

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
23 NOVEMBER 2006
(7.30 - 9.30 pm)

Present: Councillors Sargeant (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Beadsley, Edger, Harrison, Baily (Substitute) and Kendall (Substitute)

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs Birch, Browne, Earwicker, Leake and Thompson
Mr G Anderson and Mr O Dempsey

In attendance: Councillor Iain McCracken (Executive Member for Leisure and Corporate Services)
Alison Sanders (Director of Corporate Services)
Richard Beaumont (Head of Performance & Scrutiny)
Alan Nash (Head of Finance)
Rob Atkins (Head of Procurement)
Greg McIntosh (KPMG)
Andrea Carr (Policy Officer)
Steve Richards (Democratic Services Officer)

22. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members (Item 1)

The Panel noted the attendance of the following substitute members:

Councillor Kendall for Councillor Thompson and Councillor Baily for Councillor Browne.

23. Minutes and Matters Arising (Item 2)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 14 September 2006 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Councillor Beadsley and Councillor McCracken declared non-prejudicial interests as governors of Brakenhale School which was mentioned in the Internal Audit Half Yearly Assurance Report (Item 6). There were no further declarations of interest or indications that Members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

25. External Audit - 2005/06 Annual Report on Governance (Item 5)

The Commission considered the External Audit report to those charged with governance. Greg McIntosh, Director KPMG LLB (UK), informed the Commission that two key areas had been to look at the Council's accounts and to see whether they had secured value for money. The report summarised conclusions on these matters, and it was commended to the Commission.

Views and comments arising in discussion;

- (i) The possible score range in Section 2 (Use of Resources) was 1-4;

- (ii) The Financial Management score had come out as 2 due to the way that the Audit Commission required the evaluation to be carried out. It had set a benchmark for levels 2, 3 and 4 on what it believed should be achieved, and there had been one or two areas where the criteria for level 3 has not been met. Level 1 would apply when criteria had not been met, eg a department overspent its budget;
- (iii) The assessment for 2006 had been submitted, and it was now being considered. This would come back to a future meeting of this Commission, and would also feed into the APA;
- (iv) Bracknell Forest were improving in the areas where criteria had been set. A detailed assessment of direction of travel would be published in 2007;
- (v) Bracknell Forest had been consistently achieving above average results, and the overall score of 3 compared very well with other councils. A score of 3 was good, with a score of 4 being hard to obtain. Only one other council that Greg McIntosh dealt with (Wandsworth Borough Council) had achieved a score of 4.

26. Corporate Performance Overview Report (Item 8)

The Commission considered the Corporate Performance Overview Report for the first quarter of 2006/07. On behalf of the Chief Executive, Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services, gave a presentation which highlighted the following;

- (i) The Alternative Bin Collection (ABC) and the other areas highlighted in the Overview of Performance, especially the areas of notable performance over the last quarter noted on page 50. Further improvements were expected over the next quarter;
- (ii) There had been notable improvements in GCSE and Key Stage 2 Results;
- (iii) Indicator BV218(b) – removal of abandoned vehicles – was new. There had been no national figures available, and the target percentage of 87% had been an estimate by officers, which proved to be unrealistic. In addition, the issue was not as simple as a broad statistic, as the problem would appear to be less with abandoned cars and more with untaxed vehicles, which was a police issue;
- (iv) A temporary call filtering system had been in place during the ABC implementation period. Calls were now back down to pre ABC levels, and the filtering system would be switched off on 27 November 2006. Call filtering would be used again if it was deemed necessary;
- (v) When the Council had been restructured in March, Bracknell Forest Services had moved from Corporate Services to Social Services & Housing;
- (vi) The Council worked with the police on domestic violence issues. A copy of the action checklist would be requested for Councillor Edger;
- (vii) The completion of assessments had been reflected in the recent inspection of adult services;
- (viii) The IT teething problems with processing benefits had been resolved. Staff numbers had been increased, and processes looked at, and there had been a reported increase in the turnaround of benefits. Aiming for near top quartile in the speed of processing benefits by the end of the year would put Bracknell Forest in the top 10 nationally. The Commission complimented officers on this achievement;
- (ix) The Director of Corporate Services would provide further details of the group 'Safety Net' that had been launched to protect old and vulnerable people;
- (x) The Director of Corporate Services would provide Councillor Harrison with further information on the expanded Concessionary Fares Scheme introduced on 1 April 2006.

27. Annual Progress Report on All of Us (Community Cohesion Strategy) (Item 10)

The Director of Corporate Services presented her report on the progress made in implementing the three year Community Cohesion Strategy, All of Us, which highlighted the following points:

- (i) Good progress had been made on implementing the strategy, which was coming to the end of its three year period;
- (ii) Feedback on cohesion had been received from external inspections
- (iii) A more detailed mapping of BME stakeholders needed to be undertaken by the time of the CPA assessment in 2007;
- (iv) Work was being carried out on profiling the Council;
- (v) An initiative to involve hard to reach groups would start at the end of November 2006;
- (vi) There were good reasons for children being on the Child Protection Register, and no reasons for concern, and more investigations were taking place around BME groups on the Child Protection Register
- (vii) Cultural and English as a Second Language (EAL) requirements would not be known without BME infrastructure requirements being assessed;
- (viii) Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) and Neighbourhood Forums had worked in parallel and together in providing input to the Community Cohesion Strategy;
- (ix) The Modern Apprentice scheme had been sustained, and it was hoped that it would continue in the future;
- (x) There were no proposals to change the choice based letting scheme;
- (xi) More work was needed on Supporting People and on developing an Older People strategy.

