

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
24 SEPTEMBER 2009
7.30 - 10.07 PM



Present:

Councillors Edger (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Birch, Finnie, Leake, Mrs McCracken, Mrs Shillcock, Turrell, Ms Whitbread and Worrall

Teacher Representative:

Miss V Richardson

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Harrison and Virgo
Mr G S Anderson
Dr P Josephs-Franks

Also present:

Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection

In Attendance:

Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Jo Alderson, Head of Procurement
Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Sue Hills, Democratic Services Officer

29. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 16 July 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising –

Minute 26, Centre for Public Scrutiny Self Evaluation – The Chairman reported that the evaluation was in draft and would be sent out to members as soon as possible.

30. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor Mrs McCracken declared a personal interest as spouse of the Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection.

31. Appointment of Overview and Scrutiny Panel Members

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

32. Executive Response to the Review of the Implementation of the Housing and Council Tax Benefits Improvement Plan

The Commission noted the response of the Executive to the review of the implementation of the Housing and Council Tax Benefits Improvement Plan. The report had been written prior to the meeting of The Executive on 15 September 2009 at which the recommended responses contained within paragraph 5 were approved.

The response would be taken back to the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Arising in discussion –

- The need to rationalise and clarify the content of letters sent to claimants. Councillor Leake to supply details of his concerns to Councillor Finnie.
- Councillor Leake to advise Councillor Finnie of details of his concerns about unknown conditions relating to loans.
- The Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel to look into the small budget for Discretionary Housing Allowance.

33. Executive Forward Plan

The Commission noted the Executive Forward Plan relating to corporate issues. In response to members' questions, the Director of Corporate Services explained the requirement for the annual report on the on the calculation of the Council Tax base. The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that members would be consulted on the updated strategy for the Bracknell town centre regeneration.

34. Annual Report on Procurement

Jo Alderson, Head of Procurement, presented the Annual Report on Procurement 2008-09, reviewing the expenditure analysis, high spending areas, major procurement projects and achievements during the financial year.

Arising from questions and in discussion –

- Training of members and Executive members to be carried out on awareness of procurement and the audit process.
- The procurement team, established in 2002, comprised five full time officers within Corporate Services and three fulltime staff in service departments.
- Members noted the difference between cashable and non cashable savings.
- The Director of Corporate Services emphasised the value of the procurement team. The draft Use of Resources Assessment by the Audit Commission contained positive comments about the Council's procurement arrangements.
- There had been a saving on consultancies but consultants would always be used for their specialist advice on big projects when the requisite skills or capacity was unavailable internally.
- The procurement team would be involved in the pricing and legal aspects of the tenders for the Playbuilder scheme.
- In answer to a question about value for money and the cost of procurement against the cost of providing the service, the Director of Corporate Services impressed upon the Commission that it was not just about savings, but also

about doing things properly and legally. The expertise supported service departments when going out to tender.

- Information was requested to be sent to Members clarifying the position with regard to consultancies and giving total savings in respect of all consultancies.
- Information was to be sent to all Members on the outcome of the review of consultancy contracts.

The Commission noted the report. The Chairman thanked the Head of Procurement for an informative presentation and report, and emphasised the importance of procurement, which was taken very seriously by the Commission.

35. Performance Monitoring Reports (PMR)

The Commission considered the Performance Monitoring Reports for the first quarter, April to June, of the financial year 2009/10 for the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Services Department.

Chief Executive's Office

Of 80 detailed actions, 74 were achieved or on target and six were causing concern. Three of the six were related to the regeneration of the Town Centre and the others were –

- Developing CCTV options
- Reviewing and managing the Local Safeguarding Children Board performance reporting arrangements (held up because of staff sickness)
- Publishing an economic assessment for the borough.

Highlighted in the report were –

- The Armed Forces Day
- The opening of Smallmead and Longshot Lane waste and recycling facilities.
- The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership anti-social behaviour conference
- The roll out of the approach to scrutiny of partner organisations.
- Performance management IT systems procurement
- Data quality initial training
- Action plan on regeneration and enterprise had been agreed by the Economic and Skills Development Partnership.

Arising during questions and discussion –

- A list of CAA key dates and details of 'One Place' to be circulated to members.
- The importance of the staff appraisal system. The return of appraisal forms was taken very seriously and monitored by CMT.

