

Summary of Good Practice Visit by Bracknell Forest Council on 24th July 2008

The group were taken through a presentation by Richard Beaumont (Head of Policy and Performance) and Councillor Edger (Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny). It was an informative and useful session with scope for plenty of discussion. Key points to arise from the session can be summarized as follows:

Item	Explanation
<p>1. Full Council support for O&S - O&S taken seriously by most people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation • A graphical representation of the structure (in presentation handout) was given which depicts the relationship between the Executive, O&S Commission, Panels and Officers. • Where reviews are undertaken, a lead officer is selected from the appropriate directorate which gives an access point for information and provides support to the project.
<p>2. Arrangements to keep everyone engaged and informed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly Review meetings with each O&S Chairman, Vice-Chairman, relevant Executive Member and Director, O&S Officer • Agenda-setting meetings with each O&S Chairman, relevant Executive member and Director, O&S Officer • Quarterly O&S progress reports to the Corporate Management Team • Annual Report of O&S – copies of the Annual report were circulated; the document was a comprehensive account of the work that the three panels completed along with a description of reviews and working groups as well as the work carried out by the O&S commission. <p>Role of O&S in performance Management: Quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports; Corporate Performance Overview Reports; Best Value Reviews; Annual Audit and Inspection Letter; Internal Audit Reports also ensures engagement in key policy areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>3. Well-programmed and wide range of O&S reviews; well supported, with improved impact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic & coordinated work programme based on major areas of council & NHS activity • Executive & officer engagement in design of work programme to ensure reviews are relevant & will add value • Growing number of requests from the Executive for targeted O&S reviews • Indicative programme in annual report of O&S adopted by the full council therefore full engagement • Open invitation to the public to contribute ideas • Regular scanning of the Executive forward plan • Agenda setting / arrangements that keep everyone engaged & informed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplined approach for reviews • Choosing reviews that have some accord with the public (topical/ public interest) and current developments eg White paper • Proper scoping at the beginning – tight objectives; stops reviews shooting off at a tangent. • Flexibility built into work plan to allow for urgent topics that arise during the course of the year • Extensive use of working groups; for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Working Group Report on Healthcare funding ○ Working Group Report on Council’s new Medium Term Objectives ○ Working Group on Health and Well-Being Strategy ○ Working Group Report on Road Traffic Casualties (Executive response on agenda for 17 July) <p>All of which made significant recommendations, mostly accepted, and achieved distinct impact.</p>
<p>4. Backbench Members’ involvement in policy development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O&S recommendations are considered by the Executive and provide visible support by coming back to the O&S committee to present Executive’s response to recommendations.
<p>5. Joint Working</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with partners – key point being that partners and external bodies need encouragement rather than a confrontational approach plus understand that there may be mutual benefits to come before O&S in the light of partner/external body co-operation legislation and increased emphasis of corporate public image. Eg waste and packaging may be something that companies may want recognition for and in return for this “story” may be willing to engage in the Local authority’s recycling agenda • Joint East Berkshire Health O&S Committee formed with RB Windsor & Maidenhead and Slough BC following the PCTs’ amalgamation is working well • Bracknell have carried out a joint review of the Extended Schools/Children’s’ Centres programme by the Social Care and Learning Panel and the Health Panel • Currently, scrutiny of partners and external organisations confined to NHS organisations and occasional reviews of others, e.g. the DVLA’s role regarding abandoned vehicles; and the Police role re anti-social behaviour • The Bracknell Forest (Local Strategic) Partnership’s Governance Protocol states: ‘The Council shall facilitate the scrutiny of the work of the Partnership through its Overview and Scrutiny process’. • Working Group underway on the Local Area Agreement - will refine our approach to partner scrutiny.
<p>6. Opportunities for improvement & future work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public engagement -although Bracknell have conducted meetings in the community eg Leisure Centre, a local college and Sandhurst Town Hall; arranged more open seating for public; website access for public requests, more work will be done in this area.. • Understanding better the impact of O&S • Developing performance indicators • Member training • Webcasting

The Audit commission wrote the following on the O&S function:

- *Overview and scrutiny is good, rigorously challenging performance and this leads to improved services. This is evident in the recent improvements made in adult social services and in the robust challenge it is pursuing to increase health funding for the area.*
- *The Council's overview and scrutiny function provides good challenge to the Council Executive and this has been used effectively to review and maintain focus on priority areas such as in environmental issues and in improving adult social services and health funding.*
- *Scrutiny is effective in challenging and supporting policy development.*
- *Scrutiny capacity to challenge and support the Council's executive is good. It has good officer support and engages actively in the scrutiny of performance and decision-making."*