

**COUNCIL
28 APRIL 2004**

**2003/04 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE
PUBLIC SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This first annual report informs Members of the progress made in respect of the development of overview and scrutiny in Bracknell Forest over the past year since the introduction of revised arrangements in May 2003. Although I am very pleased at the significant amount we have achieved during the year, plenty remains for us to work on, both as non-executive and executive Members, to build on this strong start.

2. THE ROLE OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

- 2.1 The term overview and scrutiny covers a wide range of functions and tasks. I am keen that we take a broad approach to scrutiny, focusing not only on holding the Executive to account and keeping the Council's policies and performance under review, but also in contributing to policy development and generating ideas and input to debate on the issues that are important to people in the Borough. My aim is that we use our influence to support better, more open, transparent and accessible decision-making in the Council, reflecting the needs and views of local people and encouraging greater interest and involvement in what we do and how we do it.

3 PROGRESS OVER 2003/04

- 3.1 Subsequent to an in-depth review of the initial overview and scrutiny arrangements adopted in November 2001, at its meeting in April 2003 the Council approved new arrangements replacing the old select committees with a Public Scrutiny Commission and three scrutiny panels. Following the formal establishment of the Commission and panels at the Council's Annual Meeting on 21 May 2003, we composed a scrutiny work programme focusing on the concerns and priorities of local people whilst also taking account of the ambitions set out in our Community Plan and our priorities arising from our Comprehensive Performance Assessment. This was progressed at a Joint Scrutiny Conference in early June 2003, with Members of the Commission discussing ideas for the scrutiny work programme with the Executive and the Corporate Management Team. This was an essential step, allowing us to develop a work programme that was relevant to the needs of the whole Council. We agreed that over the next year we would undertake a series of scrutiny reviews on issues as important and varied as the provision of education in the Borough, how local transport needs are met and how we can influence and improve the health and well-being of local people.
- 3.2 Annexe A to this report sets out the scrutiny work programme for 2003/04, which consists of scrutiny reviews, overview of performance and other on-going activities, and describes progress made in its delivery over the year. Implementation of the work programme has kept us busy requiring time and commitment from both scrutiny Members and officers resulting in 13 meetings of the Commission, 20 meetings of the scrutiny panels in total, numerous meetings of the eight separate working groups

established to undertake scrutiny reviews and various other meetings for purposes including agenda planning. During the year we have done much to establish and develop the new arrangements and have already learned a lot from the process. Progress against the work programme, which initially featured discussion on the focus and timing for the various reviews before developing towards more detailed scrutiny activity, has been achieved in a number of ways which are outlined below. These have included pursuing a number of scrutiny / policy reviews, undertaking performance monitoring, developing health scrutiny, establishing and strengthening relations with external partners and development and training opportunities.

Health Scrutiny

3.3 Formal health scrutiny is a new role and responsibility which we have acquired during the year and since its formal establishment within the remit of the Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Panel, the Panel has:-

- Actively developed relationships with a range of health partners and neighbouring councils;
- Received an overview of the role and responsibilities of the Bracknell Forest Primary Care Trust (PCT);
- Considered proposed service reconfigurations to off-set the debt incurred by the Berkshire Healthcare Trust in the light of its role, responsibilities and activities;
- Discussed proposals to establish an independent sector treatment centre for East Berkshire on the site of Heatherwood Hospital, Ascot; and
- Looked at the reasons, timescales and processes leading up to the Heatherwood and Wexham Park NHS Trust's decision to close the night time facilities at the Heatherwood Minor Injuries Unit.

3.4 In addition, the Chairman of the Panel and scrutiny officers have participated in the activities of a Joint Health Scrutiny Committee relating to the area covered by the local Strategic Health Authority and are involved in the establishment of an informal health forum for East Berkshire.

3.5 The active development of relationships with a range of health partners has continued throughout the year and a representative of the Heatherwood and Wexham Park NHS Trust and the Chief Executive of the PCT regularly attend meetings of the Panel to respond to Members' comments and questions relating to local health issues. We are looking to do more in this area next year.