Corporate Services

The Director of Corporate Services gave a presentation on the performance of Corporate Services during quarter 1. Of 89 detailed actions, 87 were achieved or on target and three were causing concern, all of which were associated with the new Civic Hub.

Arising from questions or in discussion –

- Staff pool cars had been well used during the first month of the scheme.
- Only 18 responses in the staff survey expressed dissatisfaction in losing the essential car user allowance.

- The Council faced challenging budget pressures in 2009/10. One measure being taken was to leave some vacancies unfilled.
- One third of the investment in Icelandic Bank had been returned in a phased process, the remainder being expected over a long period of time.
- The very small print on the PMR would be addressed.
- The need to reassure shopkeepers at Great Hollands on the plans for the area.
- Bracknell Forest's website was considered to be one of the top websites nationally. Resources were not currently available to redevelop it. Members were asked to inform Councillor McCracken of any anomalies in the website.
- Plans were underway to utilise spare office accommodation in the Town Centre. Work had ceased on the Civic Hub.
- RIPA legislation was used sparingly, mainly for benefit evasion and fraud and monitoring of sales to underage children. The Council was inspected every two years to ensure adherence to the legislation. Councillor Leake asked to receive a copy of the Council's RIPA policy which had been approved by CMT.

The Chairman thanked the officers for complete and concise reports.

36. **Government Consultation on "Strengthening Local Democracy"**

The Commission considered the report which sought the Commission's views on the proposals in the consultation by the Department for Communities and Local Government 'Strengthening Local Democracy' and agreed the Chairman be authorised to submit to the Chief Executive's office a response to the consultation on the lines indicated.

The Commission were of the opinion that its views would be better incorporated into the Council's response although it hoped the document made clear which were the views of the Commission.

Arising in discussion –

- The resource implications in terms of councillors' time and necessary funding from the Government. The Chairman would include this in the response.

37. **Overview and Scrutiny Quarterly Progress Report**

The Commission considered the report which set out the overview and scrutiny activity from May to July 2009 and the national and local developments.

The Commission noted that 31 reviews had been undertaken since December 2003, work which was very useful to the good governance of the borough.

The Chairman reported that first meeting of the Bracknell Forest Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Group on 28 September would discuss the scrutiny of the themed partnerships, which was ground breaking work.

Arising in discussion –

- The Council could consider seeking external recognition of the innovative work on partnership overview and scrutiny, perhaps through the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Good Scrutiny Awards. Making an entry would, however, be time consuming.

- The possibility of copywriting any partnership scrutiny toolkit that might developed.

38. **Updates from Panel Chairmen**

Environment, Culture and Communities O&S Panel

Councillor Finnie reported –

- The last meeting was held at South Hill Park. Not many members of the public attended. The venue was noisy because of a jazz concert. Councillor Worrall asked if public attendance at offsite meetings could be monitored. The Head of Overview and Scrutiny explained that in a self evaluation Bracknell Forest fell short on public engagement with the O&S process and holding meetings accessible to the public was an attempt to remedy this. The meeting at South Hill Park was an opportunity to have a tour of the lottery funded project.

Councillor Mrs Birch advised the Commission that her December panel meeting would be held at the new Bracknell and Wokingham College.

Children's Services and Learning O&S Panel

Councillor Mrs Birch reported –

- a very informative and successful first partnership presentation.
- The 14-19 Years Education Provision Working Group was progressing well. She thought the working group may decide to send the report to the Secretary of State as it was a subject of national importance.

Health O&S Panel

Councillor Leake reported –

- Working groups on Preparedness for Public Health Emergencies and Bracknell Health Space were progressing well and he thanked Councillors Burrows and Virgo for leading those groups.
- In response to a question about the Patient Focus Working Group, he said the working group decided it wanted to concentrate on emergency procedures. The Chairman would seek a response from Councillor Burrows as to the use of the information on the O&S Patient Focus review and advise Councillor Mrs McCracken.

Joint East Berkshire Health O&S Committee

Councillor Leake reported –

- The chair of the Joint O&S Committee rotated annually and for the past year had been Windsor & Maidenhead who did not think working groups were the right way to conduct business. Slough now chaired the Committee. There was some discussion about the productivity of this joint committee.
- The working group on hospital discharge procedures was not progressing, a matter over which Bracknell Forest had no control.
- Further deficiencies had been uncovered in the PCT's budget.
- A working group had been established to look at hospital car park charges.

CHAIRMAN

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