



Review of the Council's Medium Term Objectives

**Interim Report by a Working Group of the
Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

November 2007

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Acknowledgements

The Working Group would like to express their thanks to the following people for their co-operation and time. All those who have participated in the review have been thanked for their contribution and provided with a copy of this report.

Councillor Paul Bettison, Leader Bracknell Forest Borough Council

The following Officers from Bracknell Forest Borough Council:

Timothy Wheadon, Chief Executive
Victor Nicholls, Assistant Chief Executive
Richard Beaumont, Chief Executive’s Office

1. Foreword by the Lead Member

This interim report records the outcome of a Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, established to review the Council's proposed new high-level corporate objectives for 2008-2011. The following Commission members were appointed to carry out this review:

Councillor Clifton Thompson, Vice Chairman Overview and Scrutiny Commission (Lead Member)

Councillor Mrs Gill Birch

Councillor Alan Browne

This review demonstrates how Overview and Scrutiny can and does make a constructive input to the formulation of Council policies, and how we are influencing important issues in a timely way through proactive engagement with the Council's political and operational leadership.

This report will be finalised following the Overview and Scrutiny Commission's next meeting on 22nd November, when the outcome of the Council's Executive meeting on 20th November will be known. Members of the Commission are asked to delegate to the Lead Member, Councillor Thompson, finalising any ensuing changes to the report, in agreement with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 13th September 2007, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission's comments were sought, as an urgent item, on the proposed new Medium Term Objectives (MTO's) for the Council, which had been published for the Executive meeting on 18th September.
- 2.2 The MTO's translate the Council's long term vision – 'To make Bracknell Forest a place where all people can thrive: living, learning and working in a clean, safe and healthy environment – and the Council's elements of the Sustainable Community Plan¹ - into objectives for the medium-term. The MTO's were due to be updated following the local government elections in 2007.
- 2.3 Members of the Commission 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.² The

¹ The Sustainable Community Plan can be found at <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/sustainable-community-strategy-2005.pdf>

² The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting can be found at [http://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/Published/C00000151/M00001573/\\$\\$\\$Minutes.doc.pdf](http://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/Published/C00000151/M00001573/$$$Minutes.doc.pdf)

Commission 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.

- 2.4 At their meeting on 18th September 2007, the Council's Executive considered a proposal from the Assistant Chief Executive to approve new Medium Term Objectives (MTO's) for the Council³. The Executive determined to make some changes to the MTO's, and agreed that the public's views should be invited.
- 2.5 The consultation on the new MTO's is due to end on 5th November 2007, and the Executive are due to meet on 20th November to consider officers' advice on any changes to the new MTO's in the light of that consultation and the Working Group's provisional recommendations.
- 2.6 The scope of the review was to consider the MTO's in more detail and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

3. Investigation and Information Gathering

- 3.1 The working group met on 25th September. The Working Group considered the MTO statement with particular reference to the Bracknell Forest Sustainable Community Plan, and set out in a letter to the Council's Leader and the Chief Executive its preliminary appraisal, attached at Appendix 2.
- 3.2 The Working Group decided to seek a meeting with the Council's Leader and the Chief Executive, to discuss the provisional conclusions and recommendations set out in the letter, such that this could be taken into account during the Executive's consultation period.
- 3.3 The Working Group met the Council's Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive on 12th October, and subsequently the Council's Leader on 15th October, to discuss the observations about the MTO's in the letter. Both meetings were very constructive. Arising out of this it was agreed that note would be taken of points in the letter at the meeting of the Executive of the 20th November prior to consideration by this Commission at this meeting and subject to any further views of the Commission's members as in 3.4.
- 3.4 On 16th October, all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission were invited to give their views on the MTOs and the letter. No views have been expressed to the Working Group.
- 3.5 A report will be given to this meeting of the meeting of the Executive of the 20th November as regards MTO's and the Working Group's appraisal in the letter.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The MTO's were generally considered to be appropriate and represented a significant piece of work in relation to the future direction of the Borough.

³ The minutes of the Executive meeting can be found at [http://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/Published/C00000102/M00001559/\\$\\$MDocPackPublic.pdf](http://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/Published/C00000102/M00001559/$$MDocPackPublic.pdf)

4.2 The independent consideration of the MTO's by the Working Group was of benefit in giving rise to a constructive critical appraisal of the MTO's and is a useful precedent to be considered in developing future policies and strategies.

4.3 It is anticipated that to the extent that the observations in the letter of the 1st October are not accepted satisfactory explanation will have been given to the Working Group.

