

**TO: THE EXECUTIVE
16 DECEMBER 2008**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT ON LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS
(Assistant Chief Executive)**

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 To determine the Executive's response to recommendations by the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Commission's Working Group on Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Executive acknowledges that the Council's O&S function has two principal purposes:

- (i) to carry out O&S in relation to the Council's own contribution to the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and Local Area Agreement (LAA), in dialogue with Councillors and Council officers; and
- (ii) in collaboration with those charged with ensuring accountability in the Bracknell Forest Partnership (BFP) partner organisations, to coordinate a programme of O&S of major issues of interest to the partnership as a whole;

- 2.2 That the Bracknell Forest Partnership Board's response to the Working Group's report be noted.

- 2.3 That the Working Group be thanked for its work.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Overview and Scrutiny Work programme, endorsed by the Executive, included this review of the LAA. The Working Group's report of that wide-ranging review considered all the issues with the support of appropriate officers. As a consequence, the report and recommendations are fully informed and merit support.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has adopted the final report from the Commission's Working Group on the Local Area Agreement. The review took place between April to August April 2008. The report concluded that *'BFC and its partners in the BFP are already operating very successfully together, and the new SCS and LAA are evidence of that. The Council's O&S function, in concert with those exercising similar roles in partner organisations, needs to support that journey of*

improvement through constructively scrutinising the partnership's policies, plans and achievements.'

- 5.2 The recommendations of the Working Group are listed on page 14 of the Working Group's report. These are attached as Annexe A and include recommendations for the BFP Board, the Council's Executive and the O&S Commission and Panels.
- 5.3 The BFP Board considered the recommendations of the Working Group at its meeting of 16 October 2008. It accepted all the recommendations and agreed a response to the O&S Commission as set out in Annexe B.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 No comment.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 There are no direct or additional financial consequences arising from the recommendation in this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Risks and mitigating actions have been identified for all targets within the Local Area Agreement and these will be monitored and managed by the BFP Board.

Other Officers

- 6.4 Not applicable.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 None

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 None

Representations Received

- 7.3 None

Background Papers

- Local Area Agreement Report from the Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Contact for further information

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Recommendations of the Working Group

To the Bracknell Forest Partnership Board

- a) As a start to effective scrutiny the BFPB is asked to provide quarterly progress reports on the LAA to the O&SC and should discuss with Council officers how this might be best achieved.
- b) Effective O&S can be achieved by establishing the arrangements described in this report. The BFPB should consider what issues may gain advantage to the decision-making process by being referred to the appropriate O&S Panel or the Commission for enquiry. This is a service with which the Council as a leading partner already has good experience and skill to carry out.
- c) The BFPB and the Council's Executive are invited to acknowledge that the Council's O&S function has two principal purposes: to carry out O&S in relation to the Council's own contribution to the SCS and LAA, in dialogue with Councillors and Council officers; and in collaboration with those charged with ensuring accountability in the BFP partner organisations, to coordinate a programme of O&S of major issues of interest to the partnership as a whole.
- d) With the support of the BFPB, the O&SC should map all the principal scrutiny and accountability arrangements in the BFP. This should include sending a short questionnaire requesting information from all BFPB Members and the Board Members of the BFP Themed Partnerships.
- e) That a closer working relationship is encouraged between the BFPB and the O&SC in order to develop a positive and constructive atmosphere and understanding for effective scrutiny to strengthen the LAA.

To Bracknell Forest Council's Executive Member for Council Strategy and Community Cohesion

- f) The BFPB and the Council's Executive are invited to acknowledge that the Council's O&S function has two principal purposes: to carry out O&S in relation to the Council's own contribution to the SCS and LAA, in dialogue with Councillors and Council officers; and in collaboration with those charged with ensuring accountability in the BFP partner organisations, to coordinate a programme of O&S of major issues of interest to the partnership as a whole.

To the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

- g) The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is currently consulting on developing O&S in the partnership context¹. The consultation closes on 30 October 2008, and the O&SC should respond to it.
- h) The O&SC should continue to be alert to emerging national good practice of scrutiny of LAAs, and contribute to it.

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/communitiesincontrol/>

- i) In regard to f) above, the O&SC should establish arrangements to ensure that a coordinated programme of O&S coverage is designed and delivered in concert with partners.
- j) With the support of the BFPB, the O&SC should map all the principal scrutiny and accountability arrangements in the BFP. This should include sending a short questionnaire requesting information from all BFPB Members and the Board Members of the BFP Themed Partnerships.
- k) When the Council's O&S work programme is being developed the Chairman of the O&SC should write to the BFP Board to seek their comments.
- l) That a closer working relationship is encouraged between the BFPB and the O&SC in order to develop a positive and constructive atmosphere and understanding for effective scrutiny to strengthen the LAA.

To the Overview and Scrutiny Panels

- m) O&S Panels should consider the themed partnerships that exist within their areas of coverage and invite leading officers to Panel meetings to describe the work they do and the way in which the scrutiny process may aid this.
- n) That when draft reports are prepared by O&S Panels those matters that might be related to partnership issues should be sent first to the BFPB for comment before passing them to Executive Members for comment.
- o) That the scrutiny of any themed partnership is undertaken with sensitivity. Scoping must be agreed by all parties involved before work begins, to avoid misunderstanding, unnecessary concern or dispute. Any success arising from scrutiny reviews should be jointly acknowledged with contributing partners; to enhance the spirit of co-operation we aim to achieve through partnership working.

To the working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

- p) That the O&SC receives a progress report on the action taken on these recommendations in six months time.

Following the BFP Board meeting of 16 October 2008, the written response to the Working Group is to confirm that the BFP Board:

- a) Will provide quarterly progress reports on the LAA to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission alongside the existing Council's Corporate Performance Overview Report (CPOR).
- b) Will consider what issues may gain advantage to the decision-making process by being referred to the appropriate O&S Panel or the Commission for enquiry. This will be undertaken at the BFP Board meeting in January 2009, following the first (quarter 2) performance report against the LAA and the GOSE annual review of the LAA.
- c) Acknowledges that the Council's O&S function has two principal purposes: to carry out O&S in relation to the Council's own contribution to the SCS and LAA, in dialogue with Councillors and Council officers; and in collaboration with those charged with ensuring accountability in the BFP partner organisations, to coordinate a programme of O&S of major issues of interest to the partnership as a whole.
- d) Will support the O&SC in mapping all the principal scrutiny and accountability arrangements in the BFP. (The BFP Board notes that this will include sending a short questionnaire requesting information from all BFPB Members and the Board Members of the BFP Themed Partnerships.)
- e) Will support the fostering of a closer working relationship between the BFPB and the O&SC in order to develop a positive and constructive atmosphere and understanding for effective scrutiny to strengthen the LAA.
- f) Thanks the Working Group for its work.