

Notice of Meeting

Council

Councillor Ms Merry (Mayor)
Councillor Gbadebo (Deputy Mayor)
Councillors Allen, Angell, Atkinson, Bhandari, Dr Barnard, Bettison OBE, D Birch, Mrs Birch, Brossard, Brown, Brunel-Walker, Dudley, Finch, Ms Gaw, Mrs L Gibson, MJ Gibson, Green, Mrs Hamilton, Harrison, Mrs Hayes MBE, Ms Hayes, Heydon, Mrs Ingham, Kennedy, Kirke, Leake, Mrs McKenzie, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, Mrs Mattick, Mossom, Neil, Parker, Porter, Skinner, Temperton, Tullett, Turrell, Virgo and Wade



Wednesday 9 September 2020, 7.30 - 9.00 pm
Online only

Timothy Wheadon
Chief Executive

Agenda

Item	Description	Page
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The meeting will be opened with prayers by the Mayor's Chaplain

1.	Apologies for Absence	
2.	Minutes of Previous Meeting	5 - 10
	To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 22 July 2020.	
3.	Declarations of Interest	
	<p>Members are asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary or affected interests in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.</p> <p>Any Member with a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in a matter should withdraw from the meeting when the matter is under consideration and should notify the Democratic Services Officer in attendance that they are withdrawing as they have such an interest. If the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest is not entered on the register of Members interests the Monitoring Officer must be notified of the interest within 28 days.</p> <p>Any Member with an affected Interest in a matter must disclose the interest to the meeting. There is no requirement to withdraw from the meeting when the interest is only an affected interest, but the Monitoring Officer should be notified of the interest, if not previously notified of it, within 28 days of the meeting.</p>	

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4.	Mayor's Announcements	
	Including a brief presentation from the Council's development partner, Countryside.	
5.	Chief Constable's Presentation	
	Thames Valley Police Chief Constable, John Campbell will be attending the meeting with Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner, Matthew Barber to deliver a presentation on the work of Thames Valley Police over the last year.	
6.	Executive Report	11 - 26
	To receive the Leader's report on the work of the Executive since the Council meeting held on 22 July 2020. Council is asked to resolve a recommendation in respect of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proposed additions to the current year's capital programme 	
7.	Response to Local Government Boundary Commission for England draft recommendations	27 - 42
	To approve the Boundary Review Working Group's proposed response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's draft recommendations for new warding arrangements for Bracknell Forest.	
8.	Member Development Strategy 2020-24 and Member Development Report 2019-20	43 - 72
	To approve the Member Development Strategy 2020 – 24 and note the Member Development Annual Report 2019 - 20.	
9.	Champion's Annual Report	73 - 92
	To receive a report on the activities and outcomes of the Council's Champions 2019/2020.	
10.	Question Submitted Under Council Procedure Rule 10	
	<u>By Councillor Temperton to Councillor Turrell, Executive Member for Planning and Transport</u> (a) How does the Government's White Paper- Planning for the Future- affect the Council's ability to meet the proposed % of affordable homes in the Local Plan? (b) What could be the effect of the proposals in this paper on the finances of Bracknell Forest Council?	
11.	Motion Submitted Under Council Procedure Rule 11	
	<u>Motion 02/2020 moved by Councillor Temperton and seconded by Councillor Brown</u>	

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	The view of this Council is that charging for the use of the Look Out play area should be a one-off as a result of Covid-19 safety measures and not a test case for future charging of play and recreational areas in Bracknell Forest	
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Sound recording, photographing, filming and use of social media is permitted. Please contact Kirsty Hunt, 01344 353108, kirsty.hunt@bracknell-forest.gov.uk, so that any special arrangements can be made.

Published: 1 September 2020

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COUNCIL
22 JULY 2020
7.30 - 9.00 PM



Present:

Councillors Ms Merry (Mayor), Gbadebo (Deputy Mayor), Allen, Bhandari, Dr Barnard, Bettison OBE, D Birch, Mrs Birch, Brown, Brunel-Walker, Dudley, Finch, Ms Gaw, Mrs L Gibson, MJ Gibson, Green, Mrs Hamilton, Harrison, Mrs Hayes MBE, Ms Hayes, Heydon, Mrs Ingham, Kennedy, Kirke, Leake, Mrs McKenzie, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, Mrs Mattick, Neil, Parker, Porter, Skinner, Temperton, Tullett, Turrell, Virgo and Wade

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Angell, Atkinson, Brossard and Mossom

11. Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 20 May 2020 be approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

12. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

13. Mayor's Announcements

Mayor's Charity

The Mayor advised the meeting that she was delighted to be working with two organisations who were supporting the Armed Forces and their families through their active service and beyond. SSAFA – Soldiers Sailors and Airmen Families Association and the British Forces Foundation. She added that presentations on the work of the charities and examples of how they were helping local residents would be provided at a future Council meeting.

Open for Business Initiative

The Mayor reported that the borough was actively supporting and promoting the retail sector in its "Open for Business" initiative and the civic team was visiting shops across the Borough to say 'thank you', and recognise all the efforts of retailers during challenging times.

Virtual engagements

The Mayor had attended the Home Start AGM virtually and hoped that this would be the first of many similar engagements. In this uncertain period she would be organising a programme of 'Virtually anything is possible' events to appeal to a wide audience and help raise funds for her selected charities.

Councillor Turrell, Executive Member for Planning and Transport

Councillor Turrell reported that the Downshire Way duelling scheme had been completed, within budget and on time. He thanked the Highways officers and the contractors Ringway for their work. He explained that there were additional benefits to the scheme such as improving the landscape alongside the road, using a quieter surface and installation of noise attenuation fencing on some sections.

