



Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2006



February 2007

Table of Contents

| | Page Number | |
|---|--|----|
| 1 | Introduction by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission | 1 |
| 2 | What is Overview and Scrutiny at Bracknell Forest? | 2 |
| 3 | Overview and Scrutiny Structure | 4 |
| 4 | Overview and Scrutiny Commission | 5 |
| 5 | Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel | 7 |
| 6 | Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel | 9 |
| 7 | Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel | 11 |
| 8 | Lifelong Learning and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel | 13 |
| 9 | Future Developments | 15 |
| | Appendix 1 - Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Panel Membership and Meeting Dates | 17 |
| | Appendix 2 - Possible Main Topics for Overview and Scrutiny in 2007/08 | 19 |

Further Information

Please contact Bracknell Forest Borough Council's Performance and Scrutiny team on 01344 352283 to obtain this report in another language, or if you would like any further information on this report, or to request copies of any of the individual reports referred to.

For further information on the work of Overview and Scrutiny in Bracknell Forest, please visit our website on <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/scrutiny>

1 INTRODUCTION BY COUNCILLOR MICHAEL SARGEANT, CHAIRMAN OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

I have great pleasure in presenting this annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny work of Bracknell Forest Borough Council in 2006, as required by Article 6.02 of the Council's Constitution.

It has been a busy and productive year for the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and its Panels. This work is described in this report. All in all, I believe this demonstrates that we have achieved our goals of:


- Holding the Executive to account;
- Ensuring that decision-making is transparent and the Executive makes the best decisions in the interests of residents;
- Providing an input to policy development; and
- Being a 'critical friend' and reflecting the local voice.

The importance of Overview and Scrutiny cannot be overstated, and all Councillors – not just those in the Executive - must have the role of scrutiny firmly established in their minds as an independent tool of local administration that has a positive contribution to make in the way this Borough is governed. If this factor is ignored outcomes could be disadvantageous to the smooth and harmonious administration we all want to establish.

Looking ahead to the 2007/08 municipal year, we face exciting new challenges flowing from the *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill*, and the *Police and Justice Act*, both of which signal central Government's increased confidence in – and recognition of the importance of - effective Overview and Scrutiny. We will also have an expanded role in relation to the Bracknell Forest (Local Strategic) Partnership. We want to build up our overview and scrutiny of other public bodies providing much needed services to the Borough and its residents, for example the National Probation Service and the Department for Work and Pensions. We will also want to provide good induction training to any new members of Overview and Scrutiny, arising from the forthcoming Local Government elections.

I must thank the members of the Council's Executive for their constructive involvement in Overview and Scrutiny, and particularly the Leader for his active support for our work. We are here to hold the Executive to account, but I consider that we have achieved the right balance of being 'cordial but not cosy', not shirking from giving criticism where it is warranted, but also acting in partnership to maintain good governance and to further the interests of the Borough at large.

I will also take this opportunity to pay tribute to my fellow Councillors, also the Church, Parent Governor and Teacher representatives who are members of the Commission and the Panels for their work on Overview and Scrutiny during the year. Our effectiveness has also relied on the willing input from officers of the Council and partner organisations, for which I and my fellow members are very appreciative. Finally, we have also been constantly supported by a dedicated team of officers in the Chief Executive's Office, who have been a great help to us. In short, Overview and Scrutiny is truly a team effort in Bracknell Forest and I am confident that this continued support will stand us in excellent stead for developing Overview and Scrutiny into the future.



2 WHAT IS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY AT BRACKNELL FOREST?

2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny function forms part of the new political arrangements featuring a Leader/Executive model with an Overview and Scrutiny split implemented by the Council in 2001 as part of the modernisation process stemming from the Local Government Act 2000. Article 6 and Procedure Rules 4.5 of the Council's Constitution explain the process by which Overview and Scrutiny operates at Bracknell Forest. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Panels have two main functions, namely, holding the Executive to account ("scrutiny") and conducting policy reviews into areas of the Council's services with a view to making recommendations for improvement ("overview"). Operating in a similar vein to select committees in the House of Commons, the work of Overview and Scrutiny falls broadly into the following areas:

- Hold the Council's Executive (its main decision making body) to account in the public interest to enable more transparent and effective decision making. This includes the power to 'call-in' unimplemented decisions and refer them back to the decision maker for reconsideration with possible suggestions for improvement.
- Support the development of effective policies and initiatives which have a beneficial impact on the community through policy review and development. Policy reviews are generally undertaken by working groups of the Commission and Panels comprising a small number of Councillors and co-opted members who undertake investigative work, consult stakeholders, take evidence and carry out site visits before formulating recommendations for improvement.
- Contribute to continuous improvement in services through Best Value reviews. Monitoring of the implementation of improvement plans associated with Best Value reviews is a role for Overview and Scrutiny.
- Have a positive impact on the work and outcomes of external agencies and providers of public services. Although work to date has concentrated mainly on health providers it is intended that scrutiny of other organisations which provide services to residents of the Borough will increase in the future.
- Aid Councillors in engaging with their communities and playing the role of community representatives and leaders.

2.2 The work of the Commission and Panels is steered by a work programme which is agreed by the Commission at the beginning of each municipal year in consultation with the Executive and Corporate Management Team. The work programme features policy reviews and performance monitoring in relation to policy objectives, performance targets and particular service areas through regular performance/audit reports and budget consultation and monitoring.

2.3 It is intended that Overview and Scrutiny be non-partisan and party politics should take a back-seat enabling a more consensual approach to be adopted.

