



LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

Report by a Working Group of the
Overview and Scrutiny Commission



September 2008

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Acknowledgements

The WG expresses its thanks to the following for their co-operation and time. A copy of the draft report has been provided to them for their comments:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Councillor Paul Bettison | - Leader, Bracknell Forest Council |
| Timothy Wheadon | - Chief Executive, Bracknell Forest Council |
| Victor Nicholls | - Assistant Chief Executive, Bracknell Forest Council |
| Claire Sharp | - Senior Policy Officer, Partnerships |
| Chief Inspector Simon Bowden | - Local Area Police Commander, Thames Valley Police |
| Martin Gilman | - Director, Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action (BFVA) |

1. Foreword

1. Bracknell Forest Council has an established track record of achievement in close, productive and harmonious partnership with many public, voluntary and private organisations operating in the Borough, and this has been widely commended¹. Central Government has put increasing importance on such local partnerships and has reinforced this through evolving Councils' legal and financial frameworks. Councils can no longer deliver services in isolation, and the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) function similarly needs to 'move with the times' and look to see how its work can be adapted to meet this new partnership landscape most effectively. That has been the purpose of this Working Group (WG).

2. The timing of this work has necessarily been something of a compromise as nationally the development of the formal partnership agenda is fast-moving. On the one hand, we do not yet have government guidance or enactment of all relevant legislation, neither have we found examples of established best practice to draw on. On the other hand, our Local Strategic Partnership – Bracknell Forest Partnership (BFP) - has entered a new era with a new Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), an Area Based Grant, and a new Local Area Agreement (LAA), of much greater operational significance than previously. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission (O&SC) therefore decided that it was necessary to make a start in shaping effective O&S arrangements for the LAA, though the wider developments in train mean that the thinking in this report will need to be revisited and refined in due course.

3. The Local Government and Public Involvement and Health Act 2007 (the Act) sets a new duty on Unitary Authorities to prepare an LAA in consultation with others for approval by the Secretary of State, via the Government Office for the South East (GOSE). It sets a duty on Unitary Authorities and other 'partner' authorities to co-operate in determining local improvement targets in the LAA. These 'partner' authorities include organisations such as Police and Fire and Rescue Authorities, Primary Care Trusts, Probation Services, Learning and Skills Councils amongst others.

4. The Act also set a responsibility on the local authority and its partners to have regard for local improvement targets in carrying out their function and to do this in a spirit of co-operation as stated above.

5. With regard to the scrutiny of LAA's the Act allows:

¹ See paragraph 6 of Corporate Assessment of Bracknell Forest Council by the Audit Commission, February 2008. The report can be viewed on the Audit Commission's website at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/CPA-CORP-ASSESS-EPORT.asp?CategoryID=ENGLISH^576^LOCAL-VIEW^AUTHORITIES^111705&ProdID=6363DFE3-0B29-4322-B63D-0B9137ED753F>

- A power for the Secretary of State to make regulations concerning the information which partner authorities must provide for scrutiny.
- A requirement that, where a report or recommendations concern a local improvement target which is specified in the LAA and which relates to a partner authority, that authority must have regard to the recommendations of O&S.

6. Because of this the O&SC was prompted to task a WG to review the current LAA process to inform it of the following:

- The purpose of the LAA and the SCS
- The manner in which the LAA is developed
- The contribution of partner organisations
- How partner organisations approached scrutiny of their functions

7. The key objectives of the WG were to:

- Ascertain examples of good practice of scrutinising LAAs
- Explore with partners how O&S could be used in a positive and meaningful way in relation to the LAA
- Establish effective arrangements for O&S of the LAA and SCS

8. The following members were appointed to the WG:

Councillor Bob Edger OBE – Lead Member, Councillor Robert McLean and Councillor Mike Beadsley.

2. Background

9. LAAs are three year negotiated agreements between upper tier Councils (Unitary and County) and Central Government. The agreement sets out a series of targets that a Council, together with its partners, must deliver.

10. The improvement targets in the LAA are challenging and so attract reward money if a Council and its partners can deliver them.

11. If a Council embarks on scrutiny of a Council's partnerships or partner stakeholders both in the LAA and the SCS it is vital to be clear about the scope and objectives of the review. The partners are legally independent of the Council and have their own governance arrangements which must be respected, thus sensitivities are involved and to ensure that partners embrace scrutiny properly it is clear that the process must be transparent, constructive and not intimidating.

12. The recently published SCS and LAA encapsulate the period from 2008 to 2014 and 2011 respectively. In developing these documents stakeholders, listed in the LAA, were consulted on the various themes and targets to be included in the document. Of the 198 indicators set by Central Government the Council consulted with its stakeholders, of which the O&SC was one. The O&S response was regarded by the BFP to be very thorough and of the 31 indicators highlighted as high priority by O&S, 16 were within the final designated targets given in the LAA document.

13. Of the remaining 15 suggestions, 3 were found to be unsuitable for the Borough as the data wasn't available at Unitary level or the cohort size was too small; 5 were replaced with similar targets that officers in that field felt were more appropriate; 3 were very new indicators and it was considered too difficult to set up measures within the timescale available and 4 were not considered to be priorities compared to other areas due to already good performance or did not have sufficient resources allocated to impact performance.

14. In Bracknell Forest there are ten themed partnerships that are all represented in the BFP organisation. From this wider membership a Bracknell Forest Partnership Board (BFPB) of key partners is selected to deal with the delivery of policy and action. The Chairmanship of themed partnerships alternates between members.

15. Partnerships are by their very nature complex. Agendas differ and the very nature of the work each organisation does will not always connect or dovetail into those of another partner. However, by providing the opportunity for dialogue across the range of targets and issues agreed in the LAA all participants have an important stake in how the Borough is run and how the Council meets its medium term objectives to the eventual benefit of its residents .

3. Information gathering

16. The WG undertook the following meetings in 2008 during the review:

- 9 April - Draft scoping meeting - Appendix A
- 13 May - Meeting with Victor Nicholls and Claire Sharp- Appendix B
- 19 June - Meeting with Timothy Wheadon - Appendix C
- 10 July - Meeting with Martin Gilman - Appendix D
- 17 July - Attendance at BFP Board - Appendix E
- 22 July - Meeting with Chief Inspector Simon Bowden- Appendix F
- 20 August - Meeting to discuss draft report
- 28 August - Meeting with Councillor Paul Bettison - Appendix G

4. General analysis arising from key player meetings

1. The Draft Scoping Meeting

17. As stated earlier the WG very soon realised that the issue of partnerships was complex. It was unlikely that the term 'Overview and Scrutiny', a Local Government term, would be readily recognised by partner organisations, who would more commonly understand the terms 'governance' and 'accountability'. A number of issues were identified such as who was the Lead Executive Member for the LSP, what organisations had an overarching scrutiny system, and whether the partnership administration was robust enough to withstand change in key officers. The former point was determined as being the Council Leader and it was subsequently confirmed that the administration was sufficiently robust to withstand change.