Scrutiny Reviews / Policy Development

3.6 We have completed several in-depth scrutiny reviews during the past year, namely, a review of adult day opportunities in the Borough following the Executive's decision to close Johnstone Court Day Centre, a policy review of untaxed/abandoned vehicles and policy development in relation to the preparation of a heritage strategy for Bracknell Forest. Involvement in the consultation relating to the South Bracknell schools review and a productive discussion with the Leader about future options relating to the SmartCard contract and a subsequent update report on related progress have also taken place.

- 3.7 The review of adult day opportunities resulted in a comprehensive report supporting the decision to close Johnstone Court Day Centre and making a number of related recommendations to the Executive, which it has recently considered together with a covering paper recommending acceptance of the report and a suggested response to the Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Panel largely welcoming the review processes employed and findings reached. The work of the Adult Day Opportunities Working Group is seen as a model which could usefully be extended to other areas of scrutiny.
- 3.8 Work towards the development of a Heritage Strategy for Bracknell Forest, which has been progressed throughout the year by a Working Group of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel, has now been completed and the draft Strategy was favourably received by the Panel at its last meeting. The Strategy has been recently submitted to the Executive Member for Leisure Services for approval.
- 3.9 A Working Group of the Commission was established to undertake a policy review of untaxed/abandoned vehicles which has been completed recently. The report of the Working Group, which contains a number of recommendations, was accepted by the Commission at its last meeting and will be submitted to the Executive at its meeting in May.
- 3.10 Other review and policy development work is ongoing and will be continued in 2004/05. Such work, which was identified as a success of the past year at the recent Scrutiny Work programme Conference (referred to below), is generally welcomed as being worthwhile and beneficial.

Performance Monitoring

- 3.11 During 2003/04 the Scrutiny Commission and Panels have undertaken a comprehensive performance monitoring role which features the consideration of Quarterly Operations Reports and Corporate Performance Overview Reports and involvement in the Best Value process. In its role as 'Audit Committee', the Commission has received internal audit assurance reports and the external auditor's Management Letter from which it can identify any further action required as a result of the completed audits. The scrutiny bodies have also contributed to the preparation of the key service plan actions designed to deliver the Council's medium term objectives and have participated in budget consultation and monitoring.

Training and Development

- 3.12 In addition to the numerous formal and informal training and briefing sessions for Members, which have included briefings by officers of the Council and workshops run by visiting guest speakers, both scrutiny Members and officers have attended external seminars, conferences and events provided by various trainers and bodies, including the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Institute of Local Government Studies, to expand their knowledge and understanding of the development of scrutiny. Scrutiny Members and officers have also participated in respective scrutiny networks for the South East area with a view to sharing best practice and expanding their scrutiny skills. Bracknell Forest's growing reputation as a local authority excelling in the field of overview and scrutiny has attracted several visits from other authorities and led to presentations to such authorities and bodies seeking information and best practice. It is proposed that further training and development will be undertaken during the forthcoming year.

Other Aspects

- 3.13 In addition to the above factors, areas of particular note in 2003/04 have been:
- Refreshing and stimulating discussion with members of Bracknell's Youth Forum about young people's views on a range of issues particularly in relation to tackling antisocial behaviour.
 - Taking scrutiny to the community including holding a scrutiny panel meeting at a local school, touring the Council's social care and housing sites and visiting several schools in South Bracknell. This is an innovation that we wish to build on next year.
 - The extent of constructive cross-party working and discussion that has characterised the early stages of the new arrangements.

