

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
24 SEPTEMBER 2013
7.30 - 9.37 PM**



Present:

Councillors Finnie (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Brossard, Ms Brown, Harrison, Ms Miller and Porter

Also Present:

Naveed Aziz, Drainage Engineer
Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Jeanne Capey, Partnership & Strategic Overview Team, Environment Agency
Mark Devon, Chief Officer: Leisure & Culture
Mark Dickinson, Development Planning Manager, Thames Water
Keith Herbert, Field Services Manager, Thames Water
Bev Hindle, Chief Officer: Planning & Transport
Councillor Kensall
Steve Loudoun, Chief Officer: Environment & Public Protection
Hilary Murgatroyd, Local / Regional Government Liaison, Thames Water
Louise Osborn, Emergency Planning Manager
Vincent Paliczka, Director of Environment, Culture & Communities
Amanda Roden, Democratic Services Officer
Melanie Ward, Partnership & Strategic Overview Team, Environment Agency

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs Barnard, Gbadebo, Mrs Ballin and Mrs Hayes

14. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 25 June 2013 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

The Head of Overview and Scrutiny summarised the actions taken on matters which had arisen at the meeting on 25 June.

15. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest relating to any items on the agenda, nor any indications that members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

16. Public Participation

There were no submissions from members of the public in accordance with the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

17. **Flood Risk Management**

The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities introduced the item by reminding members about the Council's Flood Risk Management Strategy. The Emergency Planning Manager summarised the Council's role in partnership with external agencies. Bracknell Forest experienced fewer flooding incidents than nearby boroughs, and priority was given to protecting residential dwellings and highways.

Jeanne Capey and Melanie Ward of the Partnership & Strategic Overview Team at the Environment Agency (EA) gave a presentation on Flood Risk Management.

The Risk Management Authorities were: the EA, Lead Local Flood Authority, District council/Unitary Authority, Internal Drainage Boards, Water Companies, and the Highways Authority.

The role of the EA was to take a strategic overview of flooding and support and co-operate with other risk management authorities in carrying out their functions; Support partnerships at both a strategic and operational level; and Develop a national FRM strategy for flood risk management.

Strategic Partnerships brought together Risk Management Authorities, Strategic leadership, and were important in delivering FWMA requirements and allowing organisations to be efficient and effective.

The EA would develop a National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Risk Management in England; provide a framework for the work of all flood and coastal erosion risk management authorities; set out the long-term objectives for managing flood and coastal erosion risks and the measures proposed to achieve them; and encourage more effective risk management by enabling people, communities, business and the public sector to work together.

Risk management authorities had powers and responsibilities to manage flood risk and work with others to improve the river environment in England and Wales. The EA, local authorities and internal drainage boards were all risk management authorities. The work of risk management authorities often affected riparian owners and people who lived nearby.

The EA had powers and responsibilities to maintain and improve main rivers throughout England and Wales. They also had a responsibility to manage flood risk from main rivers and the sea. Lead Local Flood Authorities had powers to manage flood risk from ordinary watercourses, surface water and groundwater.

Land owners with land adjoining a watercourse had certain rights and responsibilities. In legal terms they were a 'riparian owner' and responsibilities included: maintaining river beds and banks; allowing the flow of water to pass without obstruction; and controlling invasive alien species such as Japanese knotweed.

The main rivers in Bracknell Forest were the Cut which ran along the North and its smaller tributaries, the Bull Brook in the centre of Bracknell and the Blackmoor Stream on the border in North Ascot. Also, the River Blackwater in Sandhurst at the South of the border. There were historic records of main river flooding from the Cut in 1947, 1974 and 1981 and The River Blackwater in 1947.

The EA routinely considered dredging and other types of watercourse management, such as de-silting and vegetation removal, to reduce flood risk. Work was undertaken

where it was: Technically sound, economically viable, and environmentally acceptable and sustainable.

Watercourses were checked yearly by the Asset Inspection and Enforcement team, and they would then highlight any issues to us to inform the land owners. The EA did not own any assets in Bracknell Forest. The EA's priority was to maintain the existing conveyance of the main rivers and where possible increase its efficiency. This would be undertaken through an annual programme of bank and in-channel weed clearance and the removal of obstructions.

The EA had compiled Communities at Risk packs for West Berkshire Local Authorities. The Bracknell Forest pack included a summary of the fluvial flood risk within Bracknell Forest. It showed how the amount of fluvial flood risk compared throughout Bracknell Forest and the other Local Authority areas in Berkshire. It also highlighted the key areas of risk. The risk of flooding in Bracknell Forest had been assessed by the EA as low.