18. From this meeting an agreed scoping document was produced that is the foundation of this review although the WG realise that this is by no means the end of the process and that further meaningful work remains to be carried out by the Commission and the Panels, taking account of forthcoming legislation and guidance if the scrutiny of partnerships is to be carried out successfully.

2. Meeting with Victor Nicholls and Claire Sharp

19. Victor Nicholls explained that an officer group of Unitary authorities in Southern England had been established to share work and develop partnerships. He described the work done by Southampton City Council in this respect and shared the final report of a study undertaken for that authority by South East Employers.

20. Claire Sharp gave a wider explanation of the process undertaken to produce the LAA. She described how the 35 'designated' indicators with targets had been selected through consultation and why some recommendations from partner groups had not been accepted. She stated that the LAA process was about delivering improvement outcomes within three years that are measurable under the national indicator framework. 6 Primary Care Trust (PCT) led targets, amongst others, were included in the final document.

21. With regard to funding she showed how a new Area Based Grant (ABG) would replace a number of existing funding streams and that these grants would now flow into one basket for the Council to use at it saw fit. Future schemes would include Multi-Area Agreements that would involve setting targets across regions.

22. A summary of the action points arising from the meeting is given at Appendix B.

3. Meeting with Chief Executive

23. The Chief Executive stated that Bracknell Forest Partnership was working efficiently with all major partners represented at the right level. Having established a two-tier structure, whereby a BFPB had been established, it now worked well. He was the permanent chairman of the Board whereas the chairman of the wider Partnership alternated between members.

24. He said that the ten themed partnerships were the real drivers of the system but should problems arise which were not resolvable within a themed partnership or were of a wider nature, the BFPB could intervene to assist.

25. The BFPB has a clear agenda which it decides on; it meets monthly and monitors the SCS and the LAA . Each partnership reports back monthly on the LAA to the Board who monitor targets to ensure that they are being maintained, if not the Board decides on what can be done to help.

26. The Chief Executive described how the ABG was a small proportion of the Council's overall expenditure and how it was difficult to move funds between single organisations in to joint ventures.

27. When asked how the work of partnership scrutiny would serve the needs of local residents he said that the focus should be on partnership working and should be specifically targeted at the outcomes that partnerships were delivering through the LAA and not the partnership in general or its core terms. Although he did think that scrutiny of some partners through lead officers being invited to Panel meetings would give the scrutiny of partnership a healthy 'edge'.

28. However, scrutiny of some areas that overlapped from one organisation to another would need to be careful in its approach. It needed to be seen as inquisitive rather than adversarial and should have the same ethos as partnership itself i.e. investigation to benefit the outcome.

29. Minutes of this meeting are given at Appendix C.

4. Meeting with Martin Gilman BFVA

30. Martin Gilman said he thought the Partnership was working well. In his opinion there was a common agenda between partners and a common willingness to help residents. Good relationships had been forged and Board members had an understanding of each other. Through their work in prioritising the 35 targets in the LAA and through the negotiations with GOSE the relationship had been strengthened. He did caveat that these relationships were dependant upon the personalities involved remaining in post.

31. He thought that communication between agencies was now acceptable but was unsure that the general public knew a great deal about the Partnership's work although he did his best to communicate whatever information he could across the 450 volunteer groups with which BFVA deals.

32. When asked if volunteer organisations had embraced the partnership concept he said that the voluntary sector had the highest response rate to the priority target and felt that this was because his sector was less constricted by what it could say and do than the public and private sectors. He warned that whilst over 13,000 people were involved in voluntary work in one way or another the matter of finance was always a problem with some volunteers spending their own resources in terms of experience and time to fulfil the commitments placed upon them.

33. Martin Gilman felt that the Partnership improved performance and outcomes as skills, expertise and resources were shared, and no one agency had all the answers. There was a need to publicise good news stories from the partnership, such as the fall in reported crime, as this would stimulate more interest in what the partnerships sought to achieve. Communication was paramount and the essential element in community improvement.

34. Minutes of this meeting are given at Appendix D.

5. Attendance at Bracknell Forest Partnership Board meeting

35. Being invited to attend a Board meeting gave the WG an opportunity to observe how members engaged with each other and the calibre of the discussion and debate. It was clear that there was a mutual understanding between members of the issues on the agenda and a positive contribution being made by each member involved. The fact that GOSE was represented, as is the Audit Commission when appropriate, gave balance to the group demonstrating the importance that Central Government places on these meetings.

36. Notes on this attendance are given at Appendix E.

6. Meeting with Chief Inspector Simon Bowden

37. When asked if the BFP was working effectively the Chief Inspector was positive in his response saying that in his opinion it was and that key to its success and the themed partnerships was strong leadership and having the right members on the Board able to make decisions and commit funding as appropriate. He added that he thought the current membership had the same strategic vision for Bracknell Forest, which was to be a safe, healthy and pleasant place to live. However, sometimes individual organisation's agendas were at odds particularly with regard to Government target setting. For example a lot of youth justice matters were better dealt with through early intervention and the Youth Offending Team but Government targets for the police focus on detection and arrest rates and these were at odds with this approach.

38. In being told that the Chief Executive felt that the recent reduction of reported crime in the Borough would not have been achieved other than

through the existing partnership arrangements he agreed that this was true to an extent and that the key Council Officers in this context were those in the Community Safety Team (CST) and the themed Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP). Partnership money was used to enhance the Community Nuisance and Disorder Information System (CADIS) that had been better adapted to this Borough than it perhaps had been in other authorities.

39. To improve policing outcomes for local residents he described how GOSE would be looking at overall acquisitive crime through the LAA. In partnership with the Safer Communities Manager this has been broken down into its component crimes that gave the opportunity to gauge which ones impact most upon the local community and the focus of police resources on these areas where they can make a difference. In this way crimes such as burglary and theft of cars had been reduced.

40. When asked about governance and accountability in his own organisation he explained that this was well established through the Local Area Policing Board, the Police Authority, Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary and the Chief Constable. He felt that the introduction of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process might be a good thing if it combined with its other inspections. He understood that scrutiny was not willingly accepted by some organisations that might be suspicious of it and there were some who have little capacity to become fully involved in either the scrutiny or partnership arrangements.

41. The Chief Inspector maintained he got good value from partnerships and what money he had to support it was spent after discussion with other partners. However, as we live in rapidly changing times he was concerned about stretched resources as the town continued to expand and that there were some schemes that he would like to introduce if more funds were available such as the introduction of an Automatic Number Plate Recognition system.

42. In conclusion the Chief Inspector was of the opinion that if the partnership system was to cease it would be significantly disadvantageous.