5. Recommendations of the Working Group

5.1 That the letter of the 1st October at Appendix 2 be noted.

5.2 That the report of the meeting of the Executive on the 20th November be noted.

5.3 That the work of the Working Group be regarded as concluded subject to any further work considered appropriate consequent on the meeting of the Executive.

5.4 That the conclusion in 4.2 be passed to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council

Medium Term Objectives

2007-11 (As considered by the Executive on 18th September 2007)

Four over-arching priorities:

Priority one: a Town fit for the 21st century

Priority two: protecting and enhancing our environment

Priority three: promoting health and well-being

Priority four: safe and secure

Priority one: a town fit for the 21st century:

1 To build a vibrant Bracknell town centre that residents are proud of by:

- starting construction work on the new retail centre and leisure facilities
- delivering 200 new homes in and around Bracknell Town centre
- improving access to the new town centre by providing
 - extensive new parking facilities
 - a major package of junction improvements
 - more bus lanes and a “park and ride” scheme
- constructing and opening a new Bracknell library, new Civic Offices and a high quality “Jubilee Gardens”
- ensuring local people gain the skills for employment in the new town centre

Priority two: protecting and enhancing our environment:

2 To keep our parks, open spaces and leisure facilities accessible and attractive by:

- Restoring South Hill Park grounds
- Preparing a new cultural strategy for the Borough
- Reviewing management options for leisure sites in order to maintain quality and generate secured investment
- Preparing a new parks and open spaces strategy
- Improving the quality of the countryside and open space by targeted projects and by engaging the voluntary sector

3 To promote sustainable housing and infrastructure development by:

- Producing a Local Development Framework that protects the Green Belt and balances the demand for new housing with the need to protect the wider environment
- Uses the planning regime to ensure that all new housing developments are matched by appropriate investment in infrastructure
- Implementing a strategy to mitigate the impact of development on the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area
- Implementing the local transport plan
- Transferring the Council's housing stock to Bracknell Forest Homes
- Providing more choice for social housing applicants through the introduction of Choice Based Lettings.
- Increasing the number of affordable houses in the Borough, including directly funding 250 new units

4 Keep Bracknell Forest “clean and green” by:

- Increasing recycling rates to 50%
- Establishing a “fast response” team and increasing environmental enforcement activity to reducing the amount of litter in the Borough
- Developing a local climate change strategy by 2009
- Improving energy management in Council and school facilities
- Reducing the level of fly tipping in the borough
- Developing a joint waste strategy

Priority three: promoting health and well-being:

5 To improve health and well being within the Borough by:

- Developing and implementing a comprehensive health strategy for the Borough, in partnership with the PCT which identifies clear priorities for improving health and well-being
- Working with the PCT to secure more outpatient and diagnostic facilities in the Borough
- Increasing our focus on prevention such as the number of adults participating in at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise per week
- Producing an annual report on public health
- Implementing and monitoring the ban on smoking in public spaces
- Working with the PCT to improve mental health services for children and young people

6 To improve the outcomes for children and families through the Children and Young People's Plan by:

- Ensuring all schools are good schools and continuing to raise standards
- Making sure there are enough good school buildings for an expanding borough, including building a £35m replacement for Garth Hill College
- Commissioning a wide range of “extended services”, including opportunities in music and sport
- Establishing six new children's centres to give families access to integrated multi-agency services for young children
- Investing in new youth facilities and targeted youth support

- Helping schools manage behaviour and supporting young people at risk of exclusion from education, training or employment opportunities
- Setting up effective integrated services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities
- Improving the lives of children in care through better corporate parenting and effective commissioning of placements
- Putting in place new measures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people

7 To promote independence and choice for vulnerable adults and older people by:

- Modernising services for vulnerable adults and older people by reducing reliance on residential care and improving access to community based services.
- Increasing the number of people having direct control of the budgets for their care
- Developing a Borough-wide Strategy for Older People
- Improving the Council's star rating for Adult Social Services by 2008
- Providing advice and support to vulnerable people to help maintain them in their own homes

8 Seek to ensure that every resident feels included and able to access the services they need by:

- Appointing an Executive member with specific responsibility for Community Cohesion and related strategies
- Using innovative methods of engaging local residents in decisions that affect them, particularly targeting "hard to reach" groups to listen to their views
- Creating a new customer contact centre in Bracknell that allows people to access all services
- Improving support in schools for minority ethnic communities with English as an additional language needs.
- Implementing a DES and GES and reviewing the Council's Race Equality Scheme
- Increasing access to services by electronic means
- Improving community cohesion through culture and sport

