

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
05 JUNE 2008
7.30 - 9.35 PM



HELD AT SANDHURST TOWN COUNCIL

Present: Councillors Edger (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Birch, Brunel-Walker, Burrows, Finnie, Leake, Mrs Shillcock, Virgo, Ms Whitbread, Worrall and Wade (Substitute)

Mr I Sharland (Parent Governor Representative)

Also Present: Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Leisure, Corporate Services and Public Protection

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Thompson
Mr G S Anderson (Church Representative)

In Attendance: Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services
Sally Hendrick, Head of Audit & Risk Management
Alan Nash, Head of Finance
Dr Steven Shuttleworth, Audit Commission
Elizabeth Hale, Audit Commission
Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance & Scrutiny
Priya Patel, Democratic Services Officer

4. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 13 March 2008 and 21 May 2008 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

Minute 63 – Procurement Update Report

It was reported that a report on maverick spending would be brought to the next meeting of the Commission. Having consulted the Chairman, it was agreed that the agenda was too heavy, for this item to be considered at this meeting.

Minutes 64 – Corporate Community Cohesion Strategy 2006/07 – Annual Report

It was reported that an update report on Shopmobility was to be submitted to the Executive in the following week.

5. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting or indications that Members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

6. External Auditor's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

The Commission were presented with the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of March 2008 from the Audit Commission, by Dr Steven Shuttleworth, Relationship Manager.

Dr Shuttleworth described Bracknell Forest as a top performing Council nationally, this was to the great credit of Members. He stated that the report provided an overall summary of the Audit Commission's assessment of the Council.

He reported that the Council had either improved or maintained its level of performance in a variety of services, year on year, for the past three years. This showed a spectacular improvement in the Council's performance overall. The only service area that had lagged had been culture, however he stated that the Council should not overly concern themselves with this as, assessment calculations had changed, leading to some council's losing out. The score given in this area, did not necessarily mean that Culture services were any worse.

The Head of Performance & Scrutiny reported that this was a concern that had been highlighted at Executive; if the Council's scores remained the same in all services but maintained a 2 for Cultural Services, the Council could potentially move from four to three stars next year. The Chairman of the Environment, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel asked that a report be brought on culture services and CPA targets to a future meeting of this Panel.

Dr Shuttleworth highlighted that Supporting People services had been a key area of concern in last year's letter. In the last year to 18 months, these services had improved rapidly particularly to the merit of the interim director, Ian Davey.

He reported that looking ahead, the Council and its partners would need to work closely together over the next year to ensure that, they were ready to jointly meet the expectations of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which was replacing CPA. In particular, the Council would need to consider how it would work with partners to serve the needs of the area as a whole. The Scrutiny Commission would play a key role in the scrutiny of this process.

Members queried how accountability would be achieved once all resources were pooled together. Dr Shuttleworth stated that this would need to be carefully considered, the Council would need to work with partners and take the lead to ensure that there were clear lines of accountability and objectives. Mechanisms needed to be in place to resolve any issues that arose around accountability.

The Chairman stated that this issue would be covered by the Local Area Agreement Overview and Scrutiny Working Group. In addition, it was reported that whilst the Local Strategic Partnership would have joint responsibility to deliver services, within this, delivery of individual services would be attributed to particular organisations.

Dr Shuttleworth reported that all auditors were required to test the robustness of collecting data and had to ensure that data was collated appropriately. It was reported that the Council had a good record on the quality of its data and the Corporate Management Team were looking at this area of work and that work was underway. It was anticipated that the recommendation would be met this year.

Dr Shuttleworth reported that a specific neighbouring local authority had been very successful in reducing the number of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET). He did recognise that Bracknell Forest had done some good work as

part of the Town Centre Redevelopment Programme, around initiatives to raise skills of local people.

In response to members' queries around project management outlined as a concern in the report, officers stated that the PRINCE methodology had now been adopted to target particular areas of the Council's work. Dr Shuttleworth commended the Council for acting swiftly on this work.