43. Minutes of this interview are at Appendix F.

7. Meeting with Councillor Paul Bettison

44. Councillor Bettison, in his capacity as Executive Portfolio holder for the Local Area Agreement, was interviewed by the WG on 28 August. Councillor Bettison had been closely involved with the BFP since its formation. In its early days, the partnership had been of limited value and required extensive Council support. Subsequently, the partnership had moved from strength to strength, with much improved buy-in, pooling of resources, joining together of priorities, and sharing collectively in the partnership's successes. This put the partnership in a strong position for the challenges and opportunities of the

future. There was certainly a need for, and value to be had from effective partnership scrutiny, but it was essential that this be carried out sensitively and constructively, with proper regard to the many differences between the partner organisations. It was particularly important to share success through scrutiny with the Council's partners.

45. Minutes of this interview are at Appendix G.

5. Conclusions

46. 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. Our aim for this O&S work is to serve and empower the Bracknell Forest community by stimulating public engagement, influencing plans and outcomes, and holding decision-makers to account. This lies at the heart of effective O&S.

47. As stated in the foreword the WG was tasked by the Commission to inform it of the following:

- The purpose of the LAA and the SCS
- The manner in which the LAA is developed
- The contribution of partner organisations
- How partner organisations approached scrutiny of their functions

We will take each item in turn:

1. The purpose of the LAA and the SCS

The SCS sets out a long-term vision for the Borough which is ambitious, realistic and sustainable. It covers all aspects of life for people in the Borough in examining where the Borough wants to be by 2030. The LAA is a three-year agreement between BFP and Central Government. It sets out the outcomes and targets the partnership will deliver in the next three years to progress the achievement of the vision set out in the SCS.

In an officer information paper to the WG dated the 13 May 2008 the purpose of these documents were explained as follows:

'3. STATUTORY BASIS

3.1 The Council has a statutory obligation under the Local Government Act 2000 to produce an SCS for the Borough (in cooperation with specified partners). Once finalised the SCS must be agreed by Council in accordance with existing regulations.

3.2 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 introduced further duties on:

- Local Authorities to develop LAAs in partnership with other agencies
- Local Authorities and named partners to co-operate in agreeing LAA targets and to have regard in meeting them.

The Council's Constitution Review Group agreed on the 9 April 2008 that the function relating to LAAs be designated as an Executive Function. This was

approved by Council on 23 April 2008 and the Council's Constitution was amended accordingly.

The SCS and LAA are published on the Council's website² and copies are available on request. The WG conclude this detail is sufficient to define the purpose of both these documents other than to reiterate that the themes, targets and indicators are the result of wide consultation with many organisations that have brought a positive sense of purpose to the BFP and Council for the benefit of residents that was not there before.

It should be noted that the statutory basis for partner scrutiny already encompasses the scrutiny of National Health Service (NHS) organisations. The Council has an established Health Scrutiny function and a constructive relationship with the NHS organisations operating in the Borough. This gives the Council and the BFP a sound basis for expanding partner scrutiny arrangements.

2. The manner in which the LAA is developed

The first stage of the process to produce the new LAA and SCS was the development of a detailed evidence base and this was followed by two conferences in Autumn 2007 to gather stakeholder opinion on potential scenarios for the future and key priorities. This information was used in draft frameworks for both documents. Both were presented for open public and stakeholder consultation in early 2008. This consultation included those named partners with a duty to co-operate, local partners/theme partnerships, O&S and the business and voluntary sector. 35 responses were received regarding the LAA and 20 for the SCS. They came from a good range of stakeholder groups. The two final documents were drawn up for approval and endorsement by various partners during May 2008 to the following timetable:

- 30 April - BFC Corporate Management Team endorsed final LAA and SCS
- 6 May - BFC Executive Briefing on final LAA and SCS
- 15 May - BFP Board endorse final LAA and SCS
- 20 May - BFC Executive endorse final LAA and SCS
- 30 May - Final LAA submitted to GOSE
- 18 June - Final LAA endorsed by Council and SCS adopted.

The WG is of the opinion that sufficient evidence exists to confirm that a wide consultation took place that encompassed all relevant sections of the community and that the responses were useful and informative. All participants in the BFP had opportunities to have an input and the resulting documents that have been adopted appear to have been accepted across the board.

² <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/yc-bracknell-forest-partnership.htm>

3. The contribution of partner organisations

The WG believes that sufficient evidence exists to confirm that most partners made a contribution to the development of both the LAA and the SCS. Further evidence from our interviews with partners is that they are committed to contributing to the partnership by delivering their own LAA targets and supporting other partners to achieve theirs. Because there are so many disparate organisations operating within the Borough it will probably never be the case that all of them will play an active part in producing a policy or document intended to meet the needs of the majority. There will always be those who have no desire to contribute. However, these 'hard to reach' communities must be kept informed of events as much as possible so that they understand the changes and improvements going on around them which may be to their advantage.

The responsibility of the themed partnerships to seek to do this through their networks is essential to the consolidation of the partnership scheme and there is every reason to believe that is already the case.

4. How partner organisations approach scrutiny of their function

The WG understands that some of the key players in the BFP have sound methods of self-scrutiny although they may not use this terminology. As stated elsewhere in this report the use of the term 'Overview and Scrutiny' will be little understood outside Local Government authorities. The words 'governance' and 'accountability' will be more acceptable.

Having said this it is important that whilst the partnership scheme continues to develop and more funding streams through grants and direct payments are fed into it factors concerning good governance and financial accountability are important elements in ensuring proper administration. It is likely that this form of funding will be accompanied by stringent controls and parameters with which some organisations may not be well acquainted.

In conclusion, it is therefore essential, in the opinion of the WG, that all partners must be encouraged to consider scrutiny as an important aspect of their organisation and to understand that robust self-evaluation systems are needed so that the Partnership as a whole is confident in its governance and the way its membership conducts its business.

The Council's O&S also has a responsibility to ensure that local partnerships and the LAA are strengthened through constructive scrutiny that is inquisitive but non-threatening, helpful but not intimidating. Partners interviewed expressed a willingness to contribute to such a process.

The WG believes that constructive scrutiny will be an asset to the partnership scheme overall and all partners should embrace opportunities to participate in it. It has found in all the key participants it has interviewed that there is a strong desire to make the BFP work well and efficiently to the benefit of the whole community.

6. Recommendations

48. Three key objectives of the WG were to:

- Ascertain examples of national good practice of scrutiny in the LAA
- Explore with partners how O&S could be used in a positive and meaningful way in relation to the LAA
- Establish effective arrangements for O&S of the LAA and SCS

The WG has not identified any evidence of national good practice of scrutiny of LAAs. The reason for this is that the partnership scheme is still evolving and the most recent document has just been published. In the past the LAA was renewed annually but it is now relevant for three years, with only 'light touch' annual refreshes.

49. Based on our key objectives, the WG makes the following recommendations:

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 context³. 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.
- 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.