Councillor Birch, Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing

Councillor Birch asked the meeting to recognise and thank the actions of Bracknell Forest residents who had kept infection rates down by acting responsibly which in turn kept them and their families safe.

Councillor Dr Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning

Councillor Dr Barnard asked the meeting to join him in recognising and recording the work of staff in schools and those working within children's social care. Schools invited children of keyworkers and vulnerable children into schools and showed a commitment, dedication to education and hard work through safeguarding for those children, virtual support to students and providing support to families. Schools are now looking to September and welcoming the children back. He reported how colleagues in Children's social care had provided support to the most vulnerable families, adapting how they worked to keep people safe and making sure that throughout the voice of children were not forgotten.

Councillor Brunel-Walker, Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration

Councillor Brunel-Walker passed on his thanks to retailers, those in the hospitality sector, pubs, hairdressers and other premises that had opened in last few weeks. He recognised the hard work involved to make premises covid secure and respond to changing guidance. He thanked the team that worked to co-ordinate with the Lexicon. He reiterated the message to Act Local, Think Local and Shop Local.

14. **Executive Report**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bettison, presented his report on the work of the Executive since that reported at the Council meeting on 26 February 2020. The Executive had met five times on 10 March 2020, 28 April 2020, 15 June 2020, 30 June 2020 and 14 July 2020.

The report contained recommendations that the Council was asked to resolve in respect of the following matters:

- **Community Safety Plan 2020-23:** This was a Partnership plan drawing together Bracknell Forest Council Police and Crime Commissioner and Thames Valley Police priorities and issues. The consultation had received 497 responses with 93% of respondents agreeing with priorities
- **Central and East Berks Joint Minerals and Waste Plan:** This had been prepared with Wokingham, Reading and Windsor & Maidenhead to cover the Central Berkshire area and would run until 2036. There were no new sites within Bracknell Forest. Six week statutory consultation period would run from 3 September to 15 October
- **Revenue Outturn 2019/20:** The planned spend was £74.969m and the actual spend was £74.323 so this was the 22nd year of spending within budget
- **Selection of Joint Venture Partner:** The Preferred bidder had been appointed and was an important step in facilitating the development of major town centre sites including: Market Street, Coopers Hill and Jubilee Gardens

The Leader highlighted the following matters that had been considered:

Other Major Decisions [Non Covid]

- Highways' and Transport capital programme agreed
- Service Plans 2020/21 agreed
- Emergency Duty Service Contract agreed which was covered essential pan Berkshire out of hours services and had been hosted by Bracknell Forest Council since 1998
- Relocation of EDS/Forestcare to Waterside Park

Other Major Decisions [Covid related]

- Support for Everyone Active as part of overall strategy to ensure there was capacity to re-open services
- Outbreak Management Plan had been signed off by Department for Public Health and CEO and endorsed by Executive. This formed part of East Berkshire Health Protection Board arrangements. The new Local Outbreak Engagement Board would be chaired by Councillor Brunel-Walker.
- Residents Covid-19 Impact Survey was agreed as a telephone survey
- Greening Waste Collection implementation of weekly food and three weekly general waste collection delayed until 1 March 2021 and Autumn 2021 for Houses of multiple occupation and flats. This would allow for further post covid-19 engagement with residents.

Major National Issues and the Bracknell Forest Response

- Personal Protection Equipment: to respond to major national shortage in first few weeks a local team was established to manage supplies with more than 30 providers assisted so far
- Shielding: Of the 4,137 total number of residents advised to shield 2,528 had contacted the national helpline.
- Support to Businesses: Three different national grant schemes were being administered locally and more than £10m had been paid out in approximately 800 grants
- First 2: Common criteria: £25k or £10k
- Businesses which as at 11 March 2020 were paying NNDR
- Retail, hospitality and leisure grant
- Discretionary Grants
- focussing on smaller businesses not paying NNDR
- Test and trace – links to Outbreak Control Plans
- Care home resilience plans had appeared in national good practice guides

No questions were raised on the report.

Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Plan 2020-23

On the proposition of Councillor Harrison, Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection, seconded by Councillor Virgo it was

RESOLVED that the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Plan 2020-23 be approved and adopted.

Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan

On the proposition of Councillor Turrell, Executive Member for Planning and Transport, seconded by Councillor Mrs Hayes OBE it was

RESOLVED that the Proposed Submission Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan, the Policies Map and all supporting documents be approved to be formally submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination and that the appointed Inspector be requested to recommend main modifications to the submitted Plan, in the event that the Inspector considers that such modifications are necessary to make the Plan sound.

Revenue Expenditure Outturn 2019/20

On the proposition of Councillor Heydon, Executive Member for Transformation and Finance seconded by Councillor Allen it was

RESOLVED that

- i) the virements over £0.100m as detailed in Annexe E, within the attached Appendix 2 of the supplementary report, be approved; and
- ii) the Treasury Management performance in 2019/20 as set out in Annexe B, within the attached Appendix 2 of the supplementary report, be noted.

Contract Award of a Joint Venture Partner for the Development of Multiple Sites in Bracknell Forest

On the proposition of Councillor Heydon, Executive Member for Transformation and Finance seconded by Councillor Brunel-Walker it was

RESOLVED that funding be made available as required to support the Council's 50% investment in the joint venture, with requirements for individual site development to be agreed as part of the Executive and Council's consideration of the initial Joint Venture business plan later this year.

15. **Use of Emergency Decision-making Powers**

The Council noted the report advising them of the Chief Executive's use of emergency decision making powers.