Outcomes

- 3.14 Looking back over the year since the introduction of the revised scrutiny arrangements the Council has made good progress in developing the scrutiny function. This progress has been acknowledged in the follow up to the original Comprehensive Performance Assessment inspection and in the Audit Management Letter. Moreover, despite the fact that more than a third of the Members engaged in scrutiny were newly elected to the Council and varying degrees of frustration with or about scrutiny had been expressed by longer serving Members, over recent months there has been a marked change in the sense of optimism and appetite for scrutiny activity, particularly amongst the Members directly involved.
- 3.15 I would like to draw your attention to Annexe C to this report which summarises the views expressed by Members of the Commission, the Executive and the Corporate Management Team when invited at the recent Joint Scrutiny Conference 2004/05 to identify the scrutiny successes achieved during 2003/04 and areas for improvement next year. As you will see, there are many areas of success and the suggested areas for improvement will inform planning for 2004/05.
- 3.16 Having reflected on the past year's overview and scrutiny activities, I feel that the outcomes are very encouraging and I particularly welcome the positive response of the Executive to suggestions and recommendations arising from scrutiny reviews and policy development activities. Evidence of Members' appetite to actively participate in effective scrutiny, whether in the form of ensuring that the Council's performance remains on track or in thinking about future priorities and emerging issues, remains apparent. There is emerging evidence to suggest that increased Member involvement results in increased engagement in, and satisfaction with, the scrutiny process. I am mindful of the need to build on this impetus and enthusiasm which has emerged over the past year to ensure that we maintain our current level of progress.
- 3.17 My confidence in the progress we have achieved over the past year has been mirrored in discussions with many Councillors and officers involved in scrutiny in a number of different local authorities across the region and I remain convinced that we are making rapid headway in an area that is recognised as continuing to provide one of the major challenges for local government. The arrangements we have put in place are widely coming to be seen as an example of best practice. Following a successful presentation by the Chief Executive to SOLACE Members in the South East, I was pleased to receive an invitation from the South East Employers

Organisation to speak about our approach to scrutiny at a Member's seminar held in Surrey.

4 PLANNING FOR 2004/05

Joint Scrutiny Conference 2004/05

- 4.1 Following the success of the initial Joint Scrutiny Conference held in June 2003, we held a further Conference, involving Members of the Commission, the Executive and the Corporate Management Team, on 24 March 2004 to progress the work programme for next year in the light of the Council's priorities and available resources. The resulting work programme for 2004/05, which is attached at Annexe B, consists of a number of new review themes, on-going reviews and regular monitoring activities. Factors taken into account when formulating the review programme were the need to keep a realistic perspective on the workload, defining and allowing sufficient time for other scrutiny activities, retaining flexibility and reflecting the new structure of the Council. The Commission has now agreed the work programme and undertaken some related initial scoping activity to identify the main issues, timing, relevant witnesses etc in relation to the proposed new review themes. In addition to the successes in 2003/04, Members at the Conference identified areas for future improvement which are included in Annexe C. These areas for future improvement will also inform further development of the overview and scrutiny role for next year.

Areas for Further Development

- 4.2 Although the Council has made a positive start to the implementation of overview and scrutiny there are a number of key improvements and further developments that we need to instigate next year. In addition to those areas for future improvement identified in Annexe C, managing the work programme and strengthening support and resources are seen as areas to develop. I also intend to look in more detail at how our new arrangements are working and might consider conducting a survey of views from executive and non-executive Members, officers and external partners involved concerning the progress we have made and areas for future development. In this way I hope we will continue to work on:-

- Raise the profile of scrutiny both within and outside the Council;
- Continue to develop a culture of constructive debate and dialogue enabling scrutiny Members to influence policy development;
- Manage our communication and information arrangements to support effective scrutiny, both in the context of performance management and future policy; and
- Ensure that we remain focused on issues that are of real concern to local people in Bracknell Forest.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 5.1 I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Members for their support and involvement in the overview and scrutiny process, those officers who have provided related assistance, advice and information together with the range of partners and

other participants who have contributed and added value to the process. I look forward to an equally productive and challenging year ahead.

Councillor Michael Sargeant
Chairman, Public Scrutiny Commission

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2003/04

INITIAL WORK PROGRAMME	RELATED ACTIVITIES
PUBLIC SCRUTINY COMMISSION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of community safety ▪ Performance Monitoring ▪ Audit ▪ Budget 	<p>Separate working groups have been established to look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tackling anti-social behaviour; - CCTV provision; - arrangements for dealing with untaxed / abandoned vehicles in the Borough. - Regular review of Quarterly Operations Reports (QORs) for the Corporate Services Department and the Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Reports. - Receipt of internal audit assurance reports and the external auditor's Management Letter. - Consultation on the draft budget and budget monitoring through the QORs.

