

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
21 NOVEMBER 2013
7.30 - 9.15 PM**



Present:

Councillors Leake (Chairman), Angell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Birch, Ms Brown, Finnie, Gbadebo, Harrison, Mrs McCracken and Virgo

Reverend Canon N Parish, Church Representative
Mr R Briscoe, Parent Governor Representative

Executive Members:

Councillors McCracken and Ward

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Baily, Heydon and McLean

In Attendance:

Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services
Pat Keane, Chief Officer: Information Services
Bobby Mulheir, Chief Officer: Customer Services

30. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Commission noted the attendance of the following substitute member:

Councillor Mrs McCracken for Councillor Baily

31. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 5 September 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

- Collection of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 payments were monitored by Corporate Finance. Once CIL payments had been implemented the Council had a statutory duty to publish an annual report detailing its collection
- A report on work to brand Bracknell as a place to do business had been delayed because of timing issues. The report on Public Participation in Overview and Scrutiny had been delayed due to a desire to gain wider member input into the review

32. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor Mrs Birch declared a personal interest in that she was the spouse of the Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing

Councillor Mrs McCracken declared a personal interest in that she was the spouse of the Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection.

33. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

34. Public Participation

There were no representations submitted under the public participation scheme.

35. Customer and Contact Channel Strategy

Bobby Mulheir, Chief Officer: Customer Services, presented a report providing an update on the progress being made to implement the Customer Contact and Channel Strategy. The report included a summary of key achievements, future plans and development areas.

It was reported that the redevelopment of the Council's website been well received and it was one of only a handful of Council websites nationally to achieve a SOCITIM four star rating. The website had also received accreditation for its accessibility from the Shaw Trust for a second year. There were on average 34,000 unique visits made to the website on a weekly basis. Regular surveys of visitors to the site were conducted and 46% of those using it were local residents, a figure that was 10% higher than that achieved by other local authority websites.

Work was taking place to replace the Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) system. Once replaced the Council would have the ability to enable the residents to create customer accounts so that they could log and track their own cases on-line. Work was also taking place to facilitate and improve online booking facilities for a range of Council services.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- Individual rules could be put in place to direct telephone calls appropriately for example enquiries to the Licensing Team were routed through to the Customer Contact Centre in the first instance
- Avoidable contacts were those contacts that might have been avoided if better information had been made available in the first place
- New technologies were evaluated through the ICT Management Group
- An open source CMS system was being trailed through micro sites that were under development for the new Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and a new Youth Service site. By hosting off site the Council was provided with round the clock technical support and back up
- The possibility of producing weekly You Tube news feeds for the website would be investigated
- Analysis of the 900 staff mobile phones in use has shown that the majority of officers were using the phones to receive phone calls. Over the past quarter the cost of phone calls had been approximately £4,000 a figure that included the cost of the diversion

- Staff were expected to reimburse the cost of personal calls made on their Council mobile phones
- Under the flexible and mobile working arrangements officers were expected to be contactable in the same way as if they were in the office
- The possibility of using instant messaging to interact with residents was being investigated
- The possibility of alerting a resident by text message that a particular payment was required was being investigated
- It was acknowledged that there would always be people who were not able to interact with the council online and that it was important that the Council maintained a wide range of channels to enable these people to contact the Council

The Commission thanked Bobby Mulheir for her update.

36. **Information and Communications Technology Strategy**

The Chief Information Officer presented a report providing an update on the implementation of the ICT Strategy Action Plan.

It was reported that in July 2013, the Government had placed an obligation on all local authorities to comply with the Public Service Network Code of Connection (PSNCoCo) and this had had a significant impact on the resources of the IT Services Team as they worked to ensure that the Council's networks were fully compliant. It had also necessitated the issuing of secure Council laptops to those Home Flex staff who currently accessed the network using their own equipment. Arising from members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- The protracted log in processes required for Council laptops was due to the use of the Windows XP operating system. It was expected that the process would become simpler once the operating system had been ungraded. Meanwhile the ICT Team would contact members to establish what difficulties were being experienced
- The requirement for members' laptops to be physically connected to the Council's systems before passwords could be changed would be investigated
- Emails sent to personal email addresses were not considered secure and it could not be guaranteed that a third party would not be able to access the email's content
- Whilst it is possible to segregate the Council's network so that Members were able to access emails without logging into the system the Council did not have the resources to achieve it
- A number of the business platforms utilised by the Council were only just becoming available on Windows 7. It was therefore expected that upgrading to Windows 8 would not be achievable in the immediate future
- Under the Access to Information regulations a three year retention time had been set for emails. It would be clarified if this could be extended to four years for members to enable them to revisit emails that they may have received at the start of their four year term of office
- Because of forthcoming substantive legislative changes the scheduled upgrade of the Protocol/Controcc system used by Adult Social Care, Health and Housing had been postponed
- The Council disagreed with the Government's new PSN requirements and had complained to the Cabinet Office, which was now realising the anger it had caused across local government