16. **Standards Annual Report**

The Council noted the Annual Report which advised them of activity within its Standards framework from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

17. **Question Submitted Under Council Procedure Rule 10**

Councillor Mrs Temperton asked Councillor Brunel-Walker, Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration the following published question:

The government has initiated the 'Kickstart' Scheme to create 6-month work placements for 16-24 year olds who are on Universal Credit and may be at risk of long term unemployment, a scheme to fund high quality traineeships for 16-25 year olds and new apprenticeship schemes. Obviously these need to be in place, as soon as possible. What is the Council doing to encourage all our businesses and partners to participate in these schemes?

In response Councillor Brunel-Walker replied that the new scheme would state-funded jobs created for 16-to-24-year-olds who were currently claiming Universal

Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. The Kickstart scheme would see Government funding cover 100 per cent of the minimum wage for 25 hours a week in the scheme, with employers also able to top up the wage and receive a contribution towards overhead costs.

He reported that applications for the scheme were expected to open during the following month, with more information to follow in due course. He explained that companies who took part in the scheme would have to prove that the jobs they are making available to applicants were new.

He reported that the Council was starting to have conversations with the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Economic Skills Development Partnership to begin considering how to promote the scheme and ensure that as many as possible benefit from the scheme. Councillor Brunel-Walker committed to updating members when more information was available.

In response to a supplementary question he stated although the final guidance from Central Government on the exact details was outstanding that he anticipated that the scheme would require companies to apply and he was uncertain whether local authorities would be able to participate as employers. Councillor Brunel-Walker concluded that monitoring the scheme was key and once the methods of receiving updates was confirmed he would update Members.

18. Motion Submitted Under Council Procedure Rule 11

Motion 01/2020 was moved and seconded by Councillors Temperton and Neil respectively as follows:

"We congratulate and thank all schools for enabling Bracknell Forest children to return to school in September, keeping all as safe as possible.

This is a very exciting time for some, but very stressful for others. For some parents, with greatly reduced finances resulting from the Covid-19 lockdown, the need to buy new uniform is a huge problem. They too want the best for their child but have no available funds.

I therefore ask the Council to call upon the Executive to set up a School Uniform Grant to support those parents throughout Bracknell Forest, who have a proven need for such assistance.

On being put to the vote the motion fell.

CHAIRMAN

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To: **COUNCIL**
9 September 2020

EXECUTIVE REPORT TO COUNCIL **The Leader**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Since the Council meeting on 22 July 2020, the Executive has met on the 25 August 2020. This report summarises decisions taken by reference to the relevant portfolio within which they fall.
- 1.2 Updated Forward Plans are published every Friday and can be viewed online at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk. Full details on the decisions taken by individual portfolio holders can also be accessed online through the Council's website.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **Council is asked to consider the recommendations set out at paragraph 5.1.2.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The reasons for recommendations are set out in the supporting information and in the reports considered by the Executive.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Alternative options are discussed in the relevant individual reports considered by the Executive.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Transformation and Finance

5.1 Financial Update

- 5.1.1 The Executive noted the extreme uncertainty in the financial outlook in the light of the Coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, they identified best case and worst-case scenarios for the Council's current year financial position summarised in Table 1 and detailed in Annex A. They also approved the virements relating to the 2020/21 budget included in Annex A of the Director: Resources report. The Executive also endorsed the medium-term financial planning framework to guide detailed preparations for the 2021/22 and future years' budgets, the out-turn capital expenditure and financing for 2019/20 and approved carry-forwards of £31.596m into the 2020/21 capital programme. It was also agreed that a vacant domestic property owned by the Council be made available for social care purposes.
- 5.1.2 **The Executive recommended to Council the proposed additions to the current year's capital programme detailed in paragraph 5.37 of the Director: Resources report.**

- 5.1.3 The Council approved the current year's budget and council tax at its meeting on 26 February 2020 which at the time it was recognised to be one of the most difficult budgets that the council had ever faced. Spending pressures totalled an unprecedented £8m, the majority being related to Children's and Adult Social Care. The increased demands meant the budget includes £5m of savings, a maximum permitted increase in council tax plus the use of £0.4m from reserves to achieve a balanced budget for the year.
- 5.1.5 The impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on Council budgets since March 2020 has been widely reported. In recognising the important role that local authorities have played in responding to the situation, Government has provided an additional £3.7bn of funding to English councils directly and undertaken to mitigate some lost income from sales, fees and charges. Details of arrangements in respect of the income support were received in late August and were being evaluated when this report was published. Further costs incurred by upper tier authorities to support hospital discharges are also being covered by funding being passed through Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) although again, the detail is still awaited.
- 5.1.6 It was important to recognise the scale of uncertainty that the Council is facing at this time with estimated best- and worst-case scenarios which reflect actual expenditure to date plus a range of financial predictions from Assistant Directors covering the remainder of the year.

Looking forward there is further uncertainty about the length of time during which the additional pressures and lost income will last and the extent to which the Government will continue to support Councils beyond the current year. The budget framework for the next three years therefore includes a need to identify significant savings so that the Council can respond to the worst case, should it happen.

Planning and Transport

5.2 Temporary Changes to the Bracknell Forest Statement of Community Involvement

- 5.2.1 The Executive approved the Temporary Changes Addendum and that it be published alongside the Bracknell Forest Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (2014).
- 5.2.2 National Planning Practice Guidance requires local planning authorities to assess their SCIs to identify whether elements are inconsistent with public health guidelines and restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These restrictions mean the Council is unable to fulfil some of the commitments set out in the currently adopted SCI in respect of how the Council consults on policy documents. Some amendments to consultation procedures relating to planning applications are also required. The temporary changes have been made to protect the health of local communities and follow national advice and guidelines.

6 NOTIFICATION OF APPOINTMENTS MADE BY THE LEADER

- 6.1 The Leader appointed Councillor Mark Brunel-Walker and Councillor Peter Heydon to the Joint Venture Board.

