

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
13 SEPTEMBER 2007
(7.30 - 10.30 pm)

Present: Councillors Edger (Chairman), Baily, Beadsley, Mrs Birch, Browne, Finnie, Leake, McLean, Thompson and Worrall.

Parent Governor Representative: Mr I Sharland

Church Representative: Mr G Anderson

Also Present: Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Leisure, Corporate Services & Public Protection

Apologies: Councillors Mrs Beadsley, Brunel-Walker and Ms Whitbread.

In attendance: Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance and Scrutiny
Ian Boswell, Safer Communities Manager
Pat Keane, Chief Information Officer
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services
Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Scrutiny)
Fiona House, Democratic Services Officer

26. Substitute Members

The Commission noted the attendance of the following substitute member:

Councillor Beadsley as a substitute for Councillor Mrs Beadsley

27. Minutes & Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission held on 19 July 2007 be agreed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

Minute 19 – Review of Youth Provision – items (iv), (vi) and (ix) – The Executive Member’s response to this had been received and would now be monitored by the Lifelong Learning and Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Minute 20 – Executive Forward Plan – item (i) – The limited assurance audits relating to IT had been completed in January, and following a re-audit in August, were now satisfactory.

Minute 21 (iii) – A response to Councillor McLean’s query on public transport would be expedited

Minute 22 – Report of the Review of Healthcare Funding in Bracknell Forest – The Commission was advised that the report had been sent to two Berkshire MPs who have constituencies in Bracknell Forest and replies were awaited.

28. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or indications that members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

29. Urgent Items of Business

The Chairman gave notice that he had agreed to the addition of an item of urgent business to the agenda for the meeting. The report concerned the Council's medium term objectives for 2007-11. The reason for urgency was that the Commission's comments were required before the report went to the Executive on 18 September.

Following approval by the Executive the objectives would be out for public consultation, and any strategies resulting from the objectives would be considered by the relevant scrutiny panel.

Members were concerned that they had not been given sufficient time to consider the objectives, and it was highlighted that Overview and Scrutiny's involvement in these matters was of importance. The Commission noted the objectives in the paper but did not deem it appropriate to endorse them and expressed a wish to be involved in the related consultation exercise. The Commission also decided to form a working group, comprising Councillors Thompson (lead member), Mrs Birch and Browne, to consider the MTO's in more detail and report back to the Commission. Members also expressed the view that they wished to be more involved in Council policy formation.

30. Performance Monitoring Report (PMR)

The Commission were advised about the production timetable for the new style Performance Monitoring reports, and requested that this information be provided as early as possible. Members noted the Chief Executive's Office Performance Monitoring Report for the first quarter 2007/08. The Assistant Chief Executive highlighted the following:

- (i) The development agreement for the town centre regeneration had been signed;
- (ii) The Crime and Disorder Reduction team had been transferred to the Chief Executive's Office;
- (iii) The revised town centre planning application would be considered at the Planning and Highways Committee on 20 September 2007;
- (iv) Only 3 out of the 63 Service Plan actions were causing concern; developing a clear statement for carbon reduction in the town centre, the establishment of an Economic Partnership, and the preparation of the Older People's Strategy.

Key activities during the next quarter included:

- (i) Preparation for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment inspection;
- (ii) Publication of the town centre Compulsory Purchase Order; and
- (iii) Preparation for the new Local Area Agreement. The Commission asked to be consulted on draft new LAA.

The Director of Corporate Services presented the Corporate Services Performance Monitoring Report for the first quarter 2007/08. She highlighted that: the business plans for the new civic hub were complete and members had been consulted on areas that affected them, such as the layout of the new council chamber, after concerns were raised that the civic hub would be large enough to incorporate all departments. However, as the proposed storage space would be half that presently available, consideration would be given to alternative space saving storage methods.

The Director reported that there had been public consultations on both the community cohesion strategy and the gender equality scheme. Around 800 responses had been received on the community cohesion strategy, and responses to both had been positive. It was noted that changes were being planned for Neighbourhood Forums and Action Groups in the autumn which, it was hoped, would attract more members of the public. An update on this would be brought to the next meeting of the Commission. The Director also outlined progress in filling posts in Bracknell Forest Homes and in the Council's Finance team.

A member drew attention to the need for Overview and Scrutiny to have an input into all policy making in order to improve the Council's decision making.

Members highlighted the new no smoking policy as positive, however a concern was raised about the amount of cigarette butts littering the town centre. This issue would be passed on to the Director of Environment and Leisure.

