

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
18 MAY 2006
(7.30pm to 9.05pm)

Present: Councillors Sargeant (Chairman), Browne, Earwicker, Edger, Harrison, McLean and Thompson

Church Representatives:
Mr Anderson

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

Apologies for absence were received from:
Councillors Beadsley, Mrs Birch, Leake and Worrall

In attendance: Chris Herbert, Acting Head of Corporate Services and Resources
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Alan Nash, Acting Borough Treasurer
Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Scrutiny)

1. Minutes and Matters Arising (Item 2)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, held on 9 March 2006, be agreed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

2. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip (Item 3)

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

3. Departmental Overview and Performance (Item 4)

Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Leisure and Corporate Services, was invited to address the Commission on the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of departmental performance for Corporate Services.

Councillor McCracken, firstly, reflected upon the first six months he had served under his portfolio. The following provided a summary of this:

- The then Director of Corporate Services and Resources, Gill Steward, had left the Council to pursue a role with the London Borough of Hackney.
- The department, following a restructure, would be renamed as Corporate Services and he looked forward to welcoming its new Director, Alison Sanders, who was due to commence in position on 19 June 2006.
- The then Head of Democratic and Support Services, Peter Driver, had left the Council to pursue a role with the Housing Corporation and measures had been put in place to allow for the Section's day-to-day management to be carried out pending the

- appointment of a successor.
- The Council's Chief Information Officer, Pat Keane, had returned to full employment with the Council following his ill-health.
 - Bracknell Forest Services had transferred to Social Services and Housing on 1 April 2006.
 - The Scrutiny function had been relocated from Democratic and Support Services to the Chief Executive's Office.
 - It was reported that there were currently 14 vacant posts within Corporate Services.
 - Councillor McCracken reported that his portfolio had been extended to accommodate Grounds Maintenance, Crematoria and Cemeteries and the Coroner's Office.

Across Sections

Councillor McCracken stated the following in respect of Sections within the Department:

- Human Resources had been instrumental in the Department's quest to achieve Investors in People (iP) accreditation, to follow the success of the Education, Children's Services and Libraries Department.
- Human Resources was currently in negotiations in respect of conditions of employment and imbalance among some schemes.
- Legal had retained its LEXEL quality standard.
- RE3 (Joint Waste Disposal Board) agreement was coming to a close with a joint decision to be taken by Bracknell Forest, Wokingham and Reading Councils in respect of the provision of a waste management facility.
- The drafting and developing of agreements was ongoing in respect of the Town Centre redevelopment.
- Customer Services performance against set indicators was very good with 90% of enquiries having been dealt with in line with the indicators.
- The use of online payments continued to grow.
- Democratic and Support Services had been instrumental in securing the South East Charter for Member Development (Bracknell Forest was the first local authority in the South East to secure the award).

Councillor McCracken stated his views as to what the next six months in post would bring, as follows:

- Legal Services – 'business as usual'
- Property Section – 'business as usual', allowing for their involvement in the Civic Hub exercise.
- ICT Services – An authority-wide draft IT Strategy paper to be despatched in September 2006.
- Finance Section 'business as usual.'
- Democratic and Support Services was continuing to work on bedding-in the Modern.gov IT system.

Councillor McCracken answered questions and points raised by Members.

4. Statement on Internal Control and Internal Audit – Annual Assurance Report 2005/2006 (Item 5)

The Commission considered a report by the Acting Director of Corporate Services and Resources drawing to the attention of Members the specific issues which have been identified during the audit process.

It was reported that the Statement on Internal Control (SIC) was now a statutory document and was required to accompany the annual Statement of Accounts which was to be submitted for approval by the Final Accounts Committee at its meeting to be held on 27 June 2006. The aim of this was to provide assurance that the Council's systems of internal control were working effectively and to identify those areas where improvements could be made.

Members were advised that this process had been brought forward by one month as it needed to be published by the end of June 2006.

