

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL**

11 JULY 2017

7.30 - 9.25 PM



Present:

Councillors Porter (Vice-Chairman), Brossard, Finnie, Mrs Ingham, Mrs McKenzie, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle and Mrs Mattick

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Angell and Mrs Angell

Executive Members:

Councillor Mrs Hayes MBE and Turrell

Also Present:

Andrea Carr, Overview and Scrutiny Officer
Linda Gizzie, Cemetery and Crematorium Manager
Andrew Hunter, Chief Officer: Planning, Transport & Countryside
Damian James, Head of Performance and Resources
Steve Loudoun, Chief Officer: Environment & Public Protection
Vincent Paliczka, Director of Environment, Culture & Communities
Councillor Peacey

153. Election of Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Angell be elected Chairman of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2017/18 Municipal Year.

154. Appointment of Vice Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Porter be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the 2017/18 Municipal Year.

COUNCILLOR PORTER IN THE CHAIR

155. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 7 March 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Arising from minute 148 [Design Supplementary Planning Document] the Panel noted that information had been circulated to members regarding the maximum number of satellite dishes permitted on homes.

156. **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

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

157. **Urgent Items of Business**

There were no urgent items of business.

158. **Public Participation**

No submissions had been made by members of the public under the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

159. **Highways Maintenance Contract: Annual Report**

The Panel considered a report on the second year's performance of Ringway Infrastructure Services Ltd (RIS), who were appointed as the Council's Highways, Maintenance and Works Contractor on 1 October 2014.

The level of performance of the contract was monitored through the use of key performance indicators (KPI's), which if successfully met could result in the award of an additional year on the contract. Accordingly, following another satisfactory year, the contract had been extended and the original seven year contract would now run for nine years until 2023. The continuity was to the benefit of both parties and RIS had the security to invest in the contract with confidence.

The Panel also considered the Ringway Annual Report to the Council together with a resume of the issues dealt with by the Management Board to ensure a satisfactory performance. Actions included:

- Measures to embed the necessary changes required in the early months of the new contract;
- Taking on the challenges presented by the town centre works, including working with other contractors; and
- Recovery of the position in relation to initial underperformance in some KPI's to reach the required standard by the year end.

Three particular projects from 2016 were highlighted:

- The Coral Reef Highway Scheme and A322 Bagshot Road resurfacing
- The LED street lighting project
- The Town Centre Redevelopment works

Arising from questions and discussion, the Panel noted that the contractor had been able to deliver approximately £32k of savings through efficiencies, and that through the contractors 'buying power' the LED street lighting project would realise around £400k of savings. The Traffic Management target of a maximum 4% of Fixed Penalty Notices issued on permits granted would reduce from 4% to 3% for the year ahead, since the 2016 figure had amounted to just 0.74%.

The Panel noted the report and asked that thanks be passed onto David Gibby, the Regional Director for Ringway, for the very satisfactory level of performance.

160. **Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Joint Strategic Partnership Board, Income And Spending**

The Panel considered a report about the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), which covered parts of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire, with particular reference to the spending of money to mitigate the impact that development may have on it.

The SPA was protected by international law, as well as EU legislation and planning policy, as it was a rare example of lowland heath which was home to three important bird species that nest and breed there. This required the Council to ascertain that any development in Bracknell Forest (and likewise the 11 other local authorities which had part of the SPA within their boundaries) would not result in harm to the integrity of the SPA. Relevant planning applications were subject to an assessment which could determine that avoidance or mitigation measures were required. The Council's policy set out a two-pronged strategy to mitigate the impact of residential development within a zone extending between 400 metres and up to 7 kilometres from the edge of the SPA by:

- Provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs), new or upgraded existing open space to divert recreation activity away from the designated SPA.
- Payment of Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) contributions – financial contributions paid by developers to Natural England which were spent on matters such as wardening the SPA and monitoring the SPA Strategy across the region.

The Council had facilitated some residential development by providing access to its own SANGs. A development needed to be within a specific distance of a SANG in order to use it for mitigation. Strategic SANGs were open space land, owned or managed by the Council, where developers paid financial contributions towards their enhancement and long term management. There were also bespoke SANGs which were new open spaces provided mostly by large developments where the developer upgraded part of the land to SANG status, usually transferring it to Council ownership with maintenance sums to guarantee its long term future.

The report described how the funds were collected for the maintenance of the Strategic SANGs, of which there were six located across the Borough, with two further to come forward in the next two to three years. Each Strategic SANG had a Management Plan, agreed with Natural England, covering works to enhance the land and such measures as new footpaths, planting, signage, interpretation boards and bins. The mitigation amounts collected were divided into four funds: open space enhancements; in perpetuity maintenance; administration and education; and facilitation; which were managed by the officers and overseen by Executive Members. Details of the amounts in each fund and the spending carried out were contained in the report.

All developments made financial contributions towards SAMM measures which were calculated on a per bedroom basis and secured in S106 agreements. The contributions received by the Council were transferred to Hampshire County Council to spend in accordance with the agreement between Natural England and the local authorities affected by the SPA. The project was overseen by a Joint Strategic Partnership Board, a cross-authority group; Councillor Turrell was the Council's elected representative on the Board.

The Panel noted the report, following answers to questions to clarify a number of points.