³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/communitiesincontrol/>

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.**

GLOSSARY

ABG	Area Based Grant
BFC	Bracknell Forest Council
BFP	Bracknell Forest Partnership
BFPB	Bracknell Forest Partnership Board
BFVA	Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action
CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment
CADIS	Community Nuisance and Disorder Information System
CDRP	Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
CST	Community Safety Team
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
GOSE	Government Office for the South East
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NHS	National Health Service
O&S	Overview and Scrutiny
O&SC	Overview and Scrutiny Commission
PCT	Primary Care Trust
SCS	Sustainable Community Strategy
WG	Working Group

BRACKNELL FOREST BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

WORK PROGRAMME 2008 – 2009

Terms of Reference for:

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORKING GROUP
ON THE LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT (LAA)**

Purpose of this Working Group / anticipated value of its work:

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|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Inform the Commission about the purpose of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)2. Review the manner in which the LAA is developed3. Investigate the contribution of partner organisations4. Define the approach to Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) of the LAA and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – the Bracknell Forest Partnership (BFP) |
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Key Objectives:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To ascertain examples of national good practice of LAA Scrutiny2. To explore with partners how O&S could be used in a positive and meaningful way in relation to the LAA3. To establish effective arrangements for O&S of the LAA and SCS |
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Scope of the work:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To review the new LAA for 2008-09 to 2010-112. To interview specific lead officers, Executive Members and primary partners to establish the existing arrangements and any necessary improvements3. To review the LAA Draft Improvement Outcomes – and comment on their usefulness to the overall consultation (already completed)4. To make relevant recommendations as appropriate5. To produce a report for consideration by the Commission |
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Not included in the scope:

<p>The nature of this review is to study the existing arrangements for producing the LAA and to consider what value it gives to the work of the Council and its partners. It is not the intention of the Working Group to re-write the document or comment on the nature of the work being carried out by the Council's partners</p>
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**Terms of Reference prepared by: Councillor RC Edger OBE
Chairman O&S Commission**

**Terms of Reference agreed by: Councillor RL McLean
Councillor MJ Beadsley**

**Working Group structure: Councillors Edger, McLean,
Beadsley**

Working Group Lead Member: Councillor RC Edger OBE

**Portfolio Holder: Councillor Bettison, Leader of the
Council**

BACKGROUND:

The LAA is an emerging document and a great deal of importance is attached to it in Local Government. The O&S Commission is concerned that members understand the document and that it is given suitable scrutiny to ensure that it works in the best interests of the Borough's residents; and gives transparent value.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL TO ADDRESS:

- 1.
2. **TO BE AGREED**
- 3.
- 4.

INFORMATION GATHERING:

Witnesses to be invited

Name	Organisation/Position	Reason for Inviting
Claire Sharp	Senior Policy Officer, Chief Executive's Office	Briefing on the LAA and SCS
Partner Representatives	To be confirmed	To explore with partners how O&S could be used in a positive and meaningful way in relation to the LAA
Victor Nicholls	Assistant Chief Executive	To be confirmed
Timothy Wheadon	Chief Executive	To be confirmed
Councillor Bettison	Leader	To be confirmed

Site Visits

Location	Purpose of visit
	Unlikely that site visits are needed but these will be arranged as appropriate

Key Documents / Background Data / Research

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The existing and new LAAs2. The Sustainability Community Strategy3. The WG contribution to the LAA Draft Improvement outcomes4. Conduct a mapping of scrutiny/accountability arrangements in each of the BFP organisations5. Any other documents pertinent to the review of the Working Group |
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TIMESCALE

Starting: As soon as possible

Ending: Draft Report 20 Nov 08

OUTPUTS TO BE PRODUCED

1. Verbal update report to the Commission Thursday 5 Jun and 17 July 08
2. Initial Draft report for WG validation by Thursday 11 September 08

REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

Body	Date
O&S Commission – Draft Report	20 November 08

MONITORING / FEEDBACK ARRANGEMENTS

Body	Details	Date
O&S Commission	Verbal update	5 Jun and 17 July 08
WG	Initial draft for validation and assessment of further work if needed	11 September 08

**Local Area Agreement O&S Working Group
13 May 2008**

Present: Councillors Edger (Chairman) and McLean
Katie Dover, Victor Nicholls, Claire Sharp

Apologies: Councillor Beadsley

1. Minutes and Matters Arising

2c: Not able to progress this as not aware yet of the governance arrangements.

2e: Whilst Claire was significant in the project through her role as Project Manager for the LAA, the LSP/LAA support role was shared by a number of lead officers. There were two senior officers, Claire and Belinda Clack, and also support via a junior officer, Caroline Little. In addition, about 15 service department senior officers were leading on their own target negotiations with regards to the LAA. The Chief Executive's department role was to provide an overview and co-ordination role but with each target negotiated directly with the lead officers in the departments.

2f: The Executive Portfolio holder for the LAA was Councillor Paul Bettison. The Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader would have delegated authority to sign off any outstanding targets in the LAA following the May Executive meeting. The LAA was an Executive function; as agreed at the previous council meeting.

2g: Dealt with under the information from Victor Nicholls on the Southampton pilot project.

It was confirmed that the working group would aim to meet the target of September for their first report. It was noted that an internal audit on the LAA would be done in the autumn.

2. Report from Victor Nicholls

A new South of England officer group had been set up by the unitary authorities to help co-ordinate information sharing regarding the work ongoing to develop LAAs and manage LSPs. So far, Southampton had been the only council to be moving forward on the issue of scrutiny of LSPs:

Southampton City Council's previous administration had rejected their Community Strategy as their Members had been concerned with LSP issues. They had commissioned "Progress through Partnerships" to undertake a scrutiny pilot project through their LSP and undertake research to ensure the process ran smoothly.

The learning points from this were:

- a) When the O&S work programme was developed, the Chairman of the Commission would write to the LSP to see if there was anything they would wish to scrutinise
- b) When O&S developed draft recommendations that related to partnership working, these could be sent first to the LSP as drafts for commenting on, and then to the Executive with a final recommendation

- c) The Southampton LSP provides an annual report which is presented to their OSC for approval.

Action: Victor to provide the research report from Southampton when published.

Action: Bob Edger to contact Robin Taylor regarding the research work.

3. Report from Claire Sharp

Claire reported that the LAA would be going to the Council's Executive on 20th May for approval followed by the submission to government of the final document on 30th May 2008 (with GOSE approval required in advance of this).

Claire explained the process that had been undertaken to distil the results of the stakeholder consultation into the required 35 'designated' indicators with targets. 70 stakeholder organisations had been consulted on this issue with 35 responses received. Those consulted included parish and town councils, voluntary and community groups, partnerships/commissioning groups and regional bodies. The LGPIH Act listed named partners that had to be consulted. It had been an extensive and thorough process and generally much more inclusive better than the previous time.

General consensus areas had been found, and also the areas that all stakeholders felt were less relevant to Bracknell Forest. The issues had been given a grading system to summarise stakeholder opinion – of red (little support), amber (some support) and green (general consensus of support). Work had been undertaken with the partnership, CMT, GOSE to identify which of the amber indicators should be included alongside the green ones to make up the final basket of 35 indicators.

