

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
08 DECEMBER 2009
7.30 - 8.50 PM**



Present:

Councillors Finnie (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Beadsley, Finch, Mrs Fleming, Leake, Mrs McCracken, Mrs Angell (Substitute) and Brossard (Substitute)

Executive Members:

Councillors Mrs Hayes

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs Barnard and Simonds

Also Present:

Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Scrutiny)
Lorraine Collins, Early Years Strategy & Development Manager
Mark Devon, Chief Officer: Leisure & Culture
Jane Eaton, Chief Performance & Resources Officer
Kaylee Godfrey, Communications Officer
Colin Griffin, Team Manager Climate Control
Simon Hendey, Chief Officer: Housing
Bev Hindle, Chief Officer: Planning and Transport
Steve Loudoun, Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection
Vincent Paliczka, Director Environment, Culture & Communities
Graham Pockett, Parks and Countryside Development Officer
Emma Silverton, Democratic Services Officer
Ann Symonds, Environment Agency

31. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Panel noted the attendance of the following Substitute Members:

Councillor Brossard for Councillor Simonds

Councillor Mrs Angell for Councillor Mrs Barnard

32. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on the 08 September 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor Mrs McCracken declared a personal interest as the spouse of the Executive member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection and the Chairman of the Cultural Partnership.

34. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

35. Performance Monitoring Report

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 2nd quarter of 2009/10 ending 30 September 2009. The presentation outlined the Department's revenue and finances at October 2009. Staffing issues, the new Choice Based Lettings process, the Benefits Service, key highlights and the forward look were also included.

The Panel noted that there was a £1,220,000 change in the Gross Revenue Budget. An increased income expectation of £70,000 meant a Net Revenue Budget of £1,150,000. Major revenue variances included a fall in leisure sites catering consumables, costs for a planning development appeal, reduction in parking charge income and payment of a bill from Thames Valley Water which had not been charged for the past ten years. It was noted that this was an error by Thames Valley Water and that the size of the original bill had been significantly reduced.

The Panel was advised that the number of staff leaving posts had reduced compared to the same time last year. The average vacancy factor was slightly higher than normal as when a post became vacant a months gap was left before new recruitment in order to make savings. Overall the number of vacancies had dropped by 2 for the quarter.

BFC: My Choice was the name for the Council's new Choice Based Lettings system. Re-registration and new applications had resulted in just over 30,000 applications. Loading of applications on to the new system was to be completed by the end of December 2009.

The Benefits Service 2009/10 Improvement Plan was in place. Evaluation of the new Benefit IT Administration System was taking place with a decision to be made by the end of December 2009.

A key theme for quarter 2 had been customer care, providing a quality service was a high priority for the department. Other highlights included a significant number of procurements undertaken, an education campaign by Trading Standards regarding the selling of products unlawfully to underage children and the transfer of community centres to Corporate Services.

It was noted that a further waste satisfaction survey would be undertaken in the Borough.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- It was too early to determine whether the refuse collection contract would be in conjunction with neighbouring authorities. A joint contract would be considered if appropriate.
- Concerns over the National Grid Gas works in Priestwood had been addressed with management to ensure the same problems did not arise in future planned works.
- Work in relation to the car park management contract was not yet finalised and would take in to account the need to have flexible car parking

arrangements during the construction of the Bracknell Healthspace as the contractors would be managed by Bracknell Forest Council.

- Contractors would be on site at Priory Fields to implement remedial works to the sports pitches which should be completed for autumn 2010. It was requested that the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel be advised of any delays/changes to the schedule of works to develop sports pitches at Priory Fields.
- Although officers were unaware of any slippage in the Bracknell railway station forecourt works, implementation of the associated lighting scheme would extend into the New Year.
- Bracknell Forest had a high housing allocation and potential to deliver new homes and was waiting to be advised of proposals for the future development of the former Staff College site.
- The Panel would like further details to be provided on estimated dates for the connecting path development at Ringmead.

The Panel congratulated officers on having no households in Bed and Breakfast accommodation which had resulted in a better service for residents and savings.

The Panel congratulated officers and the Director on their successful management of the Department's performance and budget.

36. Review of the Climate Change Partnership

As part of the agreed approach to Overview and Scrutiny of the Bracknell Forest Partnership, the Panel received a completed questionnaire detailing the Climate Change Partnership's Governance, performance management, financial management, and relating issues. The Partnership's terms of reference and membership list were also received.

The Panel received an oral presentation from Ann Symonds, Chairman of the Climate Change Partnership (CCP) highlighting Bracknell Forest's approach to climate change and the work of the Partnership to date.

The Panel noted that the main focus of the CCP was to promote a reduction in CO₂ emissions and to reduce waste. Encouraging businesses and residents was key to achieving both these goals.

The CCP was established in March 2009 and had held 4 meetings at which around 15 representatives from 28 organisations in the Borough attended.

The Panel noted that involvement and awareness raising of climate change matters with young people was an important area of focus. The CCP supported the Eco Schools Program and would be meeting with children in 2010 to further promote climate change work. In Bracknell Forest over 50% of the schools were taking part in this initiative and Sandy Lane Primary School was the first school to be awarded the Eco Schools Green Flag award. A list of the schools participating and not participating in the Eco Schools Project in Bracknell Forest would be provided to Panel Members.