161. Cemetery And Crematorium Update

The Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection made a presentation to the Panel about the extensions and improvements being implemented at the Cemetery and Crematorium. The capital programme contained a sum of £1.3m to fund the following improvements which would increase capacity at the Crematorium:

- Provision of a second chapel
- Additional car parking space
- A new area for floral tributes
- Landscaping, new paths etc.

The improvements had been planned in consultation with the funeral directors as the primary users of the cemetery and crematorium. Some works, for instance the increase of 34 car parking spaces, had been completed while the construction of the new chapel was at an early stage and currently about five weeks behind schedule. However, the builder was being pressed to recover lost time in order that the work would be completed on schedule by November 2017.

As well as increasing capacity, the second chapel would enable the Council to offer a wider range of times for services of either 30, 45 or 60 minutes duration to those arranging funerals at the Crematorium. Each chapel had, or would be provided with the modern audio/visual equipment now required by many users. It had been calculated that the fees from just three additional services per week would fund the capital outlay on the improvements.

Arising from questions and discussion, the Panel commented on the high number of compliments received in relation to the services provided at the Cemetery and Crematorium. It was pleasing to note that this much appreciated service would be available more widely on completion of the improvements and extensions.

162. Coral Reef

The Head of Performance and Resources made a presentation to the Panel on the progress of the refurbishment at Coral Reef.

The contractor had now completed over 88,000 man hours on site, with a practical completion due on schedule on 18 August 2017, ready for a re-opening in September. There had been over 170 contract variations and there was a potential for the budget to be exceeded, but this was subject to detailed discussions with the contractor and the Council's Managing Partner.

The Panel received a resume of the current construction work now taking place. Descriptions, together with pictures, of the five flumes that had been installed were given, including their lengths and the special features being built in.

After handover of the building by the contractor, a four week programme of staff training, set up and testing of the facilities and procedures was planned prior to full opening. The Panel received answers to a number of questions relating to the marketing and publicity for the newly refurbished Coral Reef, the recruitment of staff (which was progressing satisfactorily), measures to deal with the high numbers of visitors expected and practical details about the new features within the project.

Final details of the arrangements for, and date of, the official opening would be published as soon as practicable but this was inevitably subject to progress with the training and set up programme. The Panel enquired as to the number of lockers which would be provided at Coral Reef and noted the comprehensive presentation.

163. Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan Update

The Panel considered a report summarising the up to date position on the various documents comprising the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan (BFBLP).

The preparation of the Comprehensive Local Plan (CLP) was proceeding in accordance with the published programme although the Draft Plan consultation was now likely to take place in November/December 2017 rather than September/October. Attention was drawn to the progress on the evidence base studies being prepared and the Panel noted the first draft report on the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment was currently being reviewed. It was confirmed that the Green Belt Review commissioned and carried out jointly for both Wokingham Borough Council and this Borough did not allocate sites and did not propose any significant changes to the Green Belt boundary.

The Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan, being prepared on behalf of four Berkshire Councils had reached the stage of an Issues and Options consultation, which was due to close on 21 July. In relation to the Local Planning Documents update, it was noted that the Warfield Neighbourhood Development Plan would soon be published for consultation.

Arising from questions, the officers were requested to confirm whether the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) evening session being planned in September was also open to Parish and Town Councillors to attend.

164. Quarterly Service Report (QSR) - Information Item

The Panel considered the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of departmental performance as reported in the QSR for the fourth quarter of 2016/17 (January to March 2017) relating to Environment, Culture and Communities. The report highlighted exceptional performance, remedial action being taken against under performance, significant changes in risk, significant customer feedback and inspections and significant changes in service use and the associated financial impact.

The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities highlighted a number of items from the report and presented an overview of the final quarter performance. He reported that the major variances on the revenue budget had resulted in an underspend of £549k for the year and detailed the budget headings where the change had exceeded £25k. The Capital Programme spend for the year had been £22,207,580, which at 85% of the budget represented a creditable performance. The remaining budget had been carried forward to the current year, the most significant items being £2,033k for the LED street lighting programme and £3,487k for the Coral Reef refurbishment.

The Director commented on the satisfactory staffing position, with the average vacancy factor at a manageable level and continuing low rates of staff sickness. The Public Protection Partnership, the new joint arrangement for Regulatory Services between Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham, had come into force and was working well. This brought resilience to the service and would in future save money for the Council.

Arising from questions and discussion, the following points were made:

- Accumulating a sum of £181k income in excess of the budget at the Cemetery and Crematorium was considered to be an excellent achievement.
- The £188k saving by the restriction of non-residents using the Household Waste Recycling Centre was also notable.
- The increase in inspection fee income for Building Control was attributable to a good approach to promoting the service to win new business.
- Officers agreed to look into a query concerning the vehicular access serving a development scheme in York Town Road, Sandhurst.
- The carry forward of £110k for the introduction of self-service at Bracknell Library was as a result of phasing in this innovation. There had been a very good response to the invitation to volunteer to assist in Library services.

165. Executive Key and Non-Key Decisions

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

The Panel noted that although a decision was due to be taken on 18 July 2017 to confirm an Article 4 Direction, it would not come into force until February 2018.

CHAIRMAN