- 6.2 The Leader appointed Councillor Nigel Atkinson, Councillor Nick Allen and Councillor Peter Heydon to the Bracknell Town Centre Regeneration Committee.
- 6.3 The Leader has clarified that Councillor Brunel-Walker's appointment to the Business Improvement District (BID) Company should be as the Council's representative on other Joint Committees, Panels and Groups list rather than external organisations. This distinction means that the restriction on nominees to external bodies subsequently accepting a role on the organisation's board as a Trustee / Director or in any other management capacity such as Treasurer does not apply to this appointment.
- 6.4 The Leader confirmed an amendment of the Bracknell Town Centre Regeneration Committee to include oversight of matters relating to the ongoing management of the Joint Venture Project.

7 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 7.1 The Borough Solicitor's comments have been addressed in the reports to the Executive.

Director: Resources

- 7.2 The Director: Resources' comments have been addressed in the reports to the Executive.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 7.3 Equalities issues, where appropriate, have been addressed in the reports to the Executive.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 7.4 Any strategic risks have been identified in the reports to the Executive.

Background Papers

Executive Agenda – 25 August 2020

Contact for further information

Hannah Stevenson, Delivery - 01344 352308
Hannah.stevenson@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

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TO: THE EXECUTIVE
DATE: 25 AUGUST 2020

**Financial Update
(Director: Resources)**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Recognising the unprecedented financial pressures the Council is facing as a result of the various impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, this report provides an update to the Executive on the Council's financial situation in the current year and a forward look to the potential financial position in future years.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive:

- 2.1 **Notes the identified best case and worst case scenarios for the Council's current year financial position summarised in Table 1 and detailed in Annex A and approves the virements relating to the 2020/21 budget also included in Annex A;**
- 2.2 **Endorses the medium-term financial planning framework in paragraph 5.22 to guide detailed preparations for the 2021/22 and future years' budgets;**
- 2.3 **Note the out-turn capital expenditure and financing for 2019/20 and approves carry-forwards of £31.596m into the 2020/21 capital programme;**
- 2.4 **Recommends to Council the proposed additions to the current year's capital programme in paragraph 5.37;**
- 2.5 **Agrees to make available a vacant domestic property owned by the Council for social care purposes, as set out in paragraph 5.38.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The recommendations are intended to ensure that the Executive is aware of the Council's current and predicted future financial position.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Executive could decide to take immediate, corrective action through approving in-year budget changes to further mitigate the identified financial risks, however such an approach is not felt to be justified at this time.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 5.1 The Council approved the current year's budget and council tax at its meeting on 26 February 2020. At the time it was recognised to be one of the most difficult budgets

ever faced. Spending pressures totalled an unprecedented £8m, the vast majority being in Children's and Adult Social Care. This necessitated the identification of £5m of savings, a maximum permitted increase in council tax plus the use of £0.4m from reserves to achieve a balanced budget for the year.

5.2 In setting the budget for 2019/20, consideration was given to the outlook for the economy as a whole, the impact of demographic changes and the resulting pressures on services and other risks contained within the proposed budget. The Contingency was set at £2.250m in the final budget proposals, to make an allowance for the identified risks.

5.3 At that time it was also recognised that there was significant uncertainty for the period from 2021/22 due to the potential impact of a number of issues, in particular:

- Fair Funding Review
- Business Rates system re-set
- 2020 Spending Review which would determine the overall quantum of resources available to local government
- Final Brexit arrangements

5.4 The most likely consequence of all of these factors combining was estimated to be an additional recurring budget gap of around £4.5m in 2021/22. It was acknowledged that the impact of these factors would be a greater reliance on Council Tax income as an on-going source of funding to support essential front-line services as well as a need to identify further savings each year. It was noted that the Future Funding Reserve had deliberately been created in order to help manage the transition to the new funding arrangements and enable savings to be gradually identified and implemented over time.

Update on Current Year Position

5.5 The impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on Council budgets since March 2020 has been widely reported. In recognising the important role that local authorities have played in responding to the situation, Government has provided an additional £3.7bn of funding to English councils directly and undertaken to mitigate some lost income from sales, fees and charges. Details of arrangements in respect of the latter support are still awaited. Further costs incurred by upper tier authorities to support hospital discharges are being covered by funding being passed through Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs).

5.6 The areas of additional spending referred to by Government as being covered by the additional funding it has provided are as follows:

Adult social care	Children's services
Public health services	Fire and rescue services
Waste collection services	Shielding those clinically vulnerable
Homelessness and rough sleeping	Domestic abuse
Supporting the NHS	Managing excess deaths

- 5.7 While welcoming the additional Government funding, individual authorities and the Local Government Association are highlighting that the scale of the impact on council budgets in the current year is expected to exceed the sums provided to date.
- 5.8 Councils have been asked by the Ministry of Housing, Local Government and Communities (MHCLG) to provide monthly updates on the scale of cost increases and income losses they are experiencing and expect to see over the remainder of the year. Responses to the June survey indicated that between March and June councils had incurred £4.8bn of extra cost pressures and income losses and expected these to rise by a further £4.4bn and £2.8bn respectively by the end of the year. In addition, collection fund losses from council tax and business rates income were forecast to be £3.7bn over the year. To date, £4bn of additional funding has been provided to councils by Government directly and through CCGs.
- 5.9 Being a unitary authority responsible for the full range of council services across the Borough, Bracknell Forest is one of the councils facing challenges both from additional expenditure and income losses across its service areas.
- 5.10 A detailed analysis of the Council's forecast financial position in the current year is set out in Annex A of this report, which shows the first formal budget monitoring report for 2020/21. Recognising the scale of uncertainty we are facing at this time, the report includes both estimated best and worst case scenarios which reflect actual expenditure to date plus a range of financial predictions from Assistant Directors covering the remainder of the year. A summary of the position being reported is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Current Year Financial Position

