

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION
23 NOVEMBER 2006

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT ON ALL OF US
(COMMUNITY COHESION STRATEGY)
(Director of Corporate Services)

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 During 2005/06 the Council made considerable progress in implementing its three year Community Cohesion Strategy – All of Us, and is well placed to achieve the Strategy's goals by the end of 2006/07. This review of progress is provided for information in the Annual Report in Annex A.

2 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Annual Progress Report

- 2.1 The progress that the Council has made in implementing Community Cohesion during 2006/07 is detailed in the annual report to the Public Scrutiny Commission in Appendix 1 and is evident in the two key performance measures against which the success of the Strategy will be judged, namely:

- ✓ 69 of the 72 Key Tasks in the Strategy are on track to be completed within their respective timescales, with the majority ahead of schedule
- ✓ Of the 18 performance indicators where information is available, the Council's performance has seen 13 improve, 2 remain stable and 3 decline. Of the 3 that have declined, 2 are already in the top quartile with only 1 in the second quartile.

Key pieces of work in the last 12 months

- 2.2 One of the major pieces of work undertaken to support the Community Cohesion Strategy has been the completion of Equalities Impact Assessments for all of the areas of services provided by the Council. This has entailed the preparation of practical, straightforward guidance on how to undertake the assessments; diversity training for managers and planning for changes following the outcome of the assessments. This was completed despite the scale of the task, its complexities and the additional resources involved. Consultants were appointed to provide practical hands-on support in conducting the assessments.

External feedback on the Strategy

- 2.3 Feedback has also been received from external sources on how the Strategy is being implemented at service levels and whether in practice it is achieving its aims. With regards to the general strategy the Local Government Association published guidance on community cohesion matters in November 2005 with the work being carried out in Bracknell Forest being included as an example of best practice.

2.4 *Children's services*

Various issues concerning community cohesion were raised and explored during the Annual Performance Assessment during June 2006. All of these were responded to positively and to the satisfaction of the assessors. Youth Forums and 'Tell Us' conferences for all children and young people are well established and there is positive dialogue with disabled children and young people and their carers. One area identified for improvement is the monitoring of appropriateness of BME groups on the Child Protection register.

2.5 *Supporting People Inspection*

Relating specifically to the Community Cohesion agenda the inspection report following the Supporting People Programme made the following recommendations :

- Identify with providers and other stakeholders, the gaps in housing-related support services for vulnerable people and ensure a plan to meet those needs is developed over time. (Within nine months.)
- Improve the information produced for users, providers and the general public on the Supporting People programme in Bracknell Forest, including more detailed information on fairer charging and products targeted at specific groups, for instance learning disability clients.
- The monitoring of the take up of Supporting People services by diverse communities should be undertaken, to ensure appropriate access.

2.6 *Social Care Services for Older People*

During May 2006 an inspection of social care services for older people took place in Bracknell Forest. The outcome of the inspection was that Bracknell Forest were serving some people well, with promising capacity for improvement. Delivering the intended outcomes of the Community Cohesion Strategy was identified as one of the key factors on which rested the Council's plans to accelerate the pace of change and support the further modernisation and sustained improvement of services.

What do we need to do in 2006/07?

2.7 In the first instance there is a need for the Corporate Working Group to address the three key tasks in the improvement plan that have been identified as being below satisfactory progress, to ensure that these can be completed during this last year of the strategy. These tasks are:

- To develop a black & minority ethnic stakeholder profile in Bracknell Forest and to assess black & minority ethnic infrastructure requirements and use as part of evidence base for prioritising interventions to promote community cohesion
- To develop an Older People's Renewal Strategy
- Review and remodel day opportunities for people with learning disabilities

There is also a need to closely monitor the progress of the key performance indicators to ensure that target performance is achieved.

- 2.8 In addition there are two major aspects that the Council will need to consider:
- Since the development of the existing strategy the demographics and make-up of the communities within Bracknell Forest has changed
 - During 2006 a number of new pieces of equality related legislation come into force such as – the Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act 2005, the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, and the Equality Act 2006. In addition the revised Equality Standard for Local Government was published in June and the Commission for Racial Equality's revised Code of Practice for Housing is due to come into force in October 2006.

2.9 Consultants have been commissioned to give an assessment of what the Council is already doing to meet this new/revised legislation and to give recommendations as to what the Council needs to do to meet the requirements of the new duties and regulations. Examples of the recommendations made are to prepare and adopt a disability equality scheme and/or combined with a gender equality scheme, action plan to meet the revised CRE Code of Practice in Housing, revise equality and diversity policy statements. Action is already underway on these areas.

Where do we go in the future?

2.10 There is no doubt that the Council has performed well against the tasks and targets it set in the first strategy for Community Cohesion. However there is a recognition that nationally the approach to Community Cohesion issues has matured over the last couple of years and the approach the Council adopts to ensure maximum cohesion will need to mature in a similar way.

2.11 There is clearly a need to keep the momentum of the first strategy alive with the development of a further strategy to take the Community Cohesion work forward beyond 2007. As part of the development of this new strategy, the Council needs to address the feedback from external sources. There is growing evidence of the difficulty the Council has in engaging with hard to reach groups, which stems from the difficulty in identifying these groups. These facts taken against the backdrop of the changing demographics within the Borough highlight the need for the Council to collate existing intelligence of hard to reach groups, with the development of a profile and needs analysis of the community.

2.12 In January 2005 Bracknell Forest Partnership adopted a joint Community Engagement Strategy that was endorsed by each of the partners. The strategy sets out four strands of work: developing neighbourhood forums; managing a residents' panel; producing a register of local consultations; and producing a community engagement handbook. The work to deliver this strategy is overseen by an internal project board.

2.13 The community engagement work has a very strong connection with the community cohesion agenda and cannot be delivered in isolation. In particular tying the two agendas together is essential for engaging and consulting with non-users and harder to reach groups.

2.14 Therefore the Community Engagement Project Board has merged with the Corporate Community Cohesion Working Group and the two agendas are both

championed by the Director of Corporate Services. The new body is the 'Corporate Community Cohesion and Engagement Working Group'.

- 2.15 A workshop is being organised for the Group to start the preparation of the new Strategy. It is intended that external officers from organisations such as GOSE and the Audit Commission, will be invited to this workshop to enhance the knowledge and skills base of the Council in the preparation of the new Strategy.
- 2.16 The Audit Commission will be working with the Corporate Community Cohesion Working Group to identify existing consultation mechanisms with hard to reach groups and seeking to identify best practice within the Council. This will assist with the work required to demonstrate the Council's approach to diversity, consultation and access to services required for the CPA assessment in 2007.

3 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 3.1 The whole essence of this report and its contents are about evidencing the Council's work towards Community Cohesion and therefore the equality impact assessments that have already been carried out on most of the Council's services, have informed or are shaping the future of Community Cohesion in Bracknell. See para 2.2 above.

Background Papers

Community Cohesion Strategy and working papers

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