

DPB/CAM

22 June 2009

Councillor R C Edger OBE
Chairman, Overview & Scrutiny Commission
Bracknell Forest Council
Easthampstead House
Town Square
Bracknell
Berkshire
RG12 1AQ

Dear Bob

**Executive Approval of the Review of the Council's Older People's Strategy
by a Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

I refer to your letter dated 29 April 2009.

On 16 June, the Executive considered the comments put forward by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission Working Group, together with the other responses received as a result of the public consultation on the draft strategy. The overwhelming majority of the Working Group's comments were accepted and have been incorporated into the Older People's Strategy which was approved at the meeting.

I enclose a copy of the report that was presented to the Executive which includes the detailed responses to the Working Group's comments.

Once again, I would like to thank the Overview and Scrutiny Commission Working Group for its work in helping to shape the strategy.

With best wishes

Councillor Dale Birch
Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing

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cc Assistant Chief Executive
Director of Social Care and Learning

BRACKNELL FOREST OLDER PEOPLE'S STRATEGY
Assistant Chief Executive

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 The consultation has now been completed for the Older People's Strategy and the comments received have been attached to this report (appendix 1).
- 1.2 This report sets out the comments received and recommends a revised draft of the Older People's Strategy (appendix 3).

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That the Executive approves:

the suggested amendments to the Older People's Strategy set out below and in more detail in Appendix 1, Appendix 2 and Appendix 3;

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 The Strategy is a key action under the 2007-08 Corporate Theme 8 – Improve Services for vulnerable adults and older people.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Should the Strategy not be progressed, the Council is at risk of not delivering on its corporate theme as set above.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background to the strategy:

- 5.1 The Council is committed to prepare a strategy for older people under its Corporate Theme 8 to improve services for vulnerable adults and older people. Officers have worked closely with a steering group comprising older people's stakeholders including the Council's older person's champion.
- 5.2 This strategy sets out a long-term vision for the future of our community, and paves the way for Bracknell Forest to become an even better place in which to live and work and, specifically, in which to reside as an older person. It also incorporates some specific actions and targets which we aim to achieve within the next five years and which will be stepping stones to achieving our long-term vision.
- 5.3 The draft strategy contains 31 action points which would be led by a range of departments and services, reflecting the cross-cutting nature of these issues. Monitoring and coordination would be led by the Director for Social Care and Learning. The target date for completion of all actions is March 2014, which will also synchronise with the Local Area Agreement. These action points have been produced as part of a separate document which will look at more specifically timescales and delivery targets. A preliminary version of this document is found at appendix 4.

Public consultation

- 5.4 The strategy was subject to a 6-week consultation which commenced on 30 March and ended on 8 May 2009. During the consultation, copies of the full consultation documents and abridged versions were distributed by the Council and partner organisations, most notably, Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action. A drop in day session was also held at the Look In on 27 April to allow residents to speak to officers regarding the draft strategy.
- 5.5 A total of 15 people and organisations responded to the consultation, the results of which have been analysed in appendix 1. Many of the points are somewhat aspirational and do not directly address the points and actions already put across in the strategy. Many points look at what residents would like to see happen but lie beyond the remit of the Council to deliver within a five year timeframe.
- 5.6 The headline points to come out of the consultation were that the strategy was in part too general and wordy. People thought that the strategy was too wide ranging and the visions were somewhat utopian and attempted to be too many things to all people. It was also noted that the action points gave little idea of a timetable for delivery. Whilst the strategy is general, it has been written in such a way as to be relevant to the age groups it is addressing. Anything more specific would risk alienating parts of the age group. The visions are not thought of as utopian but more a dynamic view of the council aspirations for its older community. Finally, the action points have been reviewed and incorporated into a separate document which looks at timescales for delivery. This is included in this report at appendix 4.

Overview and Scrutiny Working Group

- 5.7 A working group of the Overview and Scrutiny commission has reviewed the draft strategy. The working group's comments are set out at appendix 2. A suggested response is also set out in the appendix and the consequent changes have been incorporated in the revised strategy.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The relevant legal provisions are contained within the main body of the report.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The Strategy's action plan does not identify the need for additional resources in order to deliver them within the timescales indicated in the report. The resources used in the delivery of the action plan are existing resources. The availability of these resources will depend on the overall budget and other priorities facing the relevant Directorates during the period covered by the Strategy.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 It is anticipated that the strategy resulting from this work will have a positive impact on outcomes for all older people in Bracknell Forest. In addition to this universal impact, the Steering Group has representation from the Equalities Sub Group of the Community Cohesion and Engagement Working Group, and it is likely that there will be recommendations with regards to tackling age discrimination within the Strategy. An equalities impact assessment has been completed.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 There are no risks associated with this report.