The Chairman thanked Dr Shuttleworth for attending the meeting and presenting his report to the Commission. Dr Shuttleworth introduced Elizabeth Hale, who would be working with the Council in the following year as the CAA Lead for Berkshire.

7. Internal Audit Annual Assurance Report 2007/08

The Commission received a report that provided an annual assurance report timed to support the Annual Governance Statement which would accompany the Council's annual accounts. The Head of Audit & Risk Management provided a summary of each section of the report for the Commission.

In particular, she highlighted that based on the work of Internal Audit during the year and other sources of assurance outlined, the following opinion could be provided:

- There were robust systems of internal control in place in accordance with proper practices except for those specific areas summarised in the report;
- Key systems of control were operating satisfactorily except for the specific areas highlighted in the report; and
- There were adequate arrangements in place for risk management and corporate governance.

In terms of Corporate Governance she stated that CMT had established a Governance Working Group. The Annual Governance Statement that would be drafted by this Group would be reported to the Commission in September.

In terms of risk management, significant progress had been made. The Strategic Risk Register had been updated, the Risk Management Strategy also needed to be updated and the Head of Audit would be looking at this.

In terms of the effectiveness of the system of Internal Audit, the Audit Commission had undertaken a detailed review and it had reported that the Internal Audit function had been effective for the year under review.

The Head of Audit then outlined significant control weaknesses. The Commission asked that they be kept informed of the work around the purchase of goods and services.

8. Corporate Performance Overview Report

The Commission were presented with the Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Report for the third quarter (October – December) 2007/08. The Director of Corporate Services reported that 93% of actions had been achieved in this quarter and that any areas where there had been under performance, had been highlighted in the report.

The Director of Corporate Services then highlighted some of the activity over the third quarter:

- Work was progressing with the detailed design for the Civic Hub, with the focus on RIBA Stage D.
- The Secretary of State concluded that the LDF Core Strategy was sound, making Bracknell Forest one of only 6 LDFs in the South East to achieve this milestone.
- Preparations for the transfer of the Council's housing stock to Bracknell Forest Homes.
- The Council's Gender Equality Scheme was approved, with work being done on a Race Equality Scheme for 2008-11.
- The on-site stages of the inspections of Adult & Community Learning, the Youth Service and the Joint Area Review (JAR).

In response to members' queries, the Director of Corporate Services reported that Neighbourhood schemes work had just begun and it was hoped that one scheme would be complete by the end of the financial year.

9. Performance Monitoring Reports (PMR)

The Commission were presented with the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of the fourth quarter (January to March) of 2007/08 as reported in the Performance Monitoring Reports for the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Services Department.

Corporate Services Department

The Director of Corporate Services reported that there had been some significant milestones in this quarter, in particular:

- The Housing transfer, reaping benefits for residents across the Borough,
- The Department had reported an under spend of £1m for the year, as a result of good financial planning and the successful and timely transfer of the housing function.
- Collection rates of council tax and business rates had been very successful, only 5 outstanding cases of non-payment currently existed. It was noted that 80% of residents paid their council tax by direct debit.
- Corporate Services had experienced low staff turnover, 8.9% compared to the Council's average of 13.9%. Staff sickness absence was also lower at 5.75 days annually, compared with 7.3 days as the average in the South East.

Members asked if savings had been tracked in the Department, so that staff could be congratulated. The Director stated that a review was underway to track where savings had been made.

Members queried the potential of making savings by looking at the provider of Members' telecommunications. The Director stated that she would look into this.

Chief Executive's Department

The Head of Performance & Scrutiny reported that 72 out of 76 actions in the service Plan had been completed – 95%.

Highlights from this quarter included:

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- Highest level of crime reduction in Thames Valley during 2007-08.
- Completion of the CPA Scorecard process
- Preparation of the CPA Improvement Plan
- Town Centre Compulsory Purchase Order inquiry held successfully.
- Fear of Crime Survey completed – results to be released June 2008.
- Agreement of draft Local Area Agreement (LAA) and submission to Government Office for the South East.

In terms of the Older People's Strategy, he reported that the senior member of staff who had been leading on the Strategy had left, recruitment was currently underway. The Assistant Chief Executive had briefed the member champion and he was content with the proposals for the progression of this work.