The EA had to produce and publish flood risk information by 22 December 2013 to meet the requirements of the Flood Risk Regulations, which was essentially updating the way the EA published its information. Regulations required the EA to produce 'hazard' and 'risk' maps of where gets wet, the extent, depth or level, flow or velocity; Maps of what gets wet, receptors such as people and infrastructure; and the sources of water, for example, rivers & sea, reservoirs, and surface water (in Flood Risk Areas).

In response to Members' questions, the following points were noted:

- Clearer copies of the images used in the presentation were requested by the Chairman and would be provided to panel members.
- The Bull Brook did not feature in the presentation as it was not designated as a main river.
- Hydromorphological status referred to the status of a river.

Keith Herbert, Field Services Manager, Mark Dickinson, Development Planning Manager, and Hilary Murgatroyd, Local / Regional Government Liaison from Thames Water gave a presentation on Managing Flood Risk in Bracknell Forest.

Thames Water:

- Was the UK's largest water and wastewater services provider;
- Had 14 million customers;
- Had 4,500 employees;
- On average of 2,600m litres of drinking water were supplied each day;
- Had 100 water treatment works;
- Had 350 sewage works treating over 4 billion litres per day;
- Had 66,500 miles of sewer, 2,530 pumping stations and 1.2 million manholes.
- Covered areas between Reading, Swindon, Oxford, and Banbury. It also covered Guildford, and London, but other water companies covered areas in between such as Basingstoke, Luton and Stevenage.

Thames Water was appointed under the Water Industry Act 1991 to be responsible for sewerage and had a duty to provide public sewers and to clean and maintain them, and a duty to provide and extend sewerage systems. There are three types of sewer: Foul water sewers, Surface water sewers, and Combined sewers. Foul water sewers carried water that had been used for cooking, washing and from toilets, to the sewage works. Surface water sewers carried water from roofs, some roads and other

hard standing areas and returned it to a watercourse. Combined sewers carried both (mostly in London).

Types of Flooding included Hydraulic Flooding caused as a result of incapacity within the network and normally linked to excessive rainfall events, and Operational Flooding caused as a result of operational failures such as sewer blockages sewer collapses or pumping station failures.

It was important that customers reported incidents to 0845 920 0800. Operations would be undertaken to investigate and determine the cause; flooding events of less than 1 in 10 would be prioritised; and a scheme to reduce risk of flooding was designed, 1:30. The cost and benefit of the scheme would be calculated and where it met regulatory requirements the scheme could be built.

The network in Bracknell Forest was relatively new and sustainable urban drainage was the approach undertaken. Retention (balancing ponds) in Bracknell Forest attenuated the flow during flash flooding and released rain water slowly. Thames Water had recorded just 68 property floodings in the borough, which was not regarded to be a significant level.

Sewerage issues in the Bracknell Forest area included: operational use of balancing ponds and common problems were silt, vandalism, responsibilities under the Reservoir Act, ownership and usage disputes, algae, and grounds maintenance.

Thames Water were operating a 'Bin It Don't Block It' campaign. 75% of sewer flooding was caused by blockages in the sewer. Inappropriate items included: fat and oil, wet wipes, sanitary items, nappies, kitchen roll, food waste, incontinence products, colostomy bags, cotton wool, cotton buds, razor blades, tights, plasters and bandages, condoms, dental floss, medicines and tablets, engine oil, chemicals and paint.

In response to Member's questions, the following points were noted:

- In Bracknell there was a low level of complaints made regarding sewage issues.
- The flow in balancing ponds should be fairly consistent or not at all. Balancing ponds were inspected every three months but not the flow specifically. There were not many blockages on the surface water network, they were mainly from silting or collapses.
- All flooded properties received priority and the same response to flooding issues.
- The Lead Flood Authority would call on partners when needed and colleagues would work together on an operational basis.
- If people were unsure as to who to contact regarding a flooding issue, they could contact their local council or councillor and be pointed in the right direction, for example, the Environment Agency dealt with main rivers.
- The team at Thames Water were fully engaged in the planning process from extensions to larger developments. They commented regularly on housing developments but did not have statutory consultee status. Thames Water covered 93 local authorities.
- The Environment Agency commented on flood risk and surface water risk.
- There had been vandalism problems and a project had been introduced where signage had been erected at the balancing ponds to try to improve the situation. The aim was to resolve problems with the balancing ponds as

quickly as possible. The community could proactively manage the ponds themselves if they wished.