7 CONSULTATION

As noted above

Contact for further information

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Appendix 2 Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

General Comments

- Point 3 *We are concerned that the strategy appears to promise too much to too many people, verging on the utopian. In our view, the strategy is rightly aspirational, but the aspirations need to be reasonable and achievable, otherwise there is a real risk that expectations may be raised unduly. There are also too many generalisations in the strategy.*
The strategy seeks to set out a positive and dynamic vision for older people in Bracknell Forest.
- Point 4 *A related issue is the need to strike the right balance between help and interference. In our view, the strategy errs too far towards interference, and many residents feel that central/local government are already interfering too much in their lives.*
The strategy reflects views developed through a steering group, comprising a full range of stakeholders.
- Point 5 *In the tables containing 'priority actions' the role of the relevant Bracknell Forest Theme Partnerships could usefully be set out more explicitly.*
Agreed and will be amended in the action plan document.
- Point 6 *The draft strategy contains a large number of new actions for many Council officer teams. We would welcome an assurance that capacity exists to deliver these actions, and that the teams concerned have included these actions in their departmental service plans.*
The strategy has been circulated to relevant officer teams involved for comment.
- Point 7 *The strategy adopts a fairly rigid adherence to the concept that old age starts at 50 years. This may well be due to government or European policy, but we regard it to be patronising, over-simplistic and possibly detrimental, in that the Council could be seen to be encouraging people to 'wind down' at the age of 50. The working group consider that the Council should be encouraging residents to be active – and probably to be in gainful employment – for many years after the age of 50.*
The EU defines 45 as the threshold for an 'older person'. The council's strategy is not suggesting that at the age of 50 a person is deemed 'old' but rather that their circumstances and priorities may begin to change. Rather than encouraging people to wind down, the strategy takes a proactive approach to changes in people's lifestyles.
- Point 8 *We are concerned that more than a few of the actions in the strategy are too all-embracing, unspecific, and relatively timeless. We firmly believe that all actions in the strategy need to be 'SMART', and in particular specific and measurable. We refer below - in point 37 - to one action being extremely wide and non-SMART.*
A separate action plan document is being prepared to address this point.

Specific Comments

- Point 9 *Paragraph 1.2 – the point could be made more acutely. People's understanding of medical science allows them to live longer but there is less money in the pot to pay for this.*
Agreed, strategy amended.
- Point 10 *Paragraph 1.8 – the aims of the strategy should include encouraging everyone to value older people and the contribution they make. By contrast, countries such as Japan truly value their older people.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 11 *Paragraph 2.3 – this should recognise that it is very difficult for many pre-retirees to plan because most people are dependent on income and the present financial situation is critical to their finance. Also, some employers seem to regard age as a liability.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 12 *Paragraph 3.7 – the wording of this paragraph suggests that the full range of Council services will be available for everyone, which cannot be the case, neither would the Council's limited resources support such a seemingly sweeping provision of services. We suggest that in this paragraph and elsewhere there needs to be a much clearer distinction between those services of benefit to older people which are universally available (such as leisure centres) and those which are targeted and subject to strict eligibility criteria (such as residential care). We also suggest that the emphasis needs to be on appropriate access to services by those who need them. In our view, most older people are self-reliant, often with assistance from their families and friends.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

'Housing and the Home'

Point 13 *The 'issues' refer to the relevance to Bracknell, and it needs to be clear that the strategy relates to the whole of Bracknell Forest, and not just the principal town of Bracknell.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 14 *The 'issues' could usefully refer to the shortage of single storey homes as being particularly relevant to older people in the Borough.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 15 *The second bullet in the vision is distinctly utopian. With large parts of the borough being semi-rural, it is unrealistic that everyone will have easy access to shops and other amenities.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 16 *The third bullet in the vision should recognise that support for daily tasks around the house and garden is far more likely to come from family, friends or neighbours rather than a public agency.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 17 *The actions in Section 6, on 'Housing and the Home' appear to be addressed mainly from the perspective of social housing, whereas the majority of older people live in privately owned or rented housing.*

The section is aimed at all tenures of housing and it is made clear in the 'issues' section that the majority of people aged 50 and over are home owners. The aims to ensure that help is available for those who may find it difficult to stay at home as they get older and provide advice and help to adapt their homes.