Key activities during the next quarter included:

- Producing the Council's Annual Report for 2007/08.
- Preparing the 4th quarter Local Area Agreement performance monitoring report.
- Finalising and publishing the Local Area Agreement refresh.
- Finalising and publishing the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- Working with the other Berkshire Unitary Authorities to establish the new Berkshire Economic Strategy Board.

In response to members' queries, the Head of Performance & Scrutiny agreed to provide an explanation for the underachievement against the target for Best Value Performance Indicator 127a and seek advice as to whether it was feasible to provide members with profiled quarterly targets for the performance on crime and fear of crime and to show incremental progress. If this was feasible, this information would be circulated to the Commission.

10. Update on the Local Area Agreement Working Group

The Chairman reported that the Working Group had met on 30 May, with the Assistant Chief Executive and the Senior Strategy & Partnership Officer and that it had been an informative meeting.

South East Employers had produced a report on Southampton's LAA and the Working Group would be looking at this closely. The Working Group would also be attending a meeting of the Bracknell Forest Partnership Board.

The Working Group had agreed a scoping document for the review as well as arranging a meeting with the Chief Executive to put a number of questions to him. It was hoped that an initial report would be brought to the Commission in September but it was noted that the work of the Working Group would go beyond this.

11. CPA Corporate Assessment Final Audit Commission Report and Improvement Plan

The Commission were presented with a report that asked them to consider the Council's Corporate Assessment Improvement Plan, produced following the Audit Commission's publication of their final report on their corporate assessment of the Council.

The Head of Performance and Scrutiny reported that the Improvement Plan set out how the Council intended to address each criteria. Each respective action detailed in the Improvement Plan could be found in one or more Service Plans. These actions would therefore be monitored and reported upon.

Members noted that reducing people's fear of crime should be a long term target and not measured only over the short term.

12. Road Traffic Casualties - Working Group Report

The Commission were asked to note the report on Road Traffic Casualties by the working group of the Environment and Leisure Overview & Scrutiny Panel. The report had been agreed with members of the Panel and the Commission, before being sent to the Executive Member for Planning & Transportation. The Executive Member would present the Executive's response to the Commission meeting in July.

The Chairman of the Environment, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel thanked all Members and officers who had contributed to this work.

13. Updates from Panel Chairmen

Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel

The Chairman stated that the work of the Extended Services and Children's Centres Working Group should be complete by September. It had been an extremely useful and informative exercise.

Joint East Berkshire Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman reported that a working group had been looking at process around patient discharge. Concerns had been expressed about the variation in services provided at different hospitals.

Social Care & Learning Scrutiny Panel

The working group looking at English as an additional language, were on target to produce an interim report in July. The working group had now completed its visits to schools and had met with the Executive Member as well as the Carers Working Group. The Working Group on Social Care Modernisation was nearing the end of the information gathering stage.

Environment, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel

The Chairman reported that the Road Traffic Casualties review had been concluded. Two major reviews being undertaken by the Panel's working groups were continuing; on Street Cleaning and a Strategic Review of Waste. In terms of Strategic Waste, the working group had now undertaken lots of interviews and were still due to meet with the Executive Member and some other industry members. A report was currently being drafted. He thanked all Members and officers that had been involved in this work.

The Chairman asked that the working groups already underway should continue with their membership unchanged, regardless of the changes in Panel membership, in order to complete the reviews efficiently.

14. Executive Forward Plan

The Commission noted the Executive Forward Plan. Councillor Brunel-Walker asked for more information on the Desktop & Infrastructure Software Upgrade.

15. **Work Programme for 2008/09 Municipal Year**

The Commission were asked to consider the indicative work programme for Overview and Scrutiny for 2008/09. The Chairman asked that Panel Chairman consider the workloads of their Panels carefully before adding any new items. It was important not to overstretch resources, in particular officer time. Staggering the work of working groups could also be considered.

The Chairman asked that each Panel consider its work programme for the year, finalise it and bring a finalised version back to the next meeting of the Commission.

CHAIRMAN