, could maximise the use of CIL funding for residents.

Delivery methods: Surveys; desk top analysis; consultation and evidence gathering sessions

Council theme: Value for money

Council team: Infrastructure & Implementation Team from Place, Planning & Regeneration and Finance and Business Services from Resources

Review due: July 2021

Proposed by: Cllr Gill Birch, Chair Education, Skills and Growth Panel

Equalities Impact Assessment

The Council has a duty under the Equalities Act (2010) to have due regard to tackling discrimination of persons that share the characteristics protected under Section 4 of the Act; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share those

protected characteristics and people who do not.

CIL funding should have a positive impact upon all residents and service users through enhancing provision of community facilities. This review will consider how CIL funding is targeted where needs are evidenced and with respect to people who have protected characteristics.

Financial and legal implications

There are potentially legal and financial implications of any recommendations arising from this review which will be fully addressed in the review report.

Climate Change implications

CIL funding can support climate change issues, such as reducing carbon emissions in a local neighbourhood, and underpin the Council's vision for thriving communities. This review will assess whether climate change issues should be considered as part of the prioritisation process for allocating CIL funding to Parish/Town Councils.