Members noted the new system for registering anonymous electors, which was significantly different to the previous system of a public and private electoral roll. The new system was designed, under the Electoral Administration Act 2006, to allow exemption from the public scrutiny of electors on the register when it would threaten that elector's safety. Those in the same household as those at risk would also be eligible to register for this system, and would allow people to vote in person, by post or via a proxy without fear of their identity or address becoming public. To be eligible for this service the applicant must have enclosed with application a court order or injunction, or a supporting attestation by a qualified person such as a chief officer of police, chief constable, or director of adult social services, certifying that this person was faced with serious risk.

One member requested more information about the member training budget, in terms of its size and usage, which would be forwarded to him.

Members asked officers to advise whether funding associated with the mitigation measures required to protect the Special Protection Areas needed to be spent in advance of the granting of planning permission.

Members queried the Council's position in leading the review of Neighbourhood Forums, given that these were essentially a Police responsibility, and also raised concerns over the level of public participation, and were assured that this was being addressed.

Members raised concerns that the Overview role in reviewing policy documents, before being considered by the Executive, was being ignored in some instances. The Chairman said he would ensure these concerns were shared with the Leader upon their next meeting.

31. Community Safety

An update on crime statistics was presented by the Safer Communities Manager, Ian Boswell. He stated that the Chief Executive now chaired the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership which gave the Group a new focus. The Crime and Disorder Team had now moved from Social Services and Housing to the Chief Executive's Office, there was a greater emphasis on performance management, and the close proximity to the police station enabled greater partnership working. There were new monthly crime reduction meetings concentrating on the top 10 areas of crime and locations for repeat offences. Ian Boswell also reported that there had been a 15% drop in crime at April 2007, and it was hoped that this would be the overall figure for 2007. The Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service had reported a 22% reduction in the reporting of anti-social behaviour, whereas Bracknell Forest Borough Council had reported a 20% rise.

It was reported that currently there was at least one police officer per neighbourhood on a regular basis and community feedback was that this was beginning to make a difference. The recently issued Flanagan Report into Policing made reference to the importance of neighbourhood policing and it was noted that by the end of 2007 there would be 23 Police Community Support Officers in Bracknell Forest. The Commission was pleased to note these developments.

32. Review of Anti-Social Behaviour

The Commission considered the response of Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Leisure, Corporate Services and Public Protection, to the report of the review of anti-social behaviour undertaken by a working group of the Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Attention was drawn to the issue of 16 and 17 year olds that were no longer in full time education being excluded from the services provided by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). It was highlighted in the report that there was a transitional protocol between CAMHS and Adult Services with a close working relationship between the two services, however members felt it necessary to insist that there was a service gap that needed addressing. The Commission noted that Phillipa Singer, Chief Executive of Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust, would be speaking on this issue at the meeting of the Joint East Berkshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 20 September 2007.

The Executive Member undertook to reconsider recommendation 2.8 in the report as he had not interpreted it as relating to a communication issue as intended by the Working Group. He would also pursue matters with Thames Valley Police where stated. The Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel would review action taken in response to the report at a future meeting.

33. The Local Area Agreement (LAA) and Bracknell Forest Partnership (BFP)

The Assistant Chief Executive gave a presentation on the Local Area Agreement and the Bracknell Forest Partnership. Autumn 2007 would see the launch of the new Local Area Agreement where the Council would choose 35 performance indicators from a list of 200, plus 18 mandatory indicators, to be delivered and monitored by the Themed Partnerships that sat under the Local Strategic Partnership. Funding of around £1.2m was made available from the Government and the Bracknell Forest Partnership would determine how this was spent.

Some concerns were raised by members as to who was accountable for partners' delivery of the targets, the imposition of national targets, and the role Overview and Scrutiny would play. The Assistant Chief Executive advised the Commission that Overview and Scrutiny would have a monitoring role and more information on this would be presented at a future meeting. To inform future work in this area, Commission members would receive hard copies of the Assistant Chief Executive's presentation, the new Partnership Handbook, the Local Area Agreement and the Sustainable Community Plan.

34. ICT Strategy

The Commission received a presentation from the Chief Information Officer on the Council's ICT Strategy, that had been presented to the Executive in July. The current infrastructure along with the vision for the future was included in the presentation. An action plan was being prepared to deliver the Strategy and the Commission would regularly monitor its implementation.

Members took this opportunity to draw the Chief Information Officer's attention to problems being experienced with their Council IT equipment and he agreed to look into the matter without delay.

35. Updates from Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chairmen

Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

An Extended Schools and Children's Centres Working Group had been established, and the work of the other working groups was ongoing.

Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel

The setting up of working groups was ongoing.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel

A Patient Focus Working Group had been established to consider out of hours services.

Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel

A Community Arts Development Plan was being developed with the full involvement of the Panel. Two working groups on waste and street cleaning/street scene were in the process of being established.

The Chairman advised the Commission that a report would be brought back on progress at the next meeting.

36. Executive Forward Plan

The Executive Forward Plan for items of a corporate nature was noted.

CHAIRMAN