Priority four: create a borough where people are, and feel, safe:

9 To reduce crime and increase people's sense of safety in the Borough by:

- Working with the police to reduce crime [recorded by the British Crime Survey] by _% by 2011
- Reduce the number of people who fear crime by _% by 2011
- Expanding the CCTV network coverage in the Borough
- Use "speedwatch" anti-speeding teams to reduce the incidence of speeding

- Reducing the number of people, particularly young people, abusing drugs and alcohol

And

10 To be accountable and provide excellent value for money by:

- Maintaining Council Tax levels in the lowest quarter of all unitary authorities
- Implementing a four year “efficiency” programme to reduce spending to sustainable levels
- Creating clear accountable governance structures for working in partnership with other organisations in the Borough

Overview & Scrutiny Commission

Chairman : Councillor Bob Edger OBE
Vice Chairman : Councillor Cliff Thompson



1st October 2007

TO: The Leader of the Council, Chief Executive
C.C.: Councillors Mrs Birch and Browne, Assistant Chief Executive

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Dear Councillor Bettison and Mr Wheadon,

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE DRAFT MEDIUM TERM OBJECTIVES 2007/11

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission, at their meeting on 13 September 2007, decided to set up a Working Group to review the Council's draft Medium Term Objectives (MTO's) for 2007-11.

The Working Group, comprising myself as lead Member, with Councillors Mrs Birch and Alan Browne, met on 26 September, and I am writing to let you know our provisional appraisal, which we would like to discuss with you before composing our formal report.

General

The Working Group agreed with all statements in the draft MTO's, and do not propose any deletions. However, we do suggest that the MTO statement could be improved in a number of respects, as set out below.

We are concerned that the MTO statement does not give sufficient recognition to important aspects of the Sustainable Community Plan (SCP), the overarching plan for the Borough.

Aspects we draw attention to are:-

- MTO 4 should refer the Nottingham declaration.

- MTO2 refers to preparing a new cultural strategy for the Borough but in context this is limited to the physical aspects of keeping parks, open spaces and leisure facilities accessible and attractive.
- Priority 3 of the SCP (Improving health and well-being) is included as part of priority 3 of the MTO's referring to promoting health and achievement and specifically MTO 5, but both are silent on wider well-being issues. A separate Working Group is reviewing the Council's draft Health and Well-being strategy. That Group will make its own observations. We however observe that the 2006/07 MTO 4, which was to improve art, culture, sport and recreation provision within the Borough was expressed to link with Priority 3 of the SCP. In the MTO's the closest reference is to improving community cohesion through culture and sport under the last bullet point of MTO 7 (inclusion and access to services).
We therefore recommend that either priority 3 (health and achievement) includes a provision similar to MTO4 of 2006/7 in relation to the cultural strategy (to promote quality of life) or it is included under the proposed 5th priority referred to below
- Priority 6 of the SCP, Improving travel and transport, should be included in the MTO's.

Partnerships

In our view, the MTO statement makes insufficient reference to partnerships, indeed the statement looks quite 'insular'. We think it essential to recognise the value and importance of partnership working, the increasing inter-dependencies between partner organisations, and the Bracknell Forest Partnership merits an explicit reference.

We think the MTO statement is sparse and inconsistent in its references to principal partners. For example the PCT are mentioned three times in MTO 5, yet the Police and Fire & Rescue Service are not mentioned anywhere.

MTO 10 – Overall Issues

Due to the importance of the objectives added to the end of Priority 4, as they are central to everything the Council does, they warrant more prominence. We suggest it would be better to have a fifth priority, that would capture running the Council well, with explicit references to partnership working, effective strategic corporate governance, community engagement, quality of life and the achievement of value for money.

Other Observations

In MTO 5, is working with the PCT solely to improve services for children and young people?

The Sustainable Community Plan is in need of updating. We understand that work is under way for its revision and will be pleased to know of progress made.

Four years is a long time, and since nothing remains static, the statement should include a commitment to review and update the MTO's annually.

In recognition of their importance we request that consideration be given to the MTO's being brought before Council for approval.

We hope that you can accept these observations and recommendations in the constructive spirit with which they are put forward.

In order to provide timely input to the Executive's consideration of the draft MTO's, the Working Group request an early meeting with you and would appreciate a meeting in the period 10-12 October.

Yours sincerely

**Councillor Cliff Thompson
Vice Chairman, Overview & Scrutiny Commission**