Some of the indicators were rejected as they were not appropriate for a unitary council. For example, the "employer skills gap" survey results were collected by SEEDA only at a county level. Others were not appropriate as the minimum cohort size was not met, or the indicators were delayed nationally due to being too difficult to put in place in the first year.

Technical lead officers were consulted to refine the rest of the list, in terms of finding the most suitable indicator that would most effectively measure the outcomes that were raised as priorities.

In a small number of cases (e.g. street cleanliness), indicators had to be rejected as performance was already high and GOSE were unwilling to negotiate achievable improvement targets. The question arose as to what the value of a particular target was if it had to be discounted as not achievable. In these cases, the outcome was picked up using a broader indicator (such as overall satisfaction with the area). This enabled the document to talk about the overall expectations of an area and gave balance to the overall document.

The question arose as to how far the framework matched the concerns of the Borough's residents. Councillor Edger noted that in a previous survey of the Borough, residents were most concerned about i) the environment, ii) speeding and parking and iii) anti-social behaviour. These top priorities might not be reflected as such in the LAA, even though it sought to improve the quality of life.

Claire reported that the evidence base had taken account of public consultation results (including those from the neighbourhood action group survey) and issues such as litter and speeding would be picked up through the overall satisfaction with

the area indicator – the improvement plan for which is based on neighbourhood's physical environment. Anti-social behaviour had its own indicator within the final basket of 35. It was noted that the national indicator framework was however imposed on the council and therefore it did have to adapt to a certain extent to the targets imposed.

GOSE brought a national steer to the table and had its own recommendation for the basket of 35. There was overlap on at least 25 with those of high priority in Bracknell Forest. Some national steers such as the climate change target which has already been picked up by Bracknell Forest's evidence based approach. The detailed evidence based approach gave Bracknell Forest a very strong negotiating position for favouring local priorities over national ones.

The LAA process was about delivering improvement outcomes within three years and about being measurable under the national indicator framework. The final balance of the document reflects stakeholders' priorities, even though it is set within the confines of the national indicator set.

Claire was asked to talk about the benefits of the LAA. Claire reported that the LAA document was an action document, with achievable but stretching targets that would be measured. Partners were being asked to sign up to 3 year targets whereas previously this had been an annual process. Measurement would be done quarterly. Some of targets involved data available quarterly and others were based on "opinion of service", only collected every two years by survey. Here Officers were asked to come up with a "proxy trend" e.g. the anti-social behaviour reports to the CADIS system to measure a trend in between the national survey.

The question of inclusion of the health agenda arose. Health targets included stopping smoking and obesity targets. On this issue the PCT was fairly open and information was obtained via the Public Health Working Group. 6 PCT led targets were included.

Overall delivery of the priorities set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy would be mapped via an action framework. This would show where targets for each priority sat – LAA, Service Plans, Local Transport Plan etc.

The reward scheme attached to the new LAA was not announced yet, and the funds yet to be defined; however they would replace the LPSA2 money of around £2.2million. The new funding was likely to be under 1 million as there was no pump-priming money up front as before.

A new area-based grant replaced a number of different existing funding streams from Government that were previously ring-fenced to discreet areas. Now the funding would all go into one basket for the council to spend as it saw fit. As the year 1 funding was to be arriving quickly, it was decided to keep the spending allocation as it was previously, being mindful of the ability to review this later on if required.

BFBC undertook much of the servicing of the Partnership Board. The partners helped with contributions to discreet projects. The current LPSA2 reward split has been agreed in advance and includes agreement for the council to top slice 10% of the funding in order to pay for the Partnership work. The question arose as to how other councils obtained contributions from partner agencies.

The question arose as to how targets matched those with neighbouring authorities. In future years Multi-Area Agreements would be available that would enable targets to be set across regions.

4. Summary of Action Points

- a) *Victor to provide the Southampton report. The group might want to get in touch with Southampton after reading the report.*
- b) *Bob Edger to write to Chairman of the LSP to see which areas they suggest we look at and invite him to come to speak to the group.*
- c) *Scrutiny of the LAA could be done by O&S looking at quarterly reports, and an annual report if produced by the Partnership*
- d) *LAA to go on OSC agenda for 5-6-08 with the document marked to follow as would miss publication date. It would be useful for the OSC to familiarise themselves with the document and decide how to pursue– KD to inform Richard Beaumont –*
- e) *1 or 2 Members of the working group to attend the LSP to find out what goes on*
- f) *Further information required on the LAA audit – the group would like a copy of the scoping document.*

The first performance report would be published in October.

5. Date of Next Meeting

To be set shortly, email to be circulated by Katie Dover as to date options.

**Working Group on Local Area Agreement
19 June 2008**

Present: Councillors Edger (Chairman), and Beadsley
Timothy Wheadon and Katie Dover

Councillor Edger opened the meeting by noting that he had a list of questions to ask the Chief Executive about the Local Area Agreement and its development. He quoted Jessica Crowe, Chief Executive of the Centre for Public Scrutiny at their recent annual conference, where she had mentioned that the primary concerns were accountability and governance in the scrutiny of partnerships.

Questions were as follows:

1. Was the Partnership Board working efficiently?

Tim Wheadon reported that it was working efficiently with all major partner organisations represented at the right level. Now with a two tier structure it worked well. There was a Chair and lead Officer from each of the ten themed partnerships on the full Bracknell Forest Partnerships and in addition an Executive Board. This included the Chief Executive, the Police Area Commander, the Local Area Director of the PCT, a Fire Authority representative, the Chief Executive of BFVA; Martin Gilman and a GOSE representative. The Executive Board meant that the bodies most involved and interested in the work, were represented at the forum where overall co-ordination took place.

2. Clarify how this relates to the rest of the Partnership?

The real driver for action was the themed partnerships; where the real work was done e.g. Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership – now a Trust. The Board can intervene if there is a problem. The Executive Board took decisions on cross cutting issues such as the Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA.

3. Is there a set agreed agenda of work?

The Partnership Board has a clear agenda which the board decides on. The Executive Board meets monthly and works on such issues as the Local Area Agreement, Sustainable Communities Strategy and gathers information on other issues upon which it needs gain insight. With regards to the LAA, each body reports back on performance against indicators to the Board. Hence if targets are not reached then something can be done about it. If, however a body such as the PCT were not reaching their targets it would be more complicated to address.

Other statutory agencies such as the Police and Fire Authority have gained some reward grants from the partnership process but it was stipulated by the Board at the commencement that these could only be spent in Bracknell Forest.

The area based grant for 2008/09 is approximately £4.5m, rising to £6.5m in 2009/10 with the inclusion of Supporting People Grant. The Council's total expenditure for 2008/09 amounts to almost £70m and as such these grants make up a small proportion of our overall expenditure.

