

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
6 MARCH 2018
7.30 - 9.50 PM**



Present:

Councillors Angell (Chairman), Porter (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Angell, Brossard, Mrs Ingham, Kennedy (Substitute), Leake (Substitute), Mrs McKenzie and Mrs Mattick

Executive Members:

Councillor Mrs Hayes MBE, McCracken and Turrell

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Finnie, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle and Paliczka

In Attendance:

Andrew Hunter, Chief Officer: Planning, Transport & Countryside

Steve Loudoun, Chief Officer: Environment & Public Protection

Damian James, Head of Performance and Resources

Gareth Jones, Head of Recreation

Lisa Jewell, Transformation Project Manager

Sean Murphy, Public Protection Manager

Anna Smy, Team Manager

191. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9 January 2018 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

A number of queries and requests for further information raised at the last meeting had received written responses circulated by officers. With regard to the LED Lighting Scheme, the Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection reported that a substantial saving on the capital cost of acquisition of the lights had been made as the contractor Ringway had achieved economies of scale through bulk purchasing. A reduction in energy use of 37.5% had occurred in December 2017 compared to the corresponding month in 2016, but owing to a large increase in electricity supply charges, the financial saving was reduced. Notwithstanding, revenue costs would have been £41,000 higher if no LED lighting had been installed. A full report on the costs and savings of the LED Lighting Scheme would be made to a future meeting of the Panel when the project had been completed.

Details of the income received from events, book readings etc run at local libraries was outstanding and officers were asked to investigate and circulate a response to members.

192. 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.

193. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

194. Public Participation

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

195. Public Protection Partnership update

The Panel considered a report outlining the progress of the Public Protection Partnership entered into with West Berkshire and Wokingham in January 2017, bringing together all the regulatory services functions. The proposal had been considered, agreed and implemented within a tight six month schedule, on the understanding that there would be a £150k saving in staff costs. In setting up the new service it was recognised that with less staff there had to be a change to how resources are used and in future they were to be focussed around the delivery of the Agreed Strategic Priorities determined by a Joint Committee of the three partner Authorities.

Sean Murphy, the Public Protection Manager for the Partnership gave a presentation on the first year of its operation. The Partnership had been established by an Inter Authority Agreement which included Core Priority themes to guide service delivery. A Business Plan had been prepared, and a draft Strategic Assessment was due for consideration by the Joint Committee on 19 March 2018. The Partnership had a written Control Strategy outlining how the service would be delivered. The nature of the service had evolved to be more information and intelligence led, from which planned work activities and preventative actions were formulated.

The Joint Committee, comprising two elected Members from each Authority, had met three times and considered and agreed a range of issues including:

- Business Plan
- Communications Strategy
- Age Restricted Sales Enforcement Policy
- Asset Recovery Policy
- Food Enforcement Plan
- Performance report
- Trading Standards South East (TSSEL) Directors
- Budget
- Community Fund

The Partnership was considered to have made significant progress in its first year, had delivered services within its rebuilt budget (achieving savings for all Partner Authorities) and was building capacity through more efficient working with partners through a joint case management system. Nevertheless, there were challenges ahead around such issues as developing a greater understanding of the workings of the new model by Members/Officers particularly in the other councils, revisions to its structure, a rationalisation of the accommodation occupied and ICT.

Arising from questions and discussion the Panel noted:

- The Business Plan for the Partnership had been developed using the activity levels and actions performed by each of the constituent Authorities aimed at ensuring a fair and equitable allocation of the service between the partners. Clearly there were peaks and troughs in the demands on the service, but activity levels in each area were kept under review.