28. Annual Report on Procurement 2006 (Item 11)

The Head of Procurement presented the Annual Report on Procurement. This was the second annual report that had been published, and the first one to come before the Commission. The following points were highlighted:

- (i) The fixed telephone line contract had generated savings of 20-25%;
- (ii) Nine of the ten Performance Indicators had been achieved and the Council had implemented the national procurement strategy;
- (iii) The agency staff contract was still being rolled out, and was expected to give a saving of 10%. This had been taken into budgetary consideration;
- (iv) The issues concerning the partnership programme with Mowlem related to the commitment of the contractor and changes in their organisation. In the future, Bracknell Forest would collaborate with colleagues in the South East for major contracts. Work was also being carried out on a new small works framework;
- (v) In order to keep a balance between centralised and devolved procurement, it was important to have the correct number of professional staff. The procurement team more than paid for itself, although investing in professional procurement staff and using devolved procurement would always be a balance;
- (vi) As trading conditions in relation to gas and electricity had changed recently, the big rises anticipated would now probably not occur. Bracknell Forest were looking at liaising with other Unitary Authorities to buy energy together in a combination of long and short blocks as a risk management strategy, and should be able to save 10% even without prices dropping. Bracknell Forest was further advanced in this area than most other Local Authorities;
- (vii) Bracknell Forest being associated with outside bodies helped with finding out best practice among other authorities, and the Council would be a long way back from where it currently was without this involvement.

AGREED that the Commission noted the progress being made on developing the procurement function, the savings being made, and the future programme as expressed in the report.

29. Update on Implementing Best Value Review of Transport (Item 9)

Councillor McCracken, the Executive Member for Leisure & Corporate Services attended the meeting to speak to the Commission on implementing the Best Value Review of Transport.

The feasibility study had been presented to CMT and the Executive Member for Leisure & Corporate Services, and they were satisfied that it was feasible. It would now be forwarded to the Commission.

The Integrated Transport Unit had been established as a separate unit within Corporate Finance. The next steps were;

- The Home to School Transport Strategy would be available in January or February 2007;
- New software would be available by April 2007;
- The Transport Review Project Group would be set up in June 2007;
- The Integration of Social Services Transport would be completed by June 2007.

30. Internal Audit Half Yearly Assurance Report (Item 6)

The Commission considered a summary from the Head of Finance of Internal Audit activity during the period April to September 2006. The following points were highlighted:

- (i) The report had been circulated to the two lead members on audit (Councillors McLean and Worrall) and they had both had a chance to comment on it;
- (ii) External Audit continued to place significant reliance on the work of Internal Audit;
- (iii) It had been an uneventful months for Internal Audit;
- (iv) The limited assurance option had been issued in one case as it was felt that the weakness was of such significance that immediate action had been required;
- (v) The first year of the new requirement for schools to reach a consistent standard for financial management would be very much a benchmarking process;
- (vi) The Head of Finance would look into the reasons for the high number of Category 2 recommendations for the Geographical Information System (GIS) noted in Appendix A of the report and pass the information on to Councillor Beadsley;
- (vii) There had been two instances of auditors being removed from Bracknell Forest audits during the current contract period, both due to not performing to the expected standards;
- (viii) The Commission complemented the Head of Finance on the continued very effective performance of Internal Audit.

31. Risk Management and Register (Item 7)

The Commission received a progress report from the Head of Finance on the Risk Management Strategy presented to the Executive on 19 September 2006. The following points were highlighted:

- (i) A framework was being put in place to improve procedures. Paragraph 5.5 of the report set out the main areas of improvement needed to ensure that the Council's risk management arrangements remained fit for purpose. Some of these improvements had already been implemented;
- (ii) Training for the Executive was being looked at, and new Members would receive training after May 2007;
- (iii) Although the risk register in Appendix 7 of the report was now out of date, many parts of it were still relevant to current Council activities;
- (iv) This strategy was intended to raise Bracknell Forest's category to 'good';
- (v) More Members and officers would be involved when the Risk Register was updated;
- (vi) The Director of Corporate Services was the Chairman of the Strategic Risk Management Group. The Executive Member for Leisure & Corporate Services would be briefed to take this through the Executive;
- (vii) Risk management would become part of every day council activity and not a subject in itself. It would also be disseminated through the Service Plan process, with risks and mitigations being identified and reported via QORs and the CPOR, so that it became part of the process and not a separate activity.

The Commission Chairman concluded that insufficient progress was being made on the important subject of Risk Management, and the Commission intended to return to this at a later date.

32. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme (Item 12)

The Head of Performance & Scrutiny presented, for information, the work programme for the remainder of 2006/07. The programme had been agreed by the Chairmen of the different Overview and Scrutiny Panels and had been seen by the Chief Executive and Directors. It would also be mentioned in the next edition of Town & Country. A work programme for 2007/08 would be established.

33. Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity (Item 13)

Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Harrison reported that the Tree Policy had been to the Executive, and would shortly go to Council, and had been published as a pending decision. Recycling figures were being monitored to gauge the impact of ABC.

Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Edger reported that a paper on Supporting People was being produced. A paper on Anti-Social behaviour would soon be presented to the Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

CHAIRMAN

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