Councillor Kensall referred to a report he had produced concerning the Bull Brook, and raised three issues in that regard:

- There were concerns about the ownership and responsibility of the Hydro Break and Trash Screen at the Letcombe Square crossing. Thames Water representatives described their routine inspection and maintenance arrangements and undertook to arrange for this part of the watercourse to be cleared again.
- Councillor Kensall referred to the dry balancing pond and connecting water culvert, saying that the culvert was clogged with years of debris, silt, soil, long grass and trees. The bed of the dry balancing pond appeared to him to have risen by at least one metre and was also now clogged with tangled undergrowth and trees. He requested Thames Water to dig out and clear the connecting water culvert as soon as possible and to conduct a survey to establish the capacity of the dry pond area. Thames Water agreed to conduct a survey of the dry pond area.
- Councillor Kensall drew attention to the final trash screen where the stream returned to the surface water sewage system as being on Network Rail land, and asked about ownership, responsibility, and access to this area. The Council's Drainage Officer informed the Panel that he was arranging a separate meeting with all relevant agencies to discuss the issues raised about The Bull Brook Stream.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from the Environment Agency and Thames Water for their presentations.

18. **Departmental Budgetary Position**

The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities gave a presentation on the departmental budgetary position in preparation for the scrutiny of the 2014/15 budget proposals.

The underlying principles of the Budget Strategy were:

- Recognition of political priorities, for example, 'clean and green', and economic development;
- Efficiencies and savings would be taken as early as possible and would not be constrained by financial years;
- Savings would be focussed on efficiencies and the back office and the impact on front line services would be minimised;
- Twin track immediate savings and transformational change;
- Balances would be used in a measured way to facilitate the implementation of savings;
- Business rates from the regenerated town centre would help to bridge the budget gap from 2016.

Planning assumptions included:

- Funding reductions in line with 2014/15 settlement;
- Grant reduction in 2015/16 in line with Spending Round, 10%;
- Pay award 1% in 2014/15 and 2015/16; 2% in 2016/17;
- General inflation (CPI) averages 2.2% throughout the period;

- Pressures consistent with previous year's, £1.5m;
- Council funded capital programme of £6m each year plus £4m in 2014/15 for school capacity.
- Council tax freeze funding equivalent to 1% in 2014/15 and 2015/16 would be accepted, consistent with policy in previous years, but did not preclude a higher increase;
- No allowance for new NHS investment in social care or changes to the New Homes Bonus at this stage;
- £2bn on new NHS investment to support social care announced, but distribution of funding currently uncertain;
- £400m of New Homes Bonus directed towards Single Local Growth Fund and controlled by the Local Enterprise Partnership.

Possibilities for bridging the gap in the 2014/15 budget included:

- Taking a firm line to limit future year's pressures but still reflecting demographic changes and increases in demand for services;
- Increase Council Tax; 1% generates £0.5m, referendum for excessive increases;
- Utilise balances; £8.6m at 31 March 2014, £4.0m minimum prudent balance, £4.6m available but only delay the need for alternative measures
- Identify savings; efficiencies, back office or front line services.

The budget would be consulted on in December 2013 and decisions made in the New Year. The department had been given a savings target of £1.3 million. The proposals for budget cuts were aimed to be satisfactory. The new homes bonus went into general funds.

19. **Quarterly Service Report (QSR)**

The Panel considered the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of departmental performance as reported in the Quarterly Service Report (QSR) for the first quarter of 2013/14 (April to June) relating to Environment, Culture and Communities (ECC).

Major variances in revenue had occurred in areas including The Look Out Car Parking Scheme, Cemetery and Crematorium Income, Traffic Management UTMC, Concessionary Fares, and Planning Policy CIL.

A Capital scheme identified to be carried forward was: Replacing Existing Combined Heating and Power Units. A new one would be procured for Coral Reef but Bracknell Leisure Centre would be carried forward to next year.

Key highlights included: Site Allocations Local Plan (SALP); Town centre development; Work to Twin Bridges roundabout; Recycling Incentive Scheme; Ringway and BFC commended in the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation Partnership Award in respect of the way we seek to deliver the highway service; CIL consultation; Permit scheme; proposing a permit scheme for utility companies to carry out works affecting highways; and as of 06/09/2013 there were 13,449 brown bins registered, a high rate of take-up, and 4,399 blue bins registered.

A Forward Look included: Green Flag Awards; Public realm 2014 would be continued; SALP Implementation (i.e. Delivery of Major Development Sites); Further

refinement of the Residents Parking Scheme; the Bus Strategy would be finalised, and there would be a New Local Plan.

In response to Members' questions, the following points were noted:

- The insourcing of traffic management did not save money but was designed to bring more control as this needed to be fully functioning for the Borough Council before the town centre regeneration was completed.
- Under the recycling incentive scheme, a small number of first redemptions had been made for leisure services in relation to the e-plus card. It would be investigated further as to whether this could be linked with blue bin registration.
- Fees and charges were not the same for blue, brown and green bins. The blue and green bins were owned by the Borough Council but the brown bins were not, therefore there was a charge for repairing the brown bins.

20. **Sustainable Modes of Transport**

This item was deferred.