- The Partnership was virtually fully staffed, currently running at 105 in number; there were only four vacancies at present.
- The Council' was represented on the Joint Committee by Councillors Allen and McCracken. It was confirmed that they would be reporting back to the Council in due course.
- Monies recovered through Asset Recovery actions carried out was returned to the Partnership and used to benefit victim support, communications, further asset recovery work etc.
- The Community Fund, having received a crime prevention grant of £50k, had been opened to bids from local organisations that were working in such areas as crime prevention and fighting the fear of crime. Eight grants were approved in the first round of bids; a further round of bidding would take place in the summer of 2018, and it was proposed to further develop the publicity arrangements for the scheme in order to attract bids from as wide a range of organisations as possible.
- There were new rules coming into force on HMOs which would increase the number of properties that required licensing. This was largely related to fire safety issues and the close working relationship that had been developed with the Fire Service would be key, using joint inspections wherever appropriate.

The Chairman thanked the Partnership Officers for their presentation. Although the joint service was still very much in its infancy, it was confirmed that there had been no complaints received or reports from the public of issues not dealt with. It was noted that the Partnership would shortly issue the first in a series of briefing bulletins for members.

196. **Library Service Update**

The Panel considered a report on progress with regard to the Library Service review. The review target was to achieve £400,000 savings over a two year period through:

- efficiencies in management of the stock;
- developing a stronger community role for libraries through the use of volunteers;
- significant improvement to access to the libraries by introducing Technology Assisted Opening and self-service;

with all libraries in the Borough to remain open.

The project was progressing well with the stock efficiency savings being realised and good levels of volunteering achieved leading to £250,000 savings in 2017/18 as programmed. A supplier for the technology had been procured but a minor delay in the installation work meant the remaining savings would be re-phased to save £120,000 in 2018/19 and the final £30,000 in 2019/20.

The Panel noted that the programme of building works for the self-service kiosks and technology enabled opening was underway; Great Hollands had been completed with installation in the remaining eight libraries proceeding over the next few months. Tagging of books for the tracking technology had also been carried out. Over 100 volunteers had successfully been recruited to complement existing staffing, enabling extended lunchtime hours to be introduced at four libraries so far. There remained a challenge to recruit volunteers for Saturday and evening working.

The remodelling of roles and responsibilities of staff was a key element of the new vision for the service. The first phase covering management, supervisory and administrative support staff had been completed and the second phase focussing on

frontline staff and the way branches are managed across the Borough was moving ahead with staff consultation likely to begin in April 2018.

Arising from questions and discussion the Panel noted:

- Remodelling of roles and responsibilities at all levels is essential to achieve the new vision for the service. A review of staffing levels, roles and responsibilities is being carried out and will create a structure capable of this. The Council's organisational development change protocol aims to ensure that redundancies are minimised from exercises to remodel staff working. It was possible that some natural wastage would also contribute to avoiding redundancies.
- A correction to the report was made in relation to single staffing of libraries. This would only occur at some of the smaller branches, but there would be a staffed service across all libraries covering all existing opening hours.
- In relation to the number of volunteers required, a total of 150 was suggested but this would depend on the number of hours offered by the volunteers. Officers were requested to circulate members with details of which branches were in need of volunteers, and the range of hours needed to be covered. Such information could also usefully be passed on to Town and Parish Councils for inclusion in local newsletters, bulletins etc. Applications to volunteer from students and young people were very welcome.
- Communications with users about the changes being introduced would be most important. A programme of staff training was being rolled out which would cover ways of introducing the remodelled service to the public and encouraging their engagement with it.
- The new technology being introduced to branches included full technical support covering the self-service kiosks and any problems with Technology Assisted Opening.
- A question was raised about the public offering nearly new hardback books to add to library stock (a previously acceptable practice). Officers agreed to look into this.

The Panel was concerned to ensure that the changes arising from the Library Review should be introduced as smoothly as possible. At the suggestion of the Chairman, it was agreed that a further report on progress be made to the Panel at its meeting in September 2018.

197. **Cemetery and Crematorium Update**

The Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection reported to the Panel on progress with the improvements and extension works at the Cemetery and Crematorium.

