

PDB/JAR

14 December 2011

Councillor Robert McLean
Overview and Scrutiny Commission
Neighbourhood Engagement Working Group Lead Member
Bracknell Forest Council
Easthampstead House
Town Square
Bracknell
RG12 1AQ



Dear Robert

RE: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD ENGAGEMENT

Thank you for your letter of 10 October 2011, contributing the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to the neighbourhood engagement consultation process and advising that the Working Group strongly supports Option 4 (the Town and Parish/elected Members model). This option puts the Town and Parish councils at the heart of the engagement process, as they are the fundamental building block for neighbourhood engagement.

As you are aware, the consultation on the various options for our neighbourhood engagement work was conducted by the Council's Community Engagement and Equalities team and ran from the beginning of September until 4 November. The overall aim of the consultation was to provide an opportunity for the community and partners to help shape the future of neighbourhood engagement in Bracknell Forest. During the process of consultation the following groups were asked for their feedback, in order that their views could be taken into account:

- Elected Members
- Extended Services Area Partnerships
- Community Associations
- Voluntary and Community Groups (via Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action)
- The Federation of Community Groups
- Neighbourhood Action Group Chairmen and their members
- Bracknell residents
- Parish and Town Council Clerks and Chairmen
- The Parish and Town Council Liaison Group
- Bracknell Forest Partnership Board

The consultation process included:

- giving notice of the consultation and background to the Review to those groups listed above;
- holding a series of meetings with senior officers in Bracknell Forest Partnership;
- publication of a summary report and a questionnaire on the Council's website at the beginning of September 2011 asking for views on the options in the Neighbourhood Review by 4 November. Borough Council elected Members, Parish and Town Council Chairmen and Clerks, the Chairmen and members of Neighbourhood Action Groups,

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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Chairmen of Area Partnerships, Chairmen of Community Associations and the Voluntary and Community Sector were all asked for their opinions on the options in the review.

- holding a workshop with Bracknell Forest Partnership at their meeting on 8 September, and with the Overview and Scrutiny Neighbourhood Engagement Working group at their meeting on 12 September;
- holding meetings with Town and Parish Clerks and Chairmen throughout the autumn;
- feedback was also sought through a series of consultation meetings with those groups listed above which were considered in the review.

Thirty one responses to the consultation were received in total and the majority of these were from the groups involved in the review. Bracknell Forest Partnership Board expressed a preference for Option 4 at their meeting in May and the Executive did the same at their meeting in July. A significant majority of the responses to the public consultation also supported Option 4 and at their meeting on 13 December the Executive agreed that from April 2012 this option should be implemented.

This will enable a more effective flexible model for neighbourhood engagement to develop that will vary by Parish and Town Council area but will have our elected Members, as well as Parish and Town Councillors at its heart. Bracknell Forest Partnership will be taking a decision on the options put forward in the Review at their meeting on 15 December.

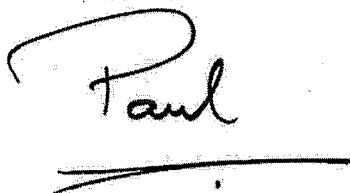
Further discussions will now need to take place with the groups who have taken part in the review and the Parish and Town Councils following the Partnership Board's decision in December.

With regard to the two issues you raised, which were not the subject of questions in the consultation questionnaire:

- Town and Parish Councils have recently confirmed on two separate occasions that they are not in a position to take on the ownership and management of Community Centres. The majority of the Council's community centres are in the Bracknell Town Council area; transferring the centres to them would present a significant maintenance challenge to the Town Council and the Borough Council, if funding also needed to be transferred. The centres are also leased by the Council to charitable community associations who would need to be consulted on any proposed changes in the future.
- The Council is in full agreement that the Extended Services Area Partnerships should be encouraged to work in close partnership with the Town and Parish Councils, and will ensure this work is taken forward through the implementation of Option 4.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Councillor Paul Bettison
Leader of the Council

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