There was a broad acceptance within the partnership that current services should be maintained at the moment. They could talk about what it would be ideal to do, but it was difficult to move funds from single organisations into joint ventures.

4. If money is spent in a way not appropriate, can the Board point out that no improvement has been made?

This was not the current style of operation which currently focussed on core business. They were focussing on trends of main importance e.g. burglaries. Work was successful when each part of the partnership understood which parts of work overlap between organisations they were concentrating on. It was considered that Local Government should be better as a result of this partnership working.

5. Where are outcomes improved?

Tim outlined the example of the Crime and Disorder partnership, where the membership has been changed eighteen months ago and the team had relocated over to the Chief Executive's Office. All team players were brought together and focus was placed on the top 20 issues such as car crime at the "Meadows" and the Sports Centre car parks. Through team working swift and appropriate action had been taken in each case to tackle the crime levels which had now dropped significantly. A similar reduction in crime levels had been achieved at a nightclub in the town through partnership working.

6. How would partnership of scrutiny work to serve the needs of the area as a whole?

The focus would be on the partnership working and should be specifically targeted on the outcomes that partnership work was delivering through the local area agreement and not on partnership in general terms. This could be done by monitoring the progress to targets on a six monthly basis, and speaking to the lead officer in each case at a scrutiny panel. It was felt that this approach, although new to some of the partners would give the scrutiny of partnership a healthy "edge".

Councillor Edger referred to the Southampton study from the South East Employers and noted the model they proposed for scrutiny. It was noted that too intense a scrutiny of partners might result in the relationship between them becoming more difficult and that it would be important to contain the scrutiny to items within the local area agreement and also to maintain a positive spirit of investigation in an appropriate manner for the organisation concerned.

The group noted that some of those representing partner agencies might be volunteers and not therefore used to the "overview and scrutiny" environment. A concern would be how the message of scrutiny would be received by them.

There might at times be issues of public concern which were not part of the overlapping work areas between some organisations. These cases, although not part of the partnership agenda, the requirement to scrutinize them would come under the community leadership agenda. Careful scrutiny approaches would be required in these cases in an inquisitive rather than adversarial way. These routes into scrutiny would have to be used in a very careful way. Scrutiny should therefore have the same ethos as partnership itself i.e. investigation to benefit the outcome.

7. What is the council getting out of this?

The working more closely with agencies had huge benefits including a drop in crime rates in the Borough. Partnership working fostered better and fuller working together. In the case of the Right Care, Right Place consultation, the Chief Executive considered that partnership working had enhanced the provision of health facilities in the town centre.

It was also considered that all partners benefited. Through the Safer Communities Fund, the police had been involved in targeting funds to where required – hence having more impact on crime rates. The Police were noted to have a BCU Fund and they consulted the Partnership on the use of that fund.

It was noted that the Chairman of the Partnership was regularly rotated but the council's own Chief Executive remained the permanent Chairman of the Executive Board.

8. Would Overview and Scrutiny cause any problems which would impact on the partnerships?

Only if scrutiny went down the route of non priority areas and if not looking at core business. In that case, partnerships might start to disengage. Scrutiny should stick to the shared agenda on the local area agreement and the council should still maintain the community leadership role.

Follow up Actions

Richard Beaumont to arrange for Martin Gilman to speak to the group in the next couple of weeks.

**WORKING GROUP ON LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT
Thursday 10 July 2008**

Present: Councillors Beadsley and McLean
Martin Gilman, Director, Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action
Katie Dover

Councillor Beadsley welcomed Martin Gilman to the meeting, thanking him for the opportunity to seek his views on the Bracknell Forest Partnership Board and the Local Area Agreement.

Councillor Beadsley explained that this Overview and Scrutiny working group had been triggered by the development of the Local Area Agreement, and that the council was interested to develop views on how the partnership was working but also how it would be able to develop scrutiny of partners and the LAA issues.

Martin stated that he felt the Partnership was working really well. There was a common agenda amongst partners and a common willingness to help the Borough's population. Good relationships had been forged and all Board Members now had reached an understanding of each other. Through their work prioritising their 35 targets, and through negotiations with GOSE, the relationship had been strengthened but of course this was dependent to a certain extent upon those personalities currently in post remaining.

The Partnership had been expanded to include more Members such as the parish council representatives. It was noted that the approach to the partnership was inevitably different from the private and voluntary sectors. It was also clear that the voluntary sector was made up of many different bodies with different views.

In response to a question regarding whether the Board was effective in taking up work on particular issues, Martin stated that the Board was well supported by Claire Sharp and her team and that it was an action orientated Partnership. The BFVA aimed to try to map the links and crossover issues between the different Members on the various parts of the partnership by pictorial means in order to enable information sharing between them.

Communication was thought to be good between the Board and agencies but Martin questioned how much the public knew about the work of the Board. Events had been arranged to promote the Board but these only reached a small percentage of people.

Martin was asked whether the voluntary sector had "bought into" the partnership concept. He stated that the voluntary sector had the highest response rate to the priority targets. People in the voluntary sector might be freer to state their own opinions than in the private sector. Ten voluntary sector representatives were elected onto various fora within the partnership. Their issues of concern often differed from the private sector. However the partnership was interested in the reasons that private companies were attracted or otherwise to site themselves in Bracknell Forest. It looked at issues relevant to private companies such as to how to overcome the skills shortage within the Borough for example. The Lifelong Learning Partnership was looking at the issue of retraining people to work in the retail market.

Martin Gilman was in contact with 450 voluntary groups and the BFVA newsletter reached in the region of 13,000 people – all volunteers who work within the Borough. Although not under his “command” Martin represented these people.

Every Partnership Board had the issue of how to reach people with their messages. He thought that publicising the outcomes of the Board was very important. It was noted that the voluntary sector could reach the “hard to reach” groups through the 13,000 activists who made a huge difference to the community. However the voluntary sector was financially poor and Martin considered that a financial impetus was required to encourage the work. Some volunteers were now also contributing financially as well as through their expertise and time. The volunteers were spread across the borough, therefore a coordinating point needed to be reasonably central and accessible.

Further negotiation with GOSE was still required with regards to the targets for the voluntary sector and there were some issues with the place survey undertaken. Martin felt that the survey was worthy of challenge, with local figures to back this up. Martin felt that it would be appropriate to maintain the work of the voluntary sector at this time, rather than aim at an increase due to the current financial situation. He reported that companies within the borough took on the responsibility of helping out, but that help was often on an ad hoc basis and that there was a gap in the area of regular volunteering. Most of the current regular volunteers were over sixty years old. In the South East many working people were cash rich but time poor, so volunteers tended to be retirees.

Martin also noted that many of the youth in the South East went to university, and if they volunteered before university, the voluntary sector trained them up but then they were unlikely to return afterwards which meant that the investment in them was lost. If they did return they would then be busy developing a career and trying to move up the housing ladder.