INITIAL WORK PROGRAMME	RELATED ACTIVITIES
ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transport Review ▪ Review of Strategic Sites ▪ Performance Monitoring ▪ Audit ▪ Budget 	<p>Separate working groups have been established to look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - arrangements for provision of community transport in Bracknell Forest; - speed cameras. - Attention has been focused on the development of a planning brief for the Amen Corner site. - Regular review of Quarterly Operations Reports (QORs) for the Environment Department and the Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Reports. - Overview of the Best Value review of the Crematorium and Cemetery Service. - Review of Landscape Services following a limited audit assurance. - Consultation on the draft budget and budget monitoring through the QORs.

INITIAL WORK PROGRAMME	RELATED ACTIVITIES
LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of Education in Bracknell Forest ▪ Review of Voluntary Sector Grant Provision ▪ Heritage ▪ Performance Monitoring ▪ Audit ▪ Budget 	<p>Work in this area has addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - planning of school places in the Borough; - the South Bracknell schools review; - school admission for rising fives - A separate working group has been established to consider arrangements within Bracknell Forest for provision of grant aid to the voluntary sector and community organisations. - Following continuation of the work of the Heritage Strategy Working Group, a draft Heritage Strategy for Bracknell Forest has been prepared for approval by the relevant Executive Member. - Regular review of Quarterly Operations Reports (QORs) for the Education Department and the Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Reports. - No specific areas for review have arisen from receipt of audit reports in relation to matters within the remit of this Panel. - Consultation on the draft budget and budget monitoring through the QORs.

INITIAL WORK PROGRAMME	RELATED ACTIVITIES
HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Health and well being ▪ Housing stock options / housing economy ▪ Performance Monitoring ▪ Audit ▪ Budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A separate working group has been established to consider the review of adult day care opportunities and its implementation; - Proposals to site a new treatment centre at Heatherwood Hospital have been considered; - Possible reconfiguration of mental health services to reduce the debt incurred by the Berkshire Health Care Trust have been looked at; - Panel representatives have been involved in the development of joint health scrutiny across East Berkshire and the Local Strategic Health Authority area. - Consideration has been given to the approach to housing allocations and key worker housing in the Borough. - Regular review of Quarterly Operations Reports (QORs) for the Social Services & Housing Department and the Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Reports. - No specific areas for review have arisen from receipt of audit reports in relation to matters within the remit of this Panel. - Consultation on the draft budget and budget monitoring through the QORs.

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2004/05

PUBLIC SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Ongoing Reviews

- Working group on CCTV.
- Working group on anti-social behaviour.
- Working group on unlicensed and abandoned vehicles.

New Review Themes (which require initial scoping to identify the main issues, timing, relevant witnesses etc.)

- Impact of new arrangements for customer services/customer care. (Following the implementation of a new 'one stop' customer services facility, consider how effectively the transition has been made and look at the benefits to or impact on customers and service standards.)
- Implementation of community cohesion agenda. (To look at how the Council's community cohesion strategy is addressing publicly raised issues and consider how best it is implemented in partnership with other major stakeholders.)

Regular Activities

Monitoring performance through consideration of and input to:-

- Quarterly Operations Reports.
- Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Report.
- Budget consultation and monitoring.
- Audit reports.
- Service Plans.
- Best Value reviews.

ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

Ongoing Reviews

- Working group on review of community transport.
- Working group on speed enforcement cameras.

New Review Themes (which require initial scoping to identify the main issues, timescale, relevant witnesses etc.)

- Policy development in relation to car parking enforcement. (To consider options for dealing with car parking enforcement in the Borough).
- Approach to major leisure assets. (Policy development and consultation activity - considering options available to the Council in relation to retention, development or disposal of major leisure assets across the Borough over the next 10 years.)