The Commission thanked Pat Keane for his update.

37. Office Accommodation Strategy

The Executive Member for Transformation and Finance presented a report providing an update on the work taking place to implement the Office Accommodation Strategy. The report outlined the progress made against the 2011 Strategy recommendations and an overview of the current status of the changes to services, working practices and the building estate.

Work to improve Time Square, to accommodate 170 additional staff, was running to schedule and was on budget. Anecdotal evidence suggested that all staff who were benefitting from the refurbished offices were satisfied with the moving process and were happy with the updated facilities. It was clarified that the final desk ratio for flexible staff of 5:4 was the ratio that would be achieved once all the moves had been completed and this would be monitored to ensure that the ratio remained.

Members commended the work of officers overseeing the implementation of the Strategy.

The Commission noted the report.

38. Review of Delegated Authorities

The Commission received a report setting out the Executive's response to the Review of Delegated Authorities carried out by a Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

The Commission was informed that the Working Group had concluded that the Council had sound, well understood arrangements in place for delegated authorities. Arrangements which achieved an appropriate balance between the Executive taking responsibility and empowering officers to carry out their duties. It was reported that Executive had agreed all the recommendations proposed by the Working Group.

The Working Group's Lead Member and the Executive member for Corporate services and public Protection thanked all the members and officers who had been involved with the review for their input and support.

The Commission noted the report.

39. Executive Forward Plan

The Commission received, and noted, a report summarising the Executive Key and Non-Key decisions relating to corporate issues.

40. Corporate Performance Overview Report 2013/14

The Commission considered the Corporate Performance Overview Report detailing Council performance during the first quarter of the 2013/14 financial year (April to June 2013). Arising from Member's questions and comments the following points were noted:

- In light of recent newspaper reports concerning comments from a number of Chief Police Constables about recording differences for reported crime levels the Commission Chairman had written to the Police Crime Commissioner

seeking assurances over the veracity of crime figures. Copies of the correspondence would be forwarded to the Assistant Chief Executive.

- The target for the number of Special Educational Needs Statements issued within 26 weeks had been missed due to an increase in the number of complex cases, where additional information and specialist assessments had been required
- The Assistant Chief Executive would consider expanding the Corporate Performance Overview Report to include summary details of compliments received

The Commission noted the report.

41. **Quarterly Service Reports 2013/14**

The Commission considered the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of departmental performance as reported in the Quarterly Service Reports for the second quarter of 2013/14 (July to September) relating to the Chief Executive's Office and the Corporate Services Department and the following points were noted:

Chief Executive's Office

- The incorporation of crimes committed at Broadmoor Hospital into the crime figures for Bracknell Forest distorted the figures and a briefing note would be circulated giving more detail
- Officers were investigating the reasons why the number of unique views on the website had fallen short of expectations

Corporate Services

- Following the retirement of a key member of the Revenue Services Team a successful recruitment campaign had been completed and it was expected that the work of the Revenue Services Team would be unaffected by the retirement

The Commission noted the report.

42. **Work Programme Update and Panel Activity Update**

The Commission received a report providing an update on Overview and Scrutiny activity contained within the work programme since its last meeting.

It was noted that the Health Panel's Working Group on the Francis Report had just completed its review and the report and recommendations would be going through the appropriate approvals process in due course.

It was acknowledged that it would be useful for all Commission Members to receive more in-depth updates on the work of the various Overview and Scrutiny Panels and it was suggested that web-links to Panel minutes be included in future reports.

CHAIRMAN

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