

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
11 JANUARY 2011
7.30 - 9.12 PM**



Present:

Councillors Finnie (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Barnard, Beadsley, Bowers, Finch, Mrs Fleming, Leake and Mrs McCracken

Executive Members:

Councillors Mrs Ballin, Birch, Mrs Hayes and McCracken

Also Present:

Andrea Carr, Policy Officer

Mark Devon, Chief Officer: Leisure & Culture

Janet Dowlman, Head of Environmental Services

Jane Eaton, Chief Performance & Resources Officer (Environment, Culture & Communities)

Councillor Bob Edger, Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Simon Hendey, Chief Officer: Housing

Bev Hindle, Chief Officer: Planning & Transport

Steve Loudoun, Chief Officer: Environment & Public Protection

Vincent Paliczka, Director of Environment, Culture & Communities

Alana Razzell, Senior Communications Officer

Eric Redford, Waste Collection Manager

Emma Silverton, Democratic Services Officer

84. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 5 October 2010 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

There were no matters arising.

85. 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.

Councillor Mrs Barnard declared a personal interest as the spouse of the Executive Member for Children & Young People.

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

86. 2011/12 Draft Budget Proposals

The Panel received extracts from the proposed 2011/12 General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme reports relating to Environment, Culture and Communities which were agreed for consultation by the Executive on 14 December 2010. The covering report advised that further savings of over £1m remained to be

found in addition to those identified in the 2011/12 budget proposals subject to consultation, owing to the lateness, complexity and scale of grant reduction of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities introduced the budget proposals which included detailed information on budget pressures and savings, proposed fees and charges, the Capital Programme and proposed Capital Schemes. The Director drew the Panel's attention to the proposed Commitment Budget for 2011/12 to 2014/15.

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

- No areas had been removed from the Commitment Budget for Environment, Culture and Communities, however the Department's commitments had been reviewed in detail and adjusted where necessary. It was agreed that the Director would provide further details of areas adjusted.
- The Borough Treasurer would provide Members with an update on the recovery of the Council's investments in Icelandic banks.
- The rate of car parking charges was set to optimise income from the Council's car parks whilst ensuring no reduction in footfall for the Town Centre. Current charges were set in accordance with the market rate.
- It was expected that Downshire Golf Complex, Car Park Income and Easthampstead Park Conference Centre would experience a decline in income, however Downshire Golf Complex and Car park Income would continue to generate a surplus in 2011/12. Easthampstead Park Conference Centre would realise a loss for the first time primarily due to reduced business use.
- Alternative uses for Downshire Golf Complex had been considered in the past but had not been viable. Selling the Complex had been considered in the current fiscal year, however the Department had been advised that it was not the right time to release the asset to the market. The Downshire Golf Complex currently made an operational surplus for the Council.
- Easthampstead Park Conference Centre had previously been run by a private contractor, however this had not been profitable and Bracknell Forest Council had taken over management of the Centre. The Conference Centre was currently held jointly by the 6 unitary authorities in Berkshire on a 20 year contract, which commenced in 1998, after which the Centre would fall to this Council when the possibility of private sector management would be investigated.
- There would be a further reduction of £55,000 in the grant to the Thames Valley Safer Roads Partnership. The Partnership had been reorganised and efficiencies made which meant the same service would be received by Bracknell Forest without a reduction in road safety. The Partnership would be retaining speed cameras as they were considered to be a valuable safety feature.
- A £30,000 cost for dog control was due to an increase in the number of stray dogs, which the Council was legally obliged to rescue and home, and was not related to the post of Dog Warden which had been deleted as part of last year's budget savings.
- Opportunities to make reductions to the Council's Arts Development function had been pursued. The Council would be working closely with partners such as South Hill Park to deliver the arts function in Bracknell Forest.
- Additional income received by Forest Care was as a result of the service taking on new corporate clients such as neighbouring local authorities and an increase in client numbers.

- The Commitment Budget contribution to the Sandhurst Freedom March in 2012 had been agreed by the Executive previously.
- The fees for Development Control reflected current market rates and could be revised next year to meet costs when local fee setting would commence. It was intended that local fee setting would take account of retrospective planning applications.

The Panel noted the draft budget proposals for 2011/12 and agreed that comments made in relation to the Environment, Culture and Communities Department Budget would be passed on to the Executive.

87. **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 2010/11. The presentation outlined the Department's finances as at November 2010, highlighted major variances on revenue and identified capital schemes that would be carried forward. Staffing issues, key highlights and a forward look were also included.

The Panel noted that there was an increase in net revenue of £331,000 which was a result of the Department being given additional areas of responsibility. It was noted that there was a Capital Finance underspend of 1.6%.

Carry forwards identified in the Capital Programme included: the Housing Transfer Receipt, Cemetery and Crematorium Mercury Abatement, South Hill Park Grounds Restoration Project, Programme of Leisure Section 106 Schemes and Highway works.

The Panel was advised that the Department had an average vacancy factor of 8.73%. Overall, vacancies had increased by 5 in the quarter due to little recruitment as part of budget efficiencies in the previous quarter and the vacancy freeze currently in place for non front-line posts.

Key highlights for the Department included: continued work on changes from the new Government's announcements, Bracknell Leisure Centre and Coral Reef achieved the Customer Service Excellence Award which had been held continuously since 1993, a Cryptosporidium incident at Coral Reef which had been successfully resolved with an independent inspection noting that the Centre was the best managed water facility they had visited to date, and the announcement of a new Waitrose foodstore in the Town Centre.

