

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
22 SEPTEMBER 2008
7.30 - 9.08 PM**



Present:

Councillors Beadsley, Burrows, Finnie (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Fleming, Mrs McCracken, McLean, Mrs Pile and Mrs Ryder

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Brunel-Walker and Leake

Also Present:

Councillor Mrs Ballin, Executive Member for Planning and Transportation

Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Leisure, Corporate Services and Public Protection

Vincent Paliczka, Director of Environment, Culture and Communities

Simon Birch, Chief Officer: Planning and Transport

Mark Devon, Chief Officer: Leisure and Culture

Steve Loudoun, Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection

Simon Hendey, Chief Officer: Housing

Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance and Scrutiny

Colin Griffin, Community and Environmental Development Team Leader

Vice-Chairman in the Chair

16. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 23 June 2008 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

Minute 6, Representative from the Tenants and Leaseholders Association

The Tenants and Leaseholders Association had been written to and advised that no external representatives would be co-opted onto the Panel. This decision and its reasons were accepted.

Minute 9, Bracknell Forest Homes

Bracknell Forest Homes had been asked about its protocol for complaints and concerns and, in response, advised officers that there was a protocol in place and a free phone line for residents to call if there were any issues. It was not felt necessary, at this time, to review protocols that were already in place.

Minute 9, Punctuality Improvement Agreement with First Buses

The Panel was advised that the agreement was now with First Buses to sign and that actions in the agreement were now being implemented.

Minute 9, Catering Contract

The Panel was advised that negotiations were ongoing for a catering contract covering the whole of the Authority. Officers would report back to a future meeting.

Minute 10, Housing Strategy Working Group

The Panel noted that the Housing Strategy Working Group had met on two occasions since its last meeting and a third was planned. Officer support was in place.

17. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor Mrs McCracken declared a personal interest as the spouse of the Executive Member for Leisure, Corporate Services and Public Protection.

There were no other declarations of interest made at the meeting nor indications that Members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

18. Departmental Overview and Performance

The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities gave a presentation in respect of departmental performance with reference to the Performance Monitoring Report (PMR) for the 1st Quarter 2008/09. The presentation outlined the Department's finances as at July 2008, highlighted variances on revenue and identified capital projects that would be carried forward. Staffing issues, changes to the Department following the Council restructure, key highlights and a forward look were also included. Members were advised that a final version of the report would be circulated following the meeting.

The Panel was advised that 17.95% of the Capital Budget had been spent and the anticipated year end spend was 99.47% with 0.53% being carried forward. Officers were being encouraged to look forward throughout the year so it was anticipated that all monies would be spent by the end of the year.

The Panel noted that because of the retirement of the Shire Horses, there was a £15,000 saving on the budget and land charges income had fallen because a number of people were carrying out their own searches, so there was a shortfall of £120,000. Furthermore, targets for Smart Connect had not been achieved, mainly because they had been set to an aspirational rather than realistic level, so there was a budget pressure of £100,000. There was a positive variance on Planning Delivery Grant and the Council had received £342,000 more than expected. Consequently, the revenue budget was forecast to be £107,000 in credit.

The Panel was advised that there was a potential budget pressure arising from Downshire Golf Course because due to adverse weather, there had been fewer visitors than predicted over the summer. Two positive issues providing cost savings were emerging from concessionary fares and the waste PFI and these would be reported on at the next meeting.

The Panel was advised that the staff vacancy rate was 8.91% and that it was not appropriate to compare this to previous quarters, at this stage, as the Department headcount had increased significantly following the re-organisation in April 2008. In

addition, the functions within each division were different. Sickness absences were being actively managed.

Key features of the last quarter featured the successful establishment of the new department, the 100% completion of staff appraisals by the due date, approval of the recommendation not to outsource leisure facilities, extensive work undertaken on trees, the first public health report being presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and the award of a grant worth £659,000 from the Government in recognition of performance in completing the core strategy and work relate to housing provision. A further highlight was the decision not to proceed with the government initiative of free swimming for over 60s and 16s and under. This decision had been discussed in depth with the Executive Member, and, although it was considered a positive initiative, the Council had a very large number of people of these ages swimming already, and the grant was only a third of what was required to cover the costs of running such an initiative. Consequently, had the Council participated, the additional costs would have had to be covered by the Council, and, therefore, the public.

