



Councillor Dale Birch
Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing
Bracknell Forest Council
Easthampstead House
Town Square
Bracknell
Berkshire
RG12 1AQ

Date: 29 /04/2009

Dear Councillor Birch

**REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S OLDER PEOPLE'S STRATEGY BY A WORKING GROUP OF
THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION**

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission was requested by the Assistant Chief Executive to provide comments on the Council's draft Older People's Strategy. The Commission formed a Working Group to consider this in detail, comprising myself as Lead Member, Councillor Mrs Birch, and Councillor Virgo.

Councillor Thompson, as the Pensioners Champion and a member of the steering group on the strategy, has abstained from the Commission's consideration of the strategy.

The Working Group met on 2 March, and I attach the Group's comments, on which we would welcome your response. We note that the draft Strategy is due to be sent for public consultation, and we therefore ask that the Working Group's comments are also taken into account as part of the response to the consultation.

With best wishes,

Councillor Bob Edger
Chairman, Overview & Scrutiny Commission

Copies to: Councillors Mrs Birch and Virgo
Director of Social Care and Learning
Assistant Chief Executive

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION

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COMMENTS BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION'S WORKING GROUP – BRACKNELL FOREST OLDER PEOPLE'S STRATEGY (5th DRAFT)

General Comments

1. We welcome the production of the Older People's Strategy, both in terms of showing the Council's commitment to an important, valuable and growing part of the Borough's population, and in drawing together the many plans pertaining to issues affecting older people.
2. We welcome the commitment in paragraph 5.2 that the strategy will be co-ordinated and monitored by the Director of Social Care and Learning. We consider that a single point of overall accountability is important, notwithstanding that the Older People's strategy requires input from many parts of the Council and its partners.
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.
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.
5. In the tables containing 'priority actions' the role of the relevant Bracknell Forest Theme Partnerships could usefully be set out more explicitly.
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.
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.
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.

Specific Comments

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

'Housing and the Home'

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.
14. The 'issues' could usefully refer to the shortage of single storey homes as being particularly relevant to older people in the Borough.
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.
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.
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.
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.
19. This section could perhaps refer to the concept in the draft Housing Strategy of a 'Care Village'.

'Neighbourhoods'

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.

'Social Activities and Networks'

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

'Getting Out and About'

24. The 'issues for older people' should refer to the low level of residents' satisfaction with public

transport in the borough.

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.
26. We suggest that the vision could usefully refer to mobility wheelchairs and scooters, which enable older people to travel and be independent.
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.
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.
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.
30. The action 'Provide advice for less confident older drivers' should include Thames Valley Police in the list of key partners.
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.

'Income'

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.
33. The '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.

'Information, Access and Participation in Services'

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.

'Health and Well-being'

35. The 'opportunities already available' should also refer to the free swimming and 'keep mobile' schemes.
36. The issues should include a specific reference to the creation of the new 'Healthspace' in Bracknell.
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.