

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
28 JANUARY 2010**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME
Assistant Chief Executive**

1 INTRODUCTION

This report invites the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to determine the changes to the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) work programme, reduction in the frequency of meetings, and other measures consequent on the reduction in officer resources.

2 SUGGESTED ACTION

2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission endorses the proposed changes to the O&S work programme, reduction in the frequency of meetings and other measures in Annex 1, subject to:

- **The O&S review of Safeguarding Children having top priority among the new and suspended O&S reviews, once resources become available;**
- **That the O&S Commission and Panels should continue to receive and review the Performance Monitoring Reports;**
- **That the quarterly O&S progress reports should be replaced by six monthly progress reports.**

3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The proposed 2010-11 budget approved by the Executive for consultation contains a number of cost reductions, including a reduction in the O&S officer team from 2.5 to 2 Full Time Equivalents. This will require a commensurate reduction in the O&S work requiring officer support. The O&S Chairmen met on 15 December 2009 to consider how this might best be addressed, and the note of their deliberations is at Annex 1.

3.2 The Chairman of the O&S Commission invited views from the Leader and the Chief Executive on the conclusions in Annex 1. The Corporate Management Team considered the proposals on 13 January and supported the proposals, subject to three points:

- Safeguarding Children has a very high priority nationally, it is a much more important issue for Bracknell Forest than the topics in the three other new or suspended O&S reviews awaiting resources, and it would be informative for the newly appointed Director of Children, Young People and Learning to have an independent view of the Council's safeguarding arrangements in the early stages of her taking up post. Consequently, CMT consider that the O&S review of Safeguarding Children should have top priority among the new and suspended O&S reviews, once resources become available.

- Performance Monitoring Reports are a fundamentally important part of the Council's performance management arrangements, and lie at the heart of the O&S function to keep abreast of key departmental issues and to hold the Executive and officers to account for their service delivery performance. Consequently, CMT consider it to be important that the O&S Commission and Panels should continue to keep a focus on reviewing the Performance Monitoring Reports. Moving the frequency of panel meetings from three to four month intervals will mean that panels will need to receive the most recent PMR. Once the new performance IT system (PARIS) is operational, officers will look to see whether the production of PMR's can be re-synchronised to every four months to coincide with the cycle of panel meetings.
- The quarterly O&S progress reports are informative for CMT as well as the O&S Commission and Panels. The Chief Executive has said he will require an O&S Progress report to CMT every six months, thus they will be available to the O&S Commission and Panels six monthly too.

Background Papers

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2009-10

Contact for further information

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CHAIRMEN'S MEETING, 15 DECEMBER 2009

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY OFFICER WORKLOAD

Present

Councillors Edger, Leake, Turrell and McLean

Apologies

Councillors Mrs Birch and Finnie

In Attendance

Richard Beaumont

The meeting had been called to consider what adjustments were needed to the programme and organisation of Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) work consequent on the draft budget for 2010-11 including a reduction of the O&S Officer team from three to two Full Time Equivalents¹.

Members considered that the key principles for the approach to this should be:

- Reducing O&S activity and outputs, rather than reducing the quality of O&S;
- Retaining the structure of the Commission and Panels, which had changed a few times in recent years;
- Maintaining a presence in the Joint East Berkshire Health O&S Committee;
- The officer workload needed to be reduced by at least one third, and arguably more than that because: there will be much less resilience with a team of two; the duties of O&S are growing; and due to a backlog of annual leave having built up.

Members recognised that there were various options for reducing the officer workload, and decided to explore these and then consult other O&S Members and the Leader on a recommended option. RB said that the Corporate Management Team would also want to be involved before a final decision was made.

Members noted that most officer time is spent on the routine servicing of the O&S Commission and Panels (also to some extent the Joint East Berkshire Health O&S Committee), and in supporting O&S Working Groups, and therefore decided to concentrate their attention on those.

Routine servicing of the O&S Commission, Panels and the JE Berks Committee

Members noted that the Commission currently meet every two months, and the four Panels meet every three months, as does the Joint East Berkshire Health O&S Committee (which BFC

¹ The permanent establishment is 2.5 posts, but due to a temporary re-organisation there are 3 staff in post currently. The future establishment is closer to 1.9 FTE's. The Head of O&S also deals with Stage 4 and Local Government Ombudsman complaints against the Council. The time needed for this varies as it depends on the number of complaints, but broadly equates to some 10% of available time; and top priority is given to these complaints.

will Chair and clerk in 2010/11). Additional meetings run to around three per year; making some 30 meetings each year in total.