The following points emerged from discussion around the report:

- The issue of schools' finances being under control in the absence of a Bursar was raised, to which, assurances were given now that Agency and interim staff were now in place.
- Members were pleased to note the Council's strong financial controls.
- The Commission was advised that the Chair of Facilities, Finance and Property at Brakenhale School had confirmed that the Bursar was due back in post.
- Members were advised that feedback questionnaires were about the credibility of the audit process and that if it was felt that the process was not working as it should, then they should contact the Acting Borough Treasurer's Team and speak to the Contract Manager.
- A Member felt that the Council was seeking to reduce time and money spent on auditing and to minimise disruption when auditors were present.
- In response to a question as to the difference in audit time between using a self-assessment and a full audit, it was noted that this was dependant upon the size of the school.

5. Report of the School Exclusions and Pupil Behaviour Policy Working Group (Item 6)

The Commission received a report from a Working Group of the Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel entitled "Review of School Exclusions and Pupil Behaviour Policy." In recognising much work that had been undertaken as part of the review, Councillor Thompson commended the report to the Commission. Councillor Thompson then spoke to the recommendations within the report.

Mr Anderson stated that, during visits to schools, it was very important to try and rectify

any problems at the earliest possible stage as these would only become worse if left to develop. He added that it was important that time was spent to help pupils with challenging behaviour.

The following points emerged from discussion around the report:

- Having noted the intention of separating Key Stage 3 from Key Stage 4 pupils to benefit the former group's educational needs with a view to returning them to mainstream education, a Member expressed concern that insufficient action was being taken to support Key Stage 4 pupils, some of whom had been attending special places through the Pupil Referral Unit at Coopers Hill.
- Clarification was given that recommendation (e) related to all pupils across the Borough.
- It was noted that there was no representation by the Education, Children's Services and Libraries Department at the meeting but that the report had been commented on by the Director of Education, Children's Services and Libraries and had been before the Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel which had agreed its content.
- A Member stated that, given the costs involved, the Council needed to ensure best value and value for money and how decisions taken could be enforced.
- Schools were provided with guidance on exclusions and had welfare departments and individual education plans to assist pupils. In attempting to get pupils back on track it was noted that, overall, the LEA and schools had a good record given the particular designated areas.
- Arrangements concerning monitoring of the implementation of the report would be decided upon receipt of the Executive Member's response. This could be in the form of feedback from the Executive Member or officers to the Panel or Commission within a programmed timeframe.
- Given the appropriateness for the Commission to expect updates at its meetings, a list of reports submitted, and how many responses received, or were awaited in full or in part, be submitted to a future meeting.

It was **AGREED** that the recommendations be approved and the report be adopted and forwarded to the Executive Member for Education and Libraries.

6. **Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity (Item 7)**

Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Edger reported that two actual reviews were ongoing, one of which was a review of anti-social behaviour. He advised the Commission that the review was progressing extremely well and the associated Working Group would be reporting to the Panel on the current position and seeking to identify those areas which required more

work to be carried out.

When formally endorsing the Supporting People Annual Business Plan 2005/06, the Executive had agreed that this Panel be invited to oversee adherence to the related Action Plan. Councillor Edger reported that both he and Councillor Mrs Shillcock would be working together on this and that an interview had taken place with the Director of Social Services and Housing and that dates had been set, on which, interviews with three members of her staff would be held.

It was reported that much was still to be undertaken in respect of the Choice-Based Lettings project and that the Head of Housing Strategy and Needs, who was leading on this, would be invited to speak to the Panel on the issue.

Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Harrison reported that the Panel was at the agenda planning stage and that performance monitoring and the Quarterly Operations Report would be discussed and that the Director of Environment and Leisure would be invited to attend. He added that the Panel would receive an update on the ongoing review of the Council's tree policy which was drawing to a conclusion. There would also be discussed, the Waste Management Strategy and the Panel would be considering a report on this. Councillor Harrison concluded that there would also be a watching brief on both the Local Development Framework and the Local Transport Plan as well as looking at other issues Members wished to focus upon.

Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

A working group of this Panel was progressing a review of libraries in Bracknell Forest.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Browne reported that a meeting of the Primary Care Trust was to be held in the near future.

Work Programmes of Overview and Scrutiny Panels

The Chairman concluded that there was no merit in holding a work programme conference at this stage and that Panels should set their own work programmes for 2006/07.

Waste Management Strategy

In this connection, Councillor Earwicker made reference to the Council's Waste Management Strategy noting that the matter would be the subject of a report to a future meeting of the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

CHAIRMAN