	Current Approved Budget £000	Predicted Variance – Best Case £000	Predicted Variance – Worst Case £000
Service Departments	84,801	7,335	14,647
Non-Departmental	-4,629	-575	-425
Sub-Total	80,172	6,760	14,222
Contingency	2,207	-2,207	-2,207
Covid Funding	0	-6,457	-6,457
Overall Position	82,379	-1,904	5,558

- 5.11 It can be seen that the Council is expecting to face additional pressures this year of between £6.8m and £14.2m, the vast majority of which are directly related to the Covid situation. With funding of almost £8.7m available from the additional Covid grant and the corporate contingency, the overall range of potential financial outcomes is from all pressures being covered by available resources in the best case scenario to an overspend of over £5.5m in the worst case scenario. Full details of the variances being reported and their underpinning rationale is included in Annex A. This shows that the service areas most significantly affected are Contract Services (car parking and leisure), Adult's and Children's Social Care and Place, Planning and Regeneration (The Look Out and Planning fees).
- 5.12 These figures will continue to be refined during the year as more data becomes available on expenditure to date and further clarity emerges on the detailed arrangements for Government support for lost income. At this stage, based on what we understand to be the position on this, it has been assumed in the best case scenario that the Government will reimburse 75% of the reduced car parking income

over the course of the year (after an initial 5% “deductible”) but no other loss of income.

- 5.13 Details of the income compensation scheme have yet to be published but it has recently become apparent that loss of management fee income from externally run leisure services is likely to be supported. Once the level of support has been confirmed this will be built into the forecast position which will have a positive impact on both scenarios. This, together with Bracknell Forest’s long track record of sound financial management, provides some confidence that the Council will be able to live within the resources available to us in the current year, without having to draw significantly from available reserves.
- 5.14 That said, the situation remains extremely unpredictable, with a further peak of Covid cases and a prolonged economic downturn still possible over the Autumn and Winter periods. Either of these could materially impact the scenarios currently being predicted. It is therefore important that we do not become complacent and continue to monitor the financial position very closely over the coming months. In the meantime, the message from the Corporate Management Team to the organisation is to be continuously mindful of the pressures we are facing and to minimise any non-essential expenditure to help ensure we remain within budget.

Medium-Term Prospects

- 5.15 Alongside the process of setting the Council’s budget for 2020/21, the Corporate Management Team and Executive members were considering and planning for the Council’s medium-term financial position earlier this year. There is currently no funding settlement for local government beyond 2020/21. However, in confirming the 2020/21 local government finance settlement the Government announced its intention to re-set the business rates baseline for all authorities in April 2021, at which point Bracknell Forest would lose around £4m of retained business rates growth which has been supporting the revenue budget for many years. This had been expected and the Council had established a Future Funding earmarked reserve to provide mitigation against this loss for several years.
- 5.16 Other key factors in projecting the medium-term financial position are:
- The level of new spending pressures and inflationary increases that are added to the base (commitment) budget each year;
 - Specific grants received, notably New Homes Bonus;
 - Annual council tax increases and the number of new properties.
- 5.17 In budget planning there is normally a gap between the predicted level of spending and available income. Since local authorities are legally obliged to set a balanced budget every year, this gap needs to be filled by a combination of budget savings and use of reserves.
- 5.18 The estimated position in February 2020 is detailed in Annex B. In summary, this showed that the Council would need to identify and deliver £10m of savings over the 3 years 2021/22 to 2023/24 to mitigate cost pressures of around £2.75m per year. It was recognised that this was significantly lower than the £8m of pressures faced in the 2020/21 budget, which was acknowledged to be unsustainable. During this period just over £10m would be used from the Future Funding reserve to support the budget. This meant that the savings required could be spread relatively evenly over the 3 years rather than having to be front loaded to coincide with the significant funding reduction in 2021/22.

5.19 In order to guide work to identify where savings would be achieved, 7 key principles were identified:

- We would:
 1. Aspire to excellence in what we do so we can live within our means;
 2. Consolidate the recent growth in social care spending into our financial plans but work towards a small reduction in real terms from 2020/21 levels;
 3. Concentrate on targeted early intervention and preventative activities to reduce future demand for more expensive services;
 4. Seek no funding for new service growth unless in exceptional circumstances, apart from a strategic priority around climate change and agreed manifesto commitments;
 5. Refocus transformation and other savings programmes and quantify savings “envelopes” for all projects;
 6. Expect all service areas to deliver spending reductions throughout the period to bridge the remaining gap, focusing on but not limiting efforts to restrict areas of limited or manageable public impact;
 7. Increase fees and charges as much as reasonably possible every year to maximise income.

5.20 Work was commencing to review and firm up savings targets for transformation programmes and individual service areas when the focus of the organisation turned, as it had to, to supporting our residents and businesses deal with the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. While the Council’s work in that respect is far from finished, we have reached the point where work needs to start to develop options for the 2021/22 budget and future years.