Core funding came from the council to the voluntary sector, to fund key personnel at the centre. Some organisations gained through discretionary funding e.g. the Citizens Advice Bureau. Financial planning needed to be on a 3 to 5 year plan so that organisations could be prepared for the future. Martin noted that most of the staff were doing work for the Primary Care Trust and yet were supported by the council. This issue was not yet part of the partnership discussions.

All the work towards targets could be done better in partnership as no one agency has all the answers and it was better to share expertise, skills and resources. The Fire Service’s information system would be of use to the Board by helping to pull essential data together. Recommendations could be worked out at board level but then it would be the individual agencies to act to bring tangible benefits for the residents. There was a need to publicise the good news stories from the Partnership such as the fall in the rate of reported crime.

In relation to a question about the best use of scrutiny in this area, Martin suggested that the quarterly monitoring reports to the Chief Executive’s office could be of benefit. The reports used the traffic light system for objectives and targets. These reports could be put forward to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to show progress and answer relevant questions.

The professional standard of the voluntary sector was rising all the time. It was their intention to apply for the ISO900 qualification – but again BFVA would need to know it had funding over the next few years in order to do so.

The Board met at least six weekly, but currently on a monthly basis. GOSE and SEEDA sit on the Board which helped to flag up any cross-boundary issues.

With regards to the targets, it was noted that 35 bring rewards but all 197 were measured. It was noted that in the star rating system for council's that the Audit Commission picks voluntary sector representatives to speak to.

Councillor Beadsley noted that if people were offering a service quasi-contractually to the council then it was good to keep an eye on progress, but with the voluntary sector the relationship was different. It was important not to antagonise those doing such good work.

Martin noted the problem of trying to measure the contribution made by the voluntary sector. If targets were signposted as green, then the statutory organisation should make positive announcements to say so. Also lessons could be learnt from the success stories.

In response to a question regarding how the overlap of different targets worked with the different statutory agencies, it was noted that the area has its own Police Commander which helped. The Fire Service was common across the six unitary authorities, health again had a different context to work in. Communication was paramount to get the good messages across and there was a need to remember that all were working together for a better Bracknell Forest.

The group thanked Martin Gilman for attending the meeting.

Bracknell Forest Partnership Board, 17 July 2008

Easthampstead Baptist Church, South Hill Road, Bracknell

Present:

Helen Barnett, Bracknell Regeneration Partnership
Chief Inspector Simon Bowden, Thames Valley Police
Steve Buck, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
Martin Gilman, Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action
Mary Purnell, Berkshire East Primary Care Trust
Timothy Wheadon, Bracknell Forest Council
Clare Wormald, Government Office for the South East

In attendance:

Councillor Mike Beadsley, Bracknell Forest Council
Barry Dellar, ACTVAR
Councillor Bob Edger, Bracknell Forest Council
Inspector Mark Harling, Thames Valley Police
Victor Nicholls, Bracknell Forest Council
Claire Sharp, Bracknell Forest Council
Katharine Simpson, Bracknell Forest Council

The Working Group members attended the whole of the meeting, and the extract from the draft minutes of the meeting relating to the scrutiny review is reproduced below.

Update from Partnership Scrutiny Working Group

The Board received a report outlining the review of the LAA being carried out by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission. It was noted that the review would:

- Explore how overview and scrutiny could be used in a positive and meaningful way in relation to the LAA
- Establish effective arrangements for overview and scrutiny of both the LAA and the SCS and
- Identify examples of national good practice of LAA scrutiny

The Commission would be meeting with members of the Board to establish how the existing LAA working arrangements had been organised and if there are any improvements that might be made to the process.

The Local area Commander for Thames valley Police offered that the Police could be part of the scrutiny review on a voluntary basis, despite police services officially being excluded from the new scrutiny powers.

Once the review had been completed the draft report would be circulated to the Board for comment.

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT WORKING GROUP
Notes of Meeting with Chief Inspector Simon Bowden, Thames Valley Police
22 July 2008**

Present: Councillor Mike Beadsley, Chief Inspector Simon Bowden, Councillor Bob Edger

1. Is the Bracknell Forest Partnership (BFP) Board Working Effectively?

Yes. Certainly from a police context we get a lot from it. The key to the success of the Board and its theme partnerships are strong leadership and having the right members on board who are able to make decisions and commit funding where required.

All members of the Board have the same strategic vision for Bracknell Forest to be a pleasant, safe place to live and work.

Tim Wheadon thought that the significant reduction in crime and disorder wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for the partnership

This is to an extent true. For the police the key players at the council are Ian Boswell and the Community Safety Team. For example there is a smaller working group that sits under the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) that involves representatives from a range of areas including housing and car parks and they look at the top ten crime hotspots across the Borough and devise solutions to address these problems. The Police have someone dedicated to working on anti-social behaviour and they work closely with the Council's Anti-social Behaviour Co-ordinator (who is also part funded by the Police)

Partnership money has also been used to fund enhancements to the CADIS data system which means that it is more tailored to the Borough than in other areas for example Windsor and Maidenhead and so it can be used to support other work areas for example NAGS and by linking it to crime mapping data it can help direct operational patrols.

2. Do partners share the same agendas?

Sometimes individual organisation's agendas are at odds particularly with regard to Government target setting. For example a lot of youth justice matters are better dealt with through early intervention and the Youth Offending Team but Government targets for the police focus on detection and arrest rates and these are at odds with this approach.

As for the Partnership as a whole all members are signed up to the indicators in the Local Area Agreement (LAA)

3. Do all partners in the wider partnership 'buy in' to the concept?

Buy in varies.

The wider partner meetings tend to be a lot of information sharing session but they work better when that information sharing is tied to break out problem solving sessions.

How does this then feed back into the Board?

The Board is where the business gets done. The wider partnership could do with going through the LAA and look at what they can do as individual organisations to help meet the targets. This could then go back to the Board for further work.

4. Outcomes for residents?

A good example of how the partnership has influenced individual partner organisations work occurred at this morning's local policing performance meeting where we looked at both crime across the area and the LAA targets and used these to give ourselves better leverage for agreeing more realistic force targets i.e. targets that are bespoke to the area and are in line with the LAA targets rather than blanket targets across the area.

In the LAA GOSE will be measuring only overall serious acquisitive crime rates and In partnership with Ian Boswell, Safer Communities Manager, this has been broken down into its component crimes and we have looked at which ones impact most on residents and then used this information to focus police resources where they can make a difference i.e. through the agreement of stretching reduction targets around burglary and theft of cars and then focusing resources on these areas.

5. What is governance and internal scrutiny like?

For the statutory organisations its okay as we are held to account through a range of bodies e.g. the Local Area Policing Board, the Police Authority, HMIC and the Chief Constable. But ten years hence a significant number of services will be delivered through voluntary groups and we have no control over their governance. Similarly BRP is a private business and again we have no control over them.