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

- Trading Standards & Services had worked with Thames Valley Police to check the weight of goods vehicles driving within the Borough. Over 50% exceeded the maximum weight permitted. The service could not be accessed on a regular basis due to cost and it was not currently known when another check would take place. Officers were developing actions to address the issue and build future checks in to the work programme.
- An improvement notice had been issued to National Grid Gas in relation to poor performance and safety measures on the mains replacement programmes in Bullbrook and Priestwood. Further details of the improvement notice would be provided to Members.
- Re-painting of Worlds End Footbridge had been deferred, however a judgement would need to be made on when to repaint the bridge as it was

part of essential maintenance to prevent large repair costs in the future. The bridge had not been re-painted for a period of 22 years.

Concern was expressed that Ward Members were not fully consulted on the allocation of Section 106 monies. It was agreed that the allocation of Section 106 monies would be sent to all Members for consultation when it was sent to the Parish and Town Council Liaison Group.

The Panel congratulated the Housing Team's Officers on the Homelessness Service which had returned to in-house management from a contracted service resulting in a saving for the Department.

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

88. Door-Stepping Waste Survey

The Panel received a presentation from the Head of Environmental Services and the Waste Collections Manager which detailed the results of the Bracknell Forest Waste Collection Doorstepping Project 2010.

2009/10 Waste Analysis indicated that Crown Wood and Great Hollands had higher landfill and lower recycling levels than other areas in the borough. The Doorstepping exercise was carried out in those areas to obtain clear understanding of the perceptions of residents in relation to what had led to the poor results, to increase participation in recycling and to ensure the best methods of communication about waste issues were used.

Doorstepping and road shows took place in August 2010 with questionnaires used as a basis for information gathering. 8,753 visits resulted in 2,518 residents spoken to which was 31.65% of the local population. Key results from the survey showed that 86.6% used the blue bins for dry recyclables, 83% recycled glass via local recycling sites, 2% thought all plastic could be recycled and 61% thought leaflets were the best form of communication.

Further work on waste recycling would include 'Are you doing it right?' leaflets, promotion of recycling through the new Waste Collection Contract August 2011, Waste Education through schools and Recycling Champions in different parts of the borough.

It was agreed that the full results report from the Doorstepping Survey and the questionnaire used to consult with residents would be circulated to Members of the Panel.

Arising from the subsequent discussion the following points were noted:

- There was a contamination scale for recyclable material. Contamination of over 10% would result in the affected load of waste being rejected from recycling. The contamination rate in Bracknell Forest was currently 14% and contaminants were sent to the Energy from Waste facility rather than landfill.
- A large proportion of contamination occurred when people collected recyclable goods in carrier bags before transporting them to the blue bins. These were then put in the bin full rather than being emptied out of the plastic bag which could not be recycled.
- Future work for the Department would focus on informing people of what to recycle and targeting specific areas. Reusable hemp bags had been

developed for storing recyclables before collection and would be distributed to reduce the number of plastic carrier bags being placed in the blue recycling bins.

- A Waste Education Programme was in place through the schools to increase children's awareness of recycling. Pupils were given the opportunity to visit the material recycling facility. Education and re-enforcing the message were key to increasing recycling in Bracknell Forest.
- Results of the Doorstepping survey showed that 62.4% of residents would like to see supermarkets reduce the amount of food packaging used. Supermarkets were currently working together under the Courtauld Commitment to address packaging nationally and a paper relating to the Commitment would be circulated to Panel Members for information.
- It was suggested that Officers share the Doorstepping information with Waitrose whose headquarters were located in the borough and work with them on a corporate level to address the issue.
- Shredded paper could be put in the blue recycling bins, however it needed to be contained within a paper bag or cardboard box to prevent it falling out of the sorting machine.

The Panel thanked Officers for their presentation, congratulated the Team for the work they had undertaken in encouraging residents to recycle and wished them luck on future projects to increase the awareness of waste collection and recycling.

89. Supporting People Service

The Chief Officer: Housing presented the report which provided an update on progress made on the Supporting People Service since the Supporting People Working Group last met in June 2010.

Two main changes had occurred since the Working Group met; firstly the withdrawal of the administration grant which led to restructuring of the Supporting People Administration Service. The Service had been reduced from two posts to one. This meant less service user reviews would take place however significant efficiencies had been achieved to optimise the service being run. Service providers now entered data themselves reducing the administration pressure.

The cost of the Supporting People Services in 2011/12 was predicted to be £1.739 million which was a 14% reduction in the cost of services but not a 14% reduction in the service provided.

Secondly retendering of the Supporting People Services Contract had been completed. Due to the uncertainty of future funding contracts had been let on a one year basis with an option to extend for a further year.

It was noted that the homelessness floating support service tender had been evaluated and further efficiencies had been secured.

The Panel thanked the Chief Officer for his update and noted the content of the report.

90. Streetscene Supplementary Planning Document and Highways Guide for Development

The Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the report which presented the outcome of the meeting of its Working Group to respond

to the Streetscene Supplementary Planning Document and linked Highways Guide for Development consultation drafts.

91. **Working Group Update Report**

The Panel noted a report providing an update on the Panel's Working Groups.

92. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Panel noted the items on the Executive Forward Plan relating to Environment, Culture and Communities.

CHAIRMAN