5.21 Given the scale of change that has happened to society and the economy since March, it is necessary to re-evaluate our planning assumptions from earlier in the year. The section below sets out key matters to consider.

a) *Pressures*

- The 2020/21 budget included £8m of service pressures and, as shown in table 1 above, we are facing a further £6.75m - £14m in year;
 - Some of the in-year pressures are likely to continue into 2021/22
 - It is not realistic at this point to plan for pressures to be held at a maximum of £2.75m per year for the foreseeable future

b) *Funding*

- It was expected that the Council would lose £4m funding in 2021/22 through a reset of the business rates system;
 - Government has recently announced that any significant changes to the business rates system will be delayed beyond 2021;
 - Business rates income will fall from the current level due to appeals against valuations (e.g. town centre) and potential business changes
- Apart from the loss of retained business rates, it was expected that the Council would keep (broadly) the same level of Government funding in future years as in 2020/21;

- Unprecedented levels of additional grant support have been provided by Government in the current year – can this realistically be sustained?
- A Spending Review has been announced for the Autumn which will cover the next three years for revenue and four years for capital– there will be no clarity before then about the overall level of public funding in the future
- This means that the local government finance settlement will most likely be announced in mid December (after the Council needs to publish its draft 2021/22 budget)

c) *Income*

- Fees and charges were planned to increase each year to help bridge the budget gap;
 - A fragile economy will make demand more sensitive to price increases
- It was expected that the number of properties paying council tax would increase significantly over the coming years;
 - To date, the council taxbase has remained broadly in line with predictions
 - A period of economic uncertainty / downturn normally has an adverse impact on the housing market
 - The impact and length of the temporary stamp duty reduction is currently unclear

5.22 An updated, estimated medium-term position is included as Annex C. A key assumption is that the level of Government support will remain broadly at the level it was at the start of 2020/21, i.e. before the additional Covid-19 support was provided. Assuming more resources will be available and then finding that this is not the case when the local government finance settlement is announced in December would leave the Council seriously exposed with little time to respond to the position outlined in Annex C. The headline is, therefore, that the Council needs to plan to deliver £15m rather than £10m of savings over the next three years to compensate for increased spending pressures and reduced income over that period. Although the gap and savings target has increased, the 7 principles previously identified under paragraph 5.19 above remain valid and will be used to guide work over the coming months to develop draft revenue budget proposals for consideration by the Executive in December.

Capital Programme

5.23 The Council approved a capital programme for 2019/20 to 2021/22 at its meeting on 28 February 2019. The final capital out-turn position is summarised in Table 2 below (subject to the final external audit).

Table 2: capital budget out-turn expenditure 2019/20

	Approved Budget	Actual Expenditure Incurred	Proposed Carry Forwards	Underspend
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Delivery	8,867	5,917	1,951	-1,000
Central Directorates	24,120	8,739	12,283	-3,099
People	28,027	6,869	17,362	-3,799
TOTAL	61,014	21,525	31,596	-7,898

- 5.24 The total capital budget for 2019/20 of £61m was comprised of £33.4m approved specifically for that year with virements and carry-forwards agreed in the year of £27.6m. The Council relies on government grants, capital receipts and other contributions of fund its on-going capital programme. As a result of the reduction in overall public expenditure over the last 3 years, the level of government grants (particular in relation to schools) has reduced substantially. However, the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) has provided the Council with the means to invest in its highest infrastructure priorities. New Council funding in 2019/20 amounted to £19.05m and included significant funding for Waste Collection, the redevelopment of Heathlands and the Town Centre redevelopment.
- 5.25 In accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations, directorates are required to manage their budgets to ensure that the overall department capital programme is not exceeded. Table 2 shows that the overall capital programme is underspent against budget, with the most significant variations from approved budgets being on the following schemes:
- Easthampstead House Demolition (£1.0m) – The original Time for Change Accommodation budget included a provision for the demolition of Easthampstead House. With tenants now in place this budget is no longer required.
 - Country Park (£2.6m) – An update has previously been provided to the Executive on the progress of this scheme. Funding for a reduced scheme remains in place.
 - Basic Needs Grant (£3.7m) – The financing of Binfield Learning Village (Kings Academy) was front-end funded through Council borrowing on the assumption that the final financing would consist of future grants and developer contributions. As such the outstanding unallocated amount of Basic Needs Grant will be used to reflect this historic position, with a consequent underspend being reported in 2019.20.
- 5.26 The total carry forwards requested by service departments amount to £31.596m. Details at scheme level can be found in Annexe D. Given the scale of this relative to the overall programme, these have been closely scrutinised by the Corporate Management Team. It is clear that the vast majority of the projects are either close to being completed or are contractually committed and underway.
- 5.27 The most significant carry-forwards that have been funded from Council resources (as opposed to grant funding which is normally automatically carried forward) are as follows:

Unrestricted

- Town Centre Redevelopment (£7.2m) – The funding set aside for the redevelopment of the Town Centre through various schemes will be drawn down as the programme continues to roll out.
 - Replacement LED Street Lights (£0.8m) – This is a continuing project and is expected to be completed in 2020/21
 - Heathlands Re-development (£10.7m) – This project is expected to complete in 2021/22 and is a long term commitment of the Council
- 5.28 In previous years funding carried forward has simply been rolled into the following year (in this instance 2020/21), however for some of the largest projects the actual cash flow profile will stretch over more than one year. This was a significant factor in the relatively low proportion of the capital budget that was actually spent in 2019/20.
- 5.29 While the Executive is asked to recommend to Council that carry-forwards totalling £31.596m are approved, it is intended that further work be undertaken over the coming months to profile capital spending across future years in time for the setting of the 2021/22 capital programme later in the year. This will enable a more accurate estimate of capital funding required and the potential revenue impact of any required additional borrowing to support the capital programme in each of the years ahead.

Capital Financing

- 5.30 Capital expenditure can be financed from four main sources; Developers' Contributions (S106 monies and Community Infrastructure Levy), Grants, Capital Receipts and Borrowing.
- 5.31 A total of £16.274m of government grants and other external contributions have been used to finance capital projects in 2019/20. Table 3 below summarises financing arrangements for capital expenditure incurred in 2019/20.