6. The CAA will encompass partnerships in 2009. How well will the BFP cope with the inspection?

If a number of inspections can be combined into a single inspection then it can only be a good thing.

Robust inspection is right but shouldn't it be based on performance indicators and how organisations are delivering against those performance indicators and then develop bespoke inspections for partnerships rather than blanket intrusive inspections.

7. Attitudes towards overview and scrutiny

Some would be less willing to engage with overview and scrutiny for example the PCT were unwilling but a lot of work has been done to address this and they are now fully engaged with the partnership.

Other groups that are less willing include the Probation Service as they don't have the capacity to get involved in partnership work and other joint tactical meetings.

8. What is the Police getting out of the Partnership? Is it good value?

Yes we do get good value.

The challenge is that in real terms budgets are shrinking. We have £90,000 for partnership policing which we spend as we see fit and in consultation with Tim Wheadon. But we are faced with a rapidly changing environment for example the development at Jennets Park and the town centre regeneration and resources (staff and budgets) that aren't growing. Consequently we need to be smarter about how we spend that money and we may need to spend large sums of money early on.

For example on the procurement of CCTV. If this isn't done early enough then we run the risk of two different systems developing which will need further money spent on them to ensure they co-ordinate properly. The introduction of an Automatic Number Plate Recognition system will cost money and although TVP should supply some of the funding the other partners will benefit from it and should also contribute e.g. Housing stock transfer money could be used for this in order to improve safety for residents.

9. Could you do without the Partnership?

It would put the clock back ten years if we did and working in a silo would be impossible.

Being on first name terms with key members of other organisations is good because it enables things to be done on an informal basis.

The characters involved are important and crucial to the success of the BFP. Having confidence in and respect of partners is also important.

The movement of key characters can impact on a partnership. This movement happens a lot in the police and the key is how continuity is provided. When I took over from Rob Povey I shadowed him and then moved into the post as an interim position before the job was confirmed and I hope to be able to do this with my successor.

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT WORKING GROUP
Notes of Meeting with Councillor Paul Bettison
28 August 2008**

Present: Councillors Edger (Lead Member), Beadsley and McLean
Councillor Paul Bettison
Richard Beaumont

Councillor Edger opened the meeting by noting that this was the last in a series of meetings of the working group, and that all previous meetings had been productive. A draft report of the Working Group was being produced, and further development of Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) in relation to the Bracknell Forest Partnership (BFP) would be needed. The Working Group (WG) wanted to ask the same questions of Councillor Bettison, in his capacity as the Council's Executive Portfolio Holder for the Local Area Agreement (LAA), as with previous people the WG had met.

The questions were as follows:

1. Is the Partnership Board working efficiently?

Cllr Bettison said that he had been sceptical about the attitudes of some partners at the outset of the BFP several years earlier. At the time, this, together with a lack of widespread buy-in and understanding about the BFP's potential, had caused it to falter. He had been Chairman of the BFP at the outset, and after 18 months had thought it timely for the role to be rotated – it was subsequently rotated every 6 months.

Over time, the partners began to identify the gains to be had from good partnership working, and relationships between the partners improved. The Crime and Disorder Reduction partnership was a particularly good example of very good achievements through that partnership working.

Two years from its creation, a step-development occurred. Partners accepted the need to cease being inflexible about the various differences which existed among the partner organisations, and the partnership agreed to split the general partnership meetings from the management meetings. This model had been successful, with good workmanlike management meetings of professional leaders, and more seminar-style meetings of the wider partnership, all of which had helped to improve shared understanding. At the present time, the BFP had a good breadth of membership and was working very efficiently and effectively. The operation of BFP had also been commended by the Audit Commission in their Comprehensive Performance Assessment reports on the Council.

2. Is there a set agreed agenda of work?

Yes. The wider partnership is behind the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and the LAA. This is constantly improving further, and it is conceivable that partnership budgets might be provided by central government in the future.

3. Do all the partners 'buy in' to the concept of the partnership?

Cllr Bettison said that, having had some distinct partnership-oriented achievements, the partners have increasingly shown more confidence in the partnership and greater willingness to be active members. It is not a partnership of equals, and never would be, but it has become a partnership of equal wills. Smaller organisations within the partnership had less flexibility than the larger organisations to move resources between priorities. This does not necessarily impede the partnership as a whole, and common aims had been forged.

Tensions had arisen from the partner organisations having differing organisational roles.

4. Budget issues

The wider partnership discusses funding, though the officers in the BFP Board manage the detailed finance discussions. There is a competitive element to budgeting, with the Council having to ensure that Bracknell Forest secures its fair share of partners' work, whilst empathising with the pressures on partners from other boroughs. Openness and honesty in this process is a key attribute and requirement, reinforced, for example by the Chief Constable's willingness to appear at a full Council meeting each year.

The long-term movement is towards a pooling of partnership budgets and priorities, an issue of much interest. This is easier in principle than practice. This is more likely to achieve more in terms of greater outputs than in generating cash savings.

5. Where are the outcomes for residents?

Councillor Bettison said that the move towards greater participation in the BFP had led to achievements being judged from a collective partnership perspective. There is a real risk that some successes depend on the actions of individuals who may be replaced. Thus it is important for successful outcomes to belong to the wider partnership as a whole. The visible and tangible successes of the partnership mean there is a good prospect that any new individual in the partnership should give the same commitment to the partnership as their predecessors. This is a vulnerability for any partnership, but not an actual weakness of the BFP.

On crime reduction, Thames Valley Police clearly saw real value with the partnership, and this was replicated to varying degrees elsewhere. The powerful contribution made by the current Area Commander, and the success achieved by those efforts, meant that there will be pressure on any successor to continue that same level of commitment.

6. Partnership scrutiny

The concept of scrutiny is gradually spreading through the partnership. It has yet to be tested to any great extent. If handled sensitively, it should not damage relationships.

Councillor Edger said the O&S Commission were likely to carry out a survey of governance and accountability arrangements operating in partner organisations. This would require an explanation of the various arrangements and help partners understand each other's differences, for example the need of private sector partners to generate a profit for their shareholders. Any approaches and interviews needed to be handled sensitively and constructively.

It was particularly important to share success through scrutiny with the Council's partners.

7. What is the council getting out of this?

Councillor Bettison said that the Council had not had good value from the BFP in its early days, when it was very resource-intensive for the Council. This had since changed markedly, with the Council getting good value, with most work being carried out by the Themed partnerships. There is evidence of sound performance management by the BFP Board, and a shared sense of achievement.

8. Would Overview and Scrutiny cause any problems which would impact on the partnerships?

Members need to be equipped to carry out partnership scrutiny in a robust yet positive manner. It would be incumbent on both members and officers to demonstrate that O&S had been helpful, including the celebration of success (by all partners), as well as challenging any under-performance.

Councillor Edger confirmed that O&S would look to co-opt external people onto O&S reviews when reviewing the work of Themed partnerships.

The Working Group thanked Councillor Bettison for attending the meeting.