Watching Brief

- The Local Development Framework and South-East Plan.
- Recycling and waste initiatives.
- Planning and Design Guidance.

Regular Activities

Monitoring performance through consideration of and input to:-

- Quarterly Operations Reports.
- Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Report.
- Budget consultation and monitoring.
- Audit reports.
- Service Plans.
- Best Value reviews.

LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

Ongoing Reviews

- Working group on community and voluntary sector grant provision.

New Review Themes (which require initial scoping to identify the main issues, timescale, relevant witnesses etc.)

- School performance in relation to transfer from primary to secondary school. (To consider how we ensure that there is continuity between primary and secondary education and how to avoid a drop in performance as a result of the process).
- Approach to school exclusions and pupil behaviour policy. (To look at trends in the number of exclusions in the Borough and what action is needed to ensure that all pupils receive their legal entitlement to full time education).
- Home to school transport. (To consider this cross-cutting theme in the light of the action plan arising from the related Best Value review.)

Regular Activities

Monitoring performance through consideration of and input to:-

- Quarterly Operations Reports.
- Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Report.
- Budget consultation and monitoring.
- Audit reports.
- Service Plans.
- Best Value reviews.

HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL

Ongoing Reviews

- Heatherwood Minor Injuries Unit Review.
- Housing allocations and housing strategy.
- Key worker housing.

New Review Themes (which require initial scoping to identify the main issues, timescale, relevant witnesses etc.)

- Health scrutiny. (To develop the approach to health scrutiny in Bracknell Forest and arrangements for joint health scrutiny with other local government and health partners. Consider key issues for health scrutiny on a local or regional basis together with relevant health partners and other stakeholders.)
- Planning for housing delivery. (Considering how we are working to meet current local housing needs and planning to meet future needs, including relationships with Registered Social Landlords, key worker housing and home improvements.)
- Changes being made to Children's Services.
- Support and services for older people, including those with mental health problems (to involve GP's, NHS trusts and other health partners.)

Regular Activities

Monitoring performance through consideration of and input to:-

- Quarterly Operations Reports.
- Chief Executive's Corporate Performance Overview Report.
- Budget consultation and monitoring.
- Audit reports.
- Service Plans.
- Best Value reviews.

IMPROVING THE SCRUTINY PROCESS

SUCSESSES IN 2003/04	AREAS FOR FUTURE IMPROVEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The overview and scrutiny role has become much better established in Bracknell Forest over the last year. ○ The profile of the scrutiny role has been raised. ○ Scrutiny reviews such as those into Adult Day Opportunities and South Bracknell Schools were effective and resulted in excellent reports with constructive recommendations to the Executive. ○ The opportunity has been taken to undertake and develop health scrutiny. ○ This first year of the revised scrutiny arrangements has provided a valuable learning process for all Members and indications are that the process is developing successfully. ○ Involvement in scrutiny review working groups has resulted in scrutiny Members taking personal responsibility for, and acquiring knowledge in relation to, the scrutiny process. ○ Recommendations arising from scrutiny reviews have been well received by the relevant Executive Members. ○ Quarterly Operations Reports and other performance monitoring documents have been welcomed and effectively utilised by scrutiny Members to enhance performance monitoring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensuring provision of full information at an early stage, including that relating to the Executive Forward Plan, to facilitate prospective scrutiny and enhance the effectiveness of holding the Executive to account. ○ The development of health scrutiny, considering opportunities to access increased Government funding, and enhanced partnership working with other agencies and local authorities. ○ Engagement of all Members in the scrutiny process to increase their sense of involvement. ○ Increased officer resourcing and improved Member skills through training and development opportunities. ○ Elaborate Quarterly Operations Reports and other performance monitoring documents to include comparative data. ○ Include intranet references on scrutiny agenda to identify the location of information on BFNet, such as the Executive Work Programme and Forward Plan, as an alternative to circulating paper copies. ○ Strengthen the process whereby Executive Members respond to scrutiny reports.