The following points arose from Members' questions and comments:

- Due to economic pressures it was noted that housing delivery would be reduced, and this could prevent the Council from achieving a grant award from the HPDG. Members were advised that the target had been reduced in order to be more realistic in the current financial climate. Housing Strategy Initiatives had been delayed but officers were now looking at more creative approaches and how they could help support residents. The new Housing Strategy had been deferred to the Executive meeting in January.
- The Licensing and Safety Committee would be considering comments from the taxi trade at its next meeting following concerns raised about increasing taxi fares.
- The Vice-Chairman congratulated the Department on its successful restructuring and control of expenditure.
- The Director would circulate the estimated date of when the permanent community centre on Jennetts Park would be built.
- The street lights on Mill Lane and Bagshot Road had not worked for the whole of the summer raising concerns from residents. Members were assured that work would commence on Mill Lane in the next few weeks and Bagshot Road shortly after. The delay had been caused because it was more complicated than just changing the bulbs and the Council had to go out to tender for the works involved. The Director agreed to confirm the dates for this.
- Speed assessments on 'B' class roads were technical and Members would be consulted on any proposed changes, with the respective Ward Members consulted first.
- The compulsory purchase order had been agreed for the Town Centre. The Chief Executive would be meeting with BRP shortly to determine what impact, if any, the current credit crunch had on the Bracknell town centre development and its phasing.
- The figures on complaints were incorrect; there had been three stage 1 complaints in relation to planning processes, two stage 2 complaints and one ongoing stage 3 complaint.
- The Chief Officer: Leisure and Culture undertook to provide a note on the completion of the handover of Church Hill House.

19. **Climate Change and the Nottingham Declaration**

The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities introduced the report, pointing to the significant new legal requirements, and the very good progress being made by the Council. The Community and Environmental Development Team Leader gave a presentation on the work being carried out by the Council on Climate Change and the Nottingham Declaration. The report updated Members on progress to date and outlined the case for action resulting from the Local Authority Carbon Management Programme.

The Panel was reminded that the Council signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change in February 2007 and that the draft Climate Change Action Plan went to public consultation and finished on 12 September 2008. Comments arising from this had been positive and no changes were required to the proposed actions.

The Panel was advised of the key drivers for climate change and carbon management in local authorities. All councils had national indicators directly allocated to climate change and carbon management and these would become increasingly important under the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) inspection regime

The Panel noted that any changes as result of the public consultation would be made and the Executive would be asked to approve this at its next meeting in October. It was noted that the Action Plan did not include any specific CO₂ reduction targets but included the Council's participation in the Carbon Trust's Local Authority Carbon Management Programme (LACMP).

The Panel noted that the Council would be required, from 1 October 2008, to display Energy Certificates (DECs) at 54 of its buildings. The Energy Manager was now trained and able to issue these but the first round had been carried out externally. Examples of the DECs, as well as the slides, would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

The following points arose from Members' questions and comments:

- The Council would implement a number of projects to reduce emissions, such as provision of motorised pool covers at leisure centres, SAFED driver training, car share schemes, bike schemes, systems link energy management software and implementing a desktop printing strategy. Furthermore, the working group, consisting of representative around the Council, was looking at easy, simple and low cost ways of reducing emissions within departments.
- The Council was committed to taking part in the LACMP as there were financial incentives and rewards that could be gained from achieving positive results.
- The Environment Agency administered and monitored the programme on behalf of DEFRA.
- The Council had carried out energy audits of specific buildings. Recommendations had arisen from these reports which had not yet been implemented but were included in the action plan.

20. **Bracknell Forest Borough Local Development Framework**

The Panel received a report on progress being made by the Council with the Local Development Framework. Members noted that the Core Strategy had been very successful and that a sixth Local Development Scheme (LDS) had been reported to

the Executive on 18 September 2008 with a recommendation that it be accepted for submission to and approval by the Government Office for the South East.

The Committee noted that several documents were required to be submitted with the LDS, split between Development Plan documents and Supplementary Planning Documents and the report detailed progress in completing these. Members were advised that the preparation of the LDS and the necessary documents that resulted from this had been subject to examination by the Development Framework Steering Group prior to consideration by the Executive. Members were pleased to note that the Government Office for the South East had been advised of the emerging content of the LSD and had, so far, raised no objection.

The Chief Officer: Planning & Transportation undertook to provide an update on the Supplementary Planning Document.

21. Working Group Report on Road Traffic Casualties

The Panel noted that on 17 July 2008 the Overview and Scrutiny Commission had received the formal response from the Executive Member for Planning and Transportation to the report from the Working Group. Members were thanked for their work and confirmed its agreement that the Working Group be disbanded.

22. Working Group Updates

The Panel noted the updates from the Waste, Street Cleansing/Street Scene, Road Traffic Casualties and Housing Strategy Working Groups. Members noted that the final report of the Street Cleaning Working Group had been completed and this would be circulated to Members in due course.

23. Overview and Scrutiny Quarterly Progress Report

The Panel noted a report outlining the activities of all of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the Commission.

The Panel asked about the status of the government's recent White Paper and was advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission was drafting a response to the consultation, which would be submitted by the end of October 2008.

Having questioned the status of the Supplementary Planning Document, Members would receive an update at a future meeting of the Panel.

24. Executive Forward Plan

The Panel noted items on the Executive Forward Plan relating to the Environment, Cultures and Communities Department. The Chief Officer: Planning and Transport undertook to clarify the purpose of the item in relation to the Refuse and Recycling.

CHAIRMAN