The CCP intended to develop any initiatives that came out of the current Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen and take them forward in the borough where appropriate.

37. **Playbuilder Project**

The Panel received a presentation from Lorraine Collins, Early Years Strategy & Development Manager in respect of the Playbuilder Project. The Playbuilder Project had been developed through the Local Play Strategy 2007 and the National Play Strategy 2008.

Funding for the Playbuilder Project had come from the Department for Children, Schools and Families to develop play spaces. Between April 2009 and March 2010 Bracknell Forest had £1,113,786 of Capital and £44,315 of Revenue. A minimum of 22 play sites need to be developed over 2 years. Bi-monthly ratings by Regional Advisers of the National Strategies assessed the project with Bracknell Forest receiving green ratings through out the project to date.

Guidance and support for the project was being provided by Play England, Design for Play, Managing Risk in Play Provision and Implementing the Play Strategy. Based upon guidance the play sites needed to be:

- Open access, free of charge and enable children to come and go as they pleased
- Comply with Disability Discrimination Act legislation
- Be made attractive to girls and inclusive of minority ethnic groups
- Access to and from sites must be considered and improved where necessary.

Throughout the project the team had engaged with a large number of stakeholders which had been very beneficial to the project. An effective and robust Play Partnership was established working closely with Parish and Town Councils to achieve the best outcomes. Widespread consultation had included visits to existing sites, play rangers talking to park users including children and discussions with the local communities.

12 sites had been identified for development in year 1 of the project, a map of which was tabled at the meeting, with a further 11 sites to be identified for year 2. It was noted that Bracknell Forest Ward members would like to be involved in identifying Year 2 sites.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- Project officers were confident that all year 1 sites would be completed on time and ready for use by the end of March 2010.
- In some cases Parish and Town Council's were adding match funding to increase the budget of specific play sites.
- Lighting would allow better use of the play sites particularly in the winter. This suggestion would be passed on to the play area design teams.

The Playbuilder Project's focus was increasing parental and child confidence in using the sites. Awareness campaigns and training for a range of public sector workers including teachers, extended schools co-ordinators, community police officers and leisure staff would be provided.

The Panel thanked Lorraine Collins for her excellent presentation and looked forward to seeing the results of year 1 and becoming more involved in the development of year 2 play sites.

38. Executive Response to 'Waste Not Want Not' - Review of Waste and Recycling

The Panel considered the Executive response to the Review of Waste and Recycling Services undertaken by a working group of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

The Executive agreed the responses to the Working Group's report at its meeting on 20 October 2009. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission noted the Executive's response at its meeting on 19 November 2009 and asked the Panel to continue to monitor how the recommendations were implemented, particularly in relation to contamination of recyclable material and the availability of brown bins / green waste bags to residents.

Arising from discussion the follow points were noted:

- Further to the response to recommendation 5.3, the Panel was advised that the Council had a small stock of 140 litre wheeled bins to provide a range of recycling options for residents. Although the Council sought to persuade residents to opt for the smaller sized bins, this was not appropriate in all cases as a larger bin provided more capacity for recycling.
- The Executive member for the Environment elaborated on the response to recommendation 5.5 by advising that the Council was consulting with neighbouring authorities and contractors to investigate beneficial waste and recycling schemes and would implement these where appropriate.
- The poor performing areas referred to in the response to recommendation 5.6 were Forest Park, The Warren and Crown Wood. Tonnage of green waste in these areas was likely to be low as there was not a significant amount of green space.
- Further to recommendation 5.11, the Council was looking at ways to engage with small businesses on waste and recycling matters and was also investigating ways of working with the voluntary sector.

The Executive member for the Environment expressed her gratitude to the Working Group for its work in this area.

39. Executive Response to the Review of the Implementation of the Housing and Council Tax Benefits Improvement Plan

The Panel considered the Executive response to the Review of the Implementation of the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Improvement Plan undertaken by a working group of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

The Executive agreed the responses to the Working Group's report at its meeting on 15 September 2009. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission noted the Executive's response at its meeting on 24 September 2009 and expressed concerns around the need to rationalise and clarify the content of letters sent to claimants, unknown conditions relating to loans and advances and the limited budget for Discretionary Housing Allowance.

The Housing and Council Tax Benefits Working Group held a meeting with officers to discuss these issues and receive an update on progress of the new implementation plan. The working group agreed it would meet again in the future to look at the Audit Commission's inspection of the Benefit Services results and to look at further progress of the 2009/10 Implementation Plan.

40. **Working Groups Update**

The Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the Working Groups Update Report.

41. **Overview and Scrutiny Quarterly Progress Report**

The Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the Overview and scrutiny activity over the period August to October 2009, set out in the Overview and Scrutiny - Quarterly Progress Report.

It was noted that Councillor Mrs Fleming was a member of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Overview and Scrutiny Working Group.

The Panel was advised that the Benefit Service were procuring a new computer system in conjunction with Corporate Services and that this maybe an area for the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to review.

42. **Executive Forward Plan**

Further to a query in respect of Executive Forward Plan item I019022 which related to a strategic housing land availability assessment, the Panel was advised that this item concerned the factual process of delivering new housing within existing urban areas towards meeting the Borough's housing delivery targets. The remaining Executive Forward Plan items relating to Environment, Culture and Communities were noted.

The next meeting of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be held on 12 January 2010 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Easthampstead House.

CHAIRMAN