



Councillor Paul Bettison  
Leader  
Bracknell Forest Council  
Easthampstead House  
Town Square  
Bracknell  
Berkshire  
RG12 1AQ

Date: 10/10/2011

Dear Councillor Bettison,

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD ENGAGEMENT**

As you know, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission decided to form a Working Group to contribute to the formulation of plans for neighbourhood engagement, in the light of the Localism Bill and local developments. The Working Group has met and reached views on the strengths and weaknesses of the five options for neighbourhood engagement, as set out in the completed consultation questionnaire, attached. We would also like to address some additional points to you in your capacity as Executive Member responsible for the Council's arrangements for Community Engagement.

The Working Group strongly supports Option 4 (the Town and Parish/elected Members model). At the heart of this, we firmly believe that Town and Parish councils are the fundamental building block for local neighbourhood engagement. We consider that giving Town and Parish Councils this enhanced role has various advantages, and no particular weaknesses. It would give a single point of focus, it would recognise their democratic mandate, it would empower them to do more within their communities, it would make better use of their infrastructure and capacity, and pushing responsibility downwards would yield better results.

If the Bracknell Forest Partnership and the Executive decide to adopt Option 4, it will be important for the Borough Council to assist them to achieve that through training and other appropriate support. The Council would also need to be mindful that each T&PC is different and consequently they should be allowed some flexibility to determine the most appropriate detailed arrangements for their circumstances.

The Working Group would also comment on two issues which were not the subject of questions in the consultation questionnaire:

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- The Working Group would support the transfer of ownership of the Community Halls to the Town and Parish Council, as we believe they would be much better placed than the Borough Council to own and operate them in concert with the Community Associations. We are cognisant of the maintenance backlog with some of the Halls, and the reported unwillingness of one Town Council to take over the Halls, but we would encourage the Executive to find a solution to making the transfer, even if this entails a cost for the Borough Council.
- Notwithstanding that education remains an important function of the Borough Council, we suggest that the Extended Services Area Partnerships should be encouraged to work in close partnership with the Town and Parish Councils.

The Neighbourhood Engagement consultation is very important, and we suggest that you should bring it to the attention of all councillors.

We hope you find these observations and recommendations helpful, and we look forward to receiving your response to this letter.

We anticipate that this letter and your response will be published with the agenda for the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 24 November.

Kind regards,

**Councillor Robert McLean**  
**Working Group Lead Member**

Copies to: Councillors Leake, Dr Barnard, Kendall and McCracken.  
Chief Executive; Director of Corporate Services

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