Table 3: Financing of 2019/20 Capital Expenditure

	£'000
Total capital expenditure	21,525
To be financed by:	
-Capital receipts	5,251
-Government Grants & Other Contributions	16,274
-Capital Financing Requirement	0

- 5.32 The table below highlights the most significant asset sales (capital receipts) that were realised in the year.

Table 4: Capital Receipts

Asset	£000
Unit A Waterside	1,060
Bigwood Lodge	548
Peacock Cottages	380
Mendelev Building	364

- 5.33 As a result of the capital expenditure in 2019/20 the Council now has an overall capital financing requirement of £211.6m as at the 31 March 2020. This represents the Council's underlying need to borrow to fund previously approved capital expenditure that cannot be financed from other income sources. As required by regulations, the Council will provide for the repayment of this through the minimum revenue provision which will be re-calculated for these out-turn figures using the policy agreed by Council and reflected in the Council's Budget.

- 5.34 The Council's actual need to borrow at any particular time is determined by its overall cashflow requirements. The actual level of borrowing at the end of March 2019 was £95m with investments of £16.8m, totalling net debt of £78.2m. This reflects that the Council holds cash from its reserves, capital receipts and developer contributions that can temporarily be used to finance expenditure, commonly known as "internal borrowing".
- 5.35 Capital receipts have significantly reduced over the last 5 years as the Council has disposed of surplus assets through reviews of its asset estate. As such greater reliance has been placed in recent years on developer contributions and government grants. There is considerable uncertainty surrounding the level of these contributions over the next 2 years as a result of economic conditions and changes that have been introduced by Government in order to reduce the burden on developers, which is likely to reduce the level of available funding for capital schemes.
- 5.36 Over the last 3 years the Council has developed proposals for an annual capital programme limited to £5m of new Council funding, recognising the negative impact on the revenue budget of any additional borrowing requirement. Given the significant level of capital funding already approved but not yet spent, the general economic conditions and the financial pressures faced by the Council at his time, it is proposed that this should continue to be the maximum amount of new council funding each year. In order to remain within this financial envelope, future proposals and bids should only be brought forward where there is an acute need for investment or where investment will contribute towards the Council's transformation programme and save costs in the medium to long-term.
- 5.37 The following schemes have been identified that need to be added to the current Capital Programme for 2020/21 due to an urgent need.

Berkshire Archives (£17,000)

There is an urgent need to replace vital equipment at the Berkshire Records Office – a share of which must be met by each Council party to the joint arrangement. The total costs of the work are estimated at £127,000 with an apportionment to Bracknell Forest of £17,000. The works will include a replacement of the Chiller system and building control management system. These works are urgent to maintain the integrity of the documents held.

Market Street (£175,000)

Members have previously agreed that the Coopers Hill site be re-developed and site closure is now anticipated to be by end of 2020 for all users. A phased closure is anticipated but exact details have yet to be agreed. Alternative accommodation needs to be found to house some services provided by the Head of Children's Support Services which are currently situated in Coopers Hill. Co-location of services has the potential to increase the effectiveness of service provision by providing a calm and purposeful learning environment for vulnerable young people within an accessible building within the centre of Bracknell. It is proposed that the site identified at 20-21 Market Street be remodelled to provide the additional accommodation required.

It is intended to remodel the building to make the site suitable for the services by subdividing some spaces to provide the required level of meeting accommodation. The refurbishment includes work associated with this remodelling, plus any legislative work to comply with Building Regulations within the initial estimate of £175,000.

The Market Street site which is owned and managed by Bracknell Forest Council has been empty since the end of the tenancy in December 2019. Market Street is currently advertised for rent in the external market for an income to the Council of

£20,000-£25,000. Current market conditions are unfavourable for securing an external tenant. The Virtual School and College Hall PRU currently pay approximately £33,000 for up to 5 rooms per day for 5 hours a day at Coopers Hill. It is proposed that the same charge will be made for use of a more suitable facility at 20/21 Market Street.

Invest-to-Save – Memorial Area (£54,000)

The Crematorium has an area of memorial tablets which were laid in the very early days of opening. These are underground vaults. All memorial leases are now on annual leases following a change to arrangements over 5 years ago. The take up of renewing leases for memorials improved significantly. A new vault is charged at £695 (this incorporates the inscribed tablet and the first year's lease). Thereafter the lease charge would be £66 p.a.

The area is on constant view to mourners after every service. They have deteriorated over the years to the extent that we are now unable to offer any vaults that have been vacated to new customers and we are also unable to offer renewals of expired leases to existing customers. The current facilities are deteriorating and not worth repairing, the cost to remove the deteriorating granite would be prohibitive for the labour alone and would not include any replacement system. The proposal is to remove the existing concrete/granite combination and replace with granite only making the tablets stronger and looking brand new once again. This ensures the strength of the memorials and the longevity of the area – the granite would last for 20 years. The families of the bereaved are constantly seeking to explore options and there is a robust business case for progressing this scheme. Estimates show projected income growing from £17,000 in year 1 to £25,000 by year 5 as new memorials are leased. Ongoing income will then drop to £9,000 per annum reflecting the assumed annual renewal. At a borrowing rate of 2% the scheme meets the criteria of the Council's Invest-to-Save, with the additional income repaying the cost of capital within 3 years. With a lifetime of at least 20 years this refurbished memorial area will generate additional income for many years to come.

- 5.38 The Executive has previously approved the disposal of a vacant bungalow owned by the Council adjacent to the Cemetery and Crematorium, with an estimated sale value in excess of £300k. An alternative opportunity has been identified to use the bungalow for specific social care and housing needs, which require a property in a relatively isolated setting. This offers a financial advantage to the Council overall compared with the alternative of using residential care home placements setting, in addition to offering a more suitable and preferred model of care, even after taking into account the opportunity cost of the capital receipt that would be foregone. It is therefore recommended that the Executive agrees to make available the bungalow near to the Cemetery and Crematoria for social care purposes, rather than dispose of it to generate a capital receipt.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 Members are reminded in the context of this report of their fiduciary duty to the Council Taxpayer, effectively to act as trustee of the Council's resources and to ensure proper custodianship of the Council's resources.