21. **Maintenance of the Public Realm**

This item was deferred.

22. **Residents' Parking Scheme**

The Chief Officer: Planning and Transport gave a presentation on the Residents' Parking Scheme Consultation in relation to the town centre.

The town centre regeneration would bring an expanding construction workforce, an additional 2,800 jobs, a predicted 8 million shoppers each year, and would involve an inevitable change in parking patterns. There was a need to protect residents living close to the town centre from increased parking pressures.

The scheme needed to be simple for residents to use, accommodating of differing needs (residents / communities), fair in its rules of operation, enforceable by Parking Attendants and cost effective to operate.

The timetable for the scheme was as follows:

By year end:

- Conclude informal stakeholder consultation & analysis;
- Establish principles of a scheme;
- Interim feedback to residents.

Spring 2014:

- Decision to consult formally on a detailed scheme;
- Formal consultation process.

Summer 2014:

- Conclusions from formal consultation;
- Decision on scheme implementation.

Autumn 2014:

- Scheme implementation and operation.

The Panel considered questions regarding, for example, the benefits of a residents' parking scheme, whether there should be a charge for permits and / or a limit on the number of permits issued, the operating hours of the scheme, and the days of the week the scheme would operate.

As a result of the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised by some members:

- The scheme was a good idea generally, but residents should not be disadvantaged from their current position.
- A charge would probably be needed, as in other areas with similar schemes. If there was no charge, the scheme would need to be paid for another way, for example, via revenue funding.
- There should be a limit on the number of permits issued otherwise there would not be enough spaces for people to park in. A permit would be linked to a person's vehicle licence plate and property address and would need to be changed if people changed their vehicle licences or addresses.
- If there was not a charge for permit changes, the initial charge for a permit might need to be slightly higher to cover administration costs of changing permits.
- The range of permits requested per household was likely to be in the region of 0-7, but was expected to be approximately 3 on average. Considerations included multiple ownership and occupancies, businesses run from home, possibly the number of bedrooms, and the need for visitors' passes.
- It was queried whether certain areas could be used for additional parking.
- It was felt that more parking spaces, would mean more cars in the area and potentially more problems surrounding parking.
- It was suggested that every resident who could drive and had a car could be issued with a permit with increased charging for further permits requested, i.e. graduated charging.
- It was queried what people with permits would do if they were unable to park.
- It was suggested that a residents' parking scheme would need to compliment existing schemes and policy.
- The scheme would be enforced to specified hours. The days and hours of enforcement needed further debate and would need to reflect when people were expected to use the town centre, for example.
- It was felt that it would be unfair to residents if they had greater difficulty parking as a result of the scheme.
- Specific parking bays would not be outlined, i.e. with white lines, as this would restrict the number of cars which could park in an area and was felt to be too prescriptive.
- It was suggested that bus services would need to be improved if parking in the town centre was going to be more restricted.
- Whilst the current consultation arose for additional parking pressure near Bracknell town centre, no other parts of the Borough should be excluded from the Council's policies.

The Panel concluded that there were many policy issues to explore and resolve before decisions could be taken on a residents' parking scheme.

23. Local Development Framework - Update Report

The Chief Officer: Planning and Transport gave an update on the Local Development Framework and Local Development Scheme.

Site allocations were being implemented, and the Local Development Framework would be considered at the next meeting of the Parish and Town Council Liaison Group to gauge the intentions of the parish and town councils in Bracknell in relation to neighbourhood plans. Bracknell Town Council intended to do a neighbourhood plan. There would be a bit for finite funding from the government with upwards of £20,000 for each area but bidding would not be undertaken until areas were designated.

24. Revised Statement of Community Involvement

The Chief Officer: Planning and Transport gave an overview on the public consultation in respect of the Revised Statement of Community Involvement prior to its subsequent approval by the Executive. The consultation was underway at present.

25. Working Groups

The Panel received an update in respect of the Panel's Working Group reviewing the Borough's Bus Strategy and considered when to establish a new working group to undertake the next piece of review work.

There was a proposed future review of Cultural Services offered in the Borough. Councillor Ms Brown expressed an interest in being on this working group, and officers would contact other members to establish their possible interest.

26. Executive Key and Non-Key Decisions

The Panel noted the forthcoming Executive Key and Non-Key Decisions relating to Environment, Culture and Communities.

In response to a query about Executive Decisions, it was noted that a Call-In could only be made by law after an Executive Decision had been made but if there were concerns it was better to raise them earlier.

Item I043082

In relation to the consultation on revised requirements relating to planning applications for on-shore oil and gas, the views of the Planning Committee had been sought, and Panel members could respond to the consultation directly.

Concerns, for example, regarding fracking would form part of the response to the consultation and concerns would be shared.

CHAIRMAN