Members noted that it takes on average around four days of officer time to service each of these meetings, to: forward plan; liaise with Chairmen and officers; produce a summary of O&S activity and a draft agenda for the quarterly review and agenda-setting meeting; attend that meeting and finalise the agenda; author around three reports for each public meeting; finalise the agenda pack; attend the public meeting; check the action list and draft minutes, and attend to the actions flowing from the meeting.

Members decided that it was necessary to retain the Commission as it covers the Corporate Services Department, Chief Executives Office, and it comprises the statutory Crime and Disorder Committee. It was seen to be preferable to reduce the frequency of meetings rather than the number of Panels. Members decided that the preferred option, to take effect from May 2010 was:

	Current Number of Meetings Annually	Future Number of Meetings Annually
O&S Commission	6 (plus annual)	4 (plus annual)
O&S Panels:	4	3
Adult Social Care		
Environment, Culture and Communities	4	3
Health	4	3
Children's Services and Learning	4	3
Joint East Berkshire Health O&S Committee	4	3
Additional meetings	Around 4	None
Total	30	19

Members also considered that the agendas needed to be slimmed down, to keep the meetings to a manageable time. This might include stopping consideration of the quarterly departmental and corporate performance monitoring reports.

Members noted but discounted an alternative option, to restructure to a Commission plus 3 Panels, possibly - Health and adult social care; Children's services and learning; Environment, Culture and Communities.

Working Groups

Members noted that there are currently 12 O&S Working Groups at various stages, as attached. This was seen to be much too large a programme with two FTE officers, and it was noted that if there is insufficient officer time, this slows reviews down. It was noted that the Member input – for example in terms of report drafting – varied widely between reviews, and if Members could take on more of this work, it should reduce the burden on officers.

Members considered that it was necessary to reduce the number of O&S reviews to a maximum of around three to four at any one time. In future, Working Group reviews should only

commence after approval from the O&S Commission. Members decided to revise the current workload as follows:

Working Group	Current Position	Revised Position
Sustaining Economic Prosperity	Not Started	Delay start – Commission to determine priority - until all but two Working Groups have ended
English as an Additional Language stage 2	Not Started	Delay start – Commission to determine priority - until all but two Working Groups have ended
Safeguarding Children	Not Started	Delay start – Commission to determine priority - until all but two Working Groups have ended
Working Group	Current Position	Revised Position
Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults	Underway	Continue (major review)
Supporting People update	Underway	Continue (Small review)
Review of Highway Maintenance	Underway	Stop (major review). Resume when all but two Working Groups have ended – Commission to determine priority
Housing and Council Tax Benefits – follow up	Underway	Continue (Small review)
Preparedness for Public Health Emergencies	Underway	Continue (major review)
Hospital Car Park Charges (Joint East Berks Committee)	Underway	Continue, but only on basis that Slough BC continue to provide officer support after the responsibility for the Committee rotates to BFC from April 2010.
Strategic Review of Waste	In final stage	Continue
Bracknell Health Space	At draft report stage	Continue
14-19 Years Education Provision	At draft report stage	Continue

Members also considered that:

- a) We will not have the resource to be able to continue the planned approach to partnership O&S. Partners would need to be informed as this runs counter to the BFP Governance Protocol.
- b) We should cease quarterly O&S progress reports, and minimise the size and content of the annual report of O&S.

Members also noted that:

- a) Officers will have much more limited capacity for research and responding to members' requests for information than currently.
- b) There will be little capacity to develop O&S to meet and set best practice, e.g. by participating in conferences, thus giving BFC a lower national profile than currently.
- c) There is a risk of overload should there be any Call-Ins, Councillor or Community Call for Action cases, or a surge of Stage 4 or Local Government Ombudsman complaints. This risk would grow when the new legislation requiring O&S involvement in handling petitions comes into effect.
- d) There is a heightened risk of absence of officer service, for example if sickness absence coincided with planned leave.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUPS (At 16 December 2009)

<u>Commission/Panel</u>	<u>Not Started</u>	<u>Underway</u>	<u>Nearing an End</u>
<u>Commission</u>	Sustaining Economic Prosperity		
<u>Adult Social Care</u>		Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults	
<u>Environment, Culture and Communities</u>			Strategic Review of Waste
		Supporting People (SP) update	
		Review of Highway Maintenance	
		Housing and Council Tax Benefits – follow up	
<u>Health</u>		Preparedness for Public Health Emergencies	
			Bracknell Health Space
		Hospital Car Park Charges (JEB)	
<u>Children's services and Learning</u>			14-19 Years Education Provision
	English as an Additional Language stage 2		
	Safeguarding Children		
	3	6	3