Point 18 *We would welcome a commitment by the Council and its partners to provide basic information on specific services and grants for older people, which might help minimise uninformed, crisis-led interventions which can and do occur.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 19 *This section could perhaps refer to the concept in the draft Housing Strategy of a 'Care Village'.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

'Neighbourhoods'

Point 20 *The Working Group does not believe that Bracknell Forest has any 'badly lit, vandalised and littered, urban neighbourhoods', and suggest that this is removed. Similarly, the vision point concerning being able to go out without fear of intimidation or mugging overstates the very low incidence of such issues in the Borough.*

Accepted, although these issues are frequently raised as a major concern for older people.

'Social Activities and Networks'

Point 21 *We consider that the first bullet point on relationships and income is patronising, far too aspirational, and achieving the vision lies beyond the ability of the Council and its partners to influence.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 22 *The 'opportunities already available' could usefully refer to lunches and other opportunities for older people to work with primary schools, as part of the Extended Schools services programme.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 23 *The priority actions could usefully be extended so that those residents who do not have a computer are not disadvantaged.*

The priority actions do include using conferences and working groups to help older people access information and does not assume that the use of a computer is paramount to get this information.

'Getting Out and About'

Point 24 *The 'issues for older people' should refer to the low level of residents' satisfaction with public transport in the borough.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 25 *The vision refers to people being able to afford a car. We do not believe that this has anything to do with the Council or its partners and should be deleted from the strategy.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 26 *We suggest that the vision could usefully refer to mobility wheelchairs and scooters, which enable older people to travel and be independent.*

This comment has been reviewed and is already made in 'opportunities already available'.

Point 27 *On the 'opportunities already available', we understand that the 'Dial-a-Ride' scheme is no longer available, and if so, this should be deleted.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 28 *On the 'opportunities already available', we suggest deleting the reference to the Age Concern car scheme, as there are other mini bus services available.*

Agreed, strategy amended.

Point 29 *The action 'With partners, improve accessibility at Bracknell railway station for people with mobility problems' could perhaps be deleted as we understand this has mainly been completed, notwithstanding that despite months of work, the brand new lifts at Bracknell railway station are not yet in service.*

This comment will be incorporated into 'opportunities already available'.

Point 30 *The action 'Provide advice for less confident older drivers' should include Thames Valley Police in the list of key partners.*

This comment will be amended.

- Point 31 *This section might usefully refer to the Berkshire East PCT's strategy to offer as many health facilities as possible locally and avoid people travelling.*
This comment will be incorporated where possible.

'Income'

- Point 32 *We suggest that this section of the strategy should make it much clearer that the Council and its partners are unable to have any significant influence on people's income.*
Noted and incorporated.

- Point 33 *Priority actions here and elsewhere include many new commitments for the Citizens Advice Bureau and other voluntary bodies. We strongly question the realism of such expansion of services when their funding is under great pressure and the demand for their routine services has increased markedly during the economic downturn.*
The OPS steering group has included representation from BFVA to help to ensure that the strategy takes a realistic approach to the voluntary sector.

'Information, Access and Participation in Services'

- Point 34 *This section could usefully include the current and potential further role of General Practitioners' surgeries in signposting people to the services which they may need, also the use of libraries as centres of information.*
This comment will be amended within the strategy both with 'opportunities available' and also priority actions.

'Health and Well-being'

- Point 35 *The 'opportunities already available' should also refer to the free swimming and 'keep mobile' schemes.*
Agreed, strategy amended.
- Point 36 *The issues should include a specific reference to the creation of the new 'Healthspace' in Bracknell.*
Agreed, strategy amended.
- Point 37 *We firmly believe that all actions in the strategy need to be 'SMART', and in particular specific and measurable. In our view, the action 'Ensure that the actions set out in the "Health and Well-being Strategy" (October 2007) are implemented wherever possible with a focus on the needs of older people, with particular reference to the potential impact of climate change and the economic downturn' is extremely wide and non-SMART.*
Agreed. The strategy will contain an action plan which identifies key actions for the next 5 years.