The planned works comprised three aspects. The extension to the car park and the improvements to the floral tribute area had been satisfactorily completed in a timely manner. The previously reported problems with construction of the new chapel were now well on the way to being remedied. The unsatisfactory foundations had been removed and replaced, a steel frame installed with roofing and brickwork proceeding. Final completion of the work was currently scheduled in May 2018 (six months late) and within budget. In order to resolve the problems, the contractor had replaced his on-site team and management and absorbed the cost of the remedial work required on the foundations.

A good relationship with Funeral Directors had been maintained throughout the ongoing work. Potential users of the facility were warned of the possibility of construction work noise during services and very few complaints had been received.

198. **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 report set out in detail the timetable for the Comprehensive Local Plan. The Draft Plan had been endorsed by Full Council in February, and was now subject to a public consultation which was due to conclude on 26 March 2018. The consultation had been informed by the provision of 11 manned exhibitions at venues across the Borough. These had generally been well attended and well received with favourable comments made about the information supplied in support of the Draft Plan.

Also in preparation was a new Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy SPD, an update of the current SPD which was adopted in March 2012. The draft SPD had been subject to full public consultation and the responses were being considered prior to presenting a final version to the Executive for adoption in spring 2018.

Hampshire County Council were continuing the work on preparation of a Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan, the next stage of which was to publish a draft Plan for consultation later in 2018.

Arising from questions about the recent speech by the Prime Minister about proposals to help developers and local authorities build more homes, the Panel was informed that the Government had just issued a consultation on revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). A report would be prepared as soon as it had been possible to consider the new proposals. In respect of the position locally, the Panel noted the available supply of approximately 9,000 dwellings in Bracknell Forest, comprising existing planning permissions together with units on sites allocated for residential development.

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

The Panel considered the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of departmental performance as reported in the QSR for the third quarter of 2017/18 (October to December 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 Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection highlighted a number of items from the report, including in his presentation the latest updated information. There was likely to be an underspend of £315k on the revenue budget, a relatively minor amount on the total budget of £35.8m. While there were a number of changes to both income and expenditure heads, the largest variances related to:

- Concessionary fares – reduced trips - (£232k)
- Waste Management – reduced tonnage for landfill -(£549k)
- SANGS capacity – lower income from Surrey Heath – £200k
- Highways – lower than anticipated savings on electricity charges due to delay on LED lighting project - £400k
- Coral Reef closure (to be met from contingency) - £340k

- Car parking – higher income from charges (mainly at the Avenue car park – new Town Centre users) – (£200k)

It was anticipated that around 92% of the total approved capital budget would be spent by the year end. Owing to delays, there were significant carry forwards of expenditure on the Martins Heron roundabout (£2,742k) and the LED Lighting programme (£3,000k).

The attention of the Panel was drawn to a number of key highlights and areas of good performance as well as some challenging issues coming up. The Transformation Programme included the gateway reviews of both Planning and Building Control and the Parks and Countryside service, together with commencement of the Transport and Highways review.

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

- The handover of Leisure Services functions to Everyone Active on 1 March 2018 had been successful, although the snowy conditions had created some difficulties and affected attendance levels. A few issues needed to be worked through.
- Some issues relating to use of Bracknell Leisure Centre were raised and the Head of Performance and Resources undertook to investigate these.
- The budget variation in respect of income from brown bin charges was as a result of an underestimate of take up in demand for the year. The higher level of income being received was now in line with expectations for the year.
- Cheques were still accepted for payment of fees for such services as brown bin collection although their use was not promoted as other methods of payment (eg. on-line, direct debit) were more economic and preferred by the Council.
- Errors in the report were noted in respect of the correct name for the SANG of “Shepherd Meadows” (page 48) and the current percentage of the Borough covered by superfast broadband showing Q3 lower than Q2 (page 38).
- There was an opportunity for Members to attend forthcoming Gateway review meetings, to contribute to the discussions and the recommendations to go forward, as follows:
 - Planning and Building Control – 14 March 2018
 - Parks and Countryside – 21 March 2018

200. **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.

CHAIRMAN