

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
7 JUNE 2007**

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTIVITY  
(Assistant Chief Executive)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide new members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission with an overview of the activities undertaken by the Commission over the last three years and to consider the indicative work programme for 2007/08 attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

**2 SUGGESTED ACTION**

- 2.1 **That the activities of the Commission for the last three years be noted; and**
- 2.2 **That the indicative overview and scrutiny work programme for 2007/08 attached at Appendix 1 be approved.**

**3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission during the last three years, summarised below, centred on corporate issues. Through co-ordination of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels, the Commission also maintained coverage of the full range of the Council's activities and those of its Health partners. During 2006, the Commission strove to make the Overview and Scrutiny process more open and to stimulate greater public engagement. For example, the Commission and its Panels have adopted more open room layouts, published their forward work plan on the Council's website and stimulated press interest in the work of overview and scrutiny.

Overview and Policy Development

- 3.2 The Commission reviewed and approved reports raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels for the onward consideration by the Executive, including Tree Policy Review, School Exclusions & Pupil Behaviour policy and School Transfers & Performance. In all cases the Commission was satisfied with the response received from the Executive. The value of overview and scrutiny reviews was demonstrated in 2005 when the lead member of the working group undertaking a review of untaxed/abandoned vehicles was invited to give a presentation at the Successful Scrutiny Roadshow, an event organised by South East Employers, on the review and its outcomes.
- 3.3 Members of the Commission also contributed to and monitored the progress of important Council policy areas such as the Community Cohesion Strategy, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment improvement plan, the Gershon efficiency plan and the progress in developing the procurement function.

### Performance Monitoring

- 3.4 Commission members reviewed the performance of the Corporate Services Department and the Chief Executive's Office, mainly through their Quarterly Operations reports, allowing them to question Executive Members and officers in detail about the trends, pressures and priorities for these areas. They also maintained a rolling review of the Council's Corporate Performance Overview quarterly reports. The Commission's conclusions and recommendations were wide-ranging and included asking the Council to amend the model disciplinary procedures for school staff and headteachers, and expressing its concern at the time taken to realise benefits from a Best Value Review of Transport. Members were generally reassured by the high standards of performance set and adhered to, and will continue to keep under review the few exceptions encountered, such as the need to speed up the roll-out of the Council's strategic risk management arrangements.

### Holding the Executive to Account

- 3.5 The Commission has kept a watching brief on the Executive's decisions and forward plan and its only occasion to 'call-in' a decision was in July 2004 in relation to the Amen Corner Planning Framework. The call-in resulted in a review of the original decision leading to more thorough consideration of the matter and to an alternative and more informed decision being recommended to, and agreed by, full Council given the significant impact on the Borough's Development Plan. The call-in also triggered agreement to undertake a review of the entire Amen Corner area as part of the work of the Local Development Framework.

### Budget Consultation

- 3.6 The Commission has considered the Council's budget proposals each year and wrote to the Government Minister expressing serious concern over the Local Government Grant Settlement in 2006/07. It was also consulted on the approach to Departmental Service Plans.

### Audit and Inspection

- 3.7 Commission members regularly reviewed reports by the Council's internal and external auditors, and paid particular attention to the relatively few issues of concern in those reports. The Commission was particularly encouraged by the very positive 2006 annual report on governance by the External Auditors.
- 3.8 It was decided to formalise the Commission's role as the Council's Audit Committee and the recommendation to promulgate this by changing the Commission's Terms of Reference in the Constitution was accepted by full Council.

### Background Papers

Agenda, minutes and review reports of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2004/05 – 2006/07.

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### **Possible Main Topics for Overview and Scrutiny in 2007/08**

The determination of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for the forthcoming year will, following the 2007 local government elections, be a matter for the newly appointed members of the Commission and its Panels. To help inform that decision, and having taken note of the future developments set out in section 9 of the Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report 2006/07, our experience and the views offered by others, the current members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission set out below an indicative programme of the main topics which we consider are worthy of review. The proposed indicative work programme below will necessarily be subject to refinement and updating.

#### **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

1. Co-ordination of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels
2. Routine Monitoring of the performance of the Council's corporate functions.
3. Audit Committee duties, including the review of plans and the reports of both internal and external audit.
4. Periodic review of the Council's strategic risk management arrangements.
5. The operations of other public sector service providers (other public bodies, such as the Department for Work and Pensions and the South East Economic Development Agency have important statutory roles to play in providing services to the Borough and its residents. Using existing powers, enhanced by the forthcoming *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill*, the Council can and should hold the more significant service providers to account for their performance). After an initial scoping review, specific reviews of individual providers may be carried out by one or more of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.
6. Review of the Council's procurement arrangements
7. ICT Strategy
8. The Council's involvement in partnerships and the Bracknell Forest Partnership in particular (*The Local Area Agreement will 'go live' in April 2007, and there is a new duty on the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function to ensure that scrutiny of all the theme partnerships is in place*)
9. 2008/09 budget scrutiny
10. Exercising pre-decision scrutiny by reference to the Executive Forward Plan.

#### **Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

1. Review of Adult Treatment Plan (Drugs and Alcohol Action Team)
2. 'Your Homes' – implementation, following the residents' ballot.
3. Monitoring the performance of the Social Services and Housing Department.
4. Monitoring the implementation of the action plans for Supporting People and Adult Social Care (arising from the 2006 Commission for Social Care Inspection).
5. Review of action taken in response to the Panel's report on anti-social behaviour.
6. Exercising pre-decision scrutiny by reference to the Executive Forward Plan.
7. Contributing to the development of significant statutory plans and policies (*department to provide details of forthcoming plans and policies for 2007*).

### **Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

1. Parking enforcement – implementation of the Council's new powers and future opportunities.
2. Monitoring the performance of the Environment and Leisure Department.
3. Bracknell Town Centre regeneration.
4. Waste – Progress review of new waste Private Finance Initiative contract, also the experience of the first year of Alternative Bin Collection.
5. Exercising pre-decision scrutiny by reference to the Executive Forward Plan.
6. Contributing to the development of significant statutory plans and policies (*department to provide details of forthcoming plans and policies for 2007*).

### **Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

1. Contributing to and agreeing the Council's development of a Health Strategy for the Borough.
2. Monitoring the remediation of underfunding of health care in the Borough, as revealed by the Chief Executive of the Berkshire East PCT.
3. Extended Schools/Children's Centres – a joint review with the Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
4. A review centred around patient focus, being a principal area of concern for residents, perhaps concentrating on waiting lists, consultant referral and infection control.
5. In concert with the Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, monitoring the performance of the Berkshire East PCT.
6. Contributing to the development of significant statutory plans and policies proposed by the PCT.

### **Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

1. Preparations for, and outcome of the 2007 Joint Area Review.
2. Monitoring the performance of the Education, Children's Services and Libraries Department.
3. Exercising pre-decision scrutiny by reference to the Executive Forward Plan.
4. Contributing to the development of significant statutory plans and policies (*department to provide details of forthcoming plans and policies for 2007*).