The Council must set and maintain a balanced budget and must take steps to deal with any projected overspends and identify savings or other measures to bring budget pressures under control.

In relation to pressures and savings the Council has a variety of statutory duties which it must fulfil by law. It cannot lawfully decide not to carry out those duties. Even where the Council is under a statutory duty to provide a service there is often a discretion available to the Council about the level of service provision. For other activities, the Council provides services in pursuance of a statutory power rather than a duty, and though not bound to carry out those activities, decisions about them must be taken in accordance with the decision making requirements of administrative law.

Director: Finance

- 6.2 The financial implications of this report are included in the supporting information.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 The Council's budget proposals impact on a wide range of services. A detailed consultation was undertaken on the draft budget proposals published in December 2019 to provide individuals and groups the opportunity to provide comments.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 The Council's strategic risk register contains a specific risk highlighting "significant pressures on the Council's ability to balance its finances whilst maintaining satisfactory service standards". While this is a long-standing issue, the situation in the current year and future year prospects mean that the risk is particularly difficult to manage at the current time. This paper has been brought to the Executive at this time to ensure there is a shared understanding of the situation and to agree an outline approach to achieving financial sustainability over the medium-term, to help focus more detailed work on specific options over the coming months.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 A detailed consultation will be undertaken on the Councils draft budget proposals for 2021/22 after they are published in December 2020.

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To: Council
9 September 2020

**Local Government Boundary Commission for England Electoral Review
Response to Draft Recommendations
Chief Executive/ Returning Officer – Democratic & Registration Services**

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is reviewing Bracknell Forest Council's electoral arrangements. The new arrangements for the Borough are scheduled to come into effect at the Council elections in May 2023. The Commission's review is undertaken in two stages. The first stage to determine the future Council size was completed on 7 January. The outcome was that the Commission was minded to recommend that 40 councillors should be elected to Bracknell Forest Council in future; two fewer than the current arrangements. This has been increased by one councillor to 41 in subsequent stages.
- 1.2 Stage Two of the review will determine a new pattern of electoral wards to accommodate these councillors. The Commission concluded this stage of the consultation on 16 March and issued draft recommendations for a new pattern of wards on 30 June.
- 1.3 The second consultation stage, based on the draft recommendations commenced on 30 June and will conclude on 7 September. The Commission has agreed that the Council can submit its response after the close of the consultation to accommodate the existing schedule of meetings.
- 1.4 The cross-party Boundary Review Working Group appointed by Council on 17 July 2019 reconvened and worked with officers to draft the proposed response to the Commission. This report seeks Council's approval to submit the recommended response.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the Council approves the Boundary Review Working Group's response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's draft recommendations for new warding arrangements for Bracknell Forest.**

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 To agree a Council response to the Local Government Boundary Commissions draft recommendations for Bracknell Forest.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The Working Group considered various options and warding patterns as part of its deliberations.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 In October 2018 the LGBCE advised that a review of the Council's electoral arrangements would take place. Bracknell Forest boundaries have not been reviewed since 2002. The review is intended to address levels of electoral inequality in Bracknell Forest that have arisen since 2002. The review is comprised of two stages; the first determines the future Council size and the second considers an appropriate pattern of wards, including:
- The total number of wards.
 - Ward boundaries.
 - The number of councillors elected to each ward.
 - The names of each ward.
- 5.2 An initial meeting to agree the review timetable was held on 27 March 2019 with the LGBCE Chairman, the Chief Executive of the Commission, the Leader of the Council, the Returning Officer (Council Chief Executive) and the Head of Democratic & Registration Services. Members were briefed on the process by the LGBCE at the 17 July Council meeting.
- 5.3 Following this briefing a cross-party Member Working Group, chaired by Cllr Dale Birch, was established with the following terms of reference:
- To ensure full Member involvement in, and support to, the electoral review process.
 - To consider options on the future size of the Council i.e. the number of elected councillors, taking into account governance arrangements, scrutiny and regulatory functions and councillors' representational roles; and to formulate draft recommendations on Council size for consideration by Council.
 - To support officers in the provision of information required by the LGBCE and the drafting of the Electoral Review document.
 - To recommend a pattern of wards to Council for submission to the LGBCE that demonstrates how the statutory criteria set by the LGBCE have been met.
- 5.4 Stage One of the review process has been completed and following this the Commission advised the Council that it was, at that point, minded to recommend that 40 councillors should be elected to the Council in future, two fewer than the current arrangements. This was consistent with the Working Group's recommendation that was agreed by Council on 13 November 2019.
- 5.5 The first consultation phase of the Stage Two concluded on 16 March with the Commission publishing their draft recommendations on 30 June. In their draft recommendations the Commission increased the number of councillors from the initially recommended 40 to 41. The Working Group has adjusted its considerations to take account of 41 councillors.
- 5.6 The Leader, Deputy Leader and Chief Executive met with The Local Government Boundary Commissions Lead Commissioner and review manager on 31 July to discuss the Council's response to the draft recommendations and the process the Commission undertook to create the proposed warding pattern.
- 5.7 The Council's Boundary Review Working Group reconvened and developed a Borough-wide response to the draft recommendations which has followed the same principles and statutory criteria of previous stages:

- To deliver electoral equality
- To reflect community interests and local identities
- To promote effective and convenient local government

- 5.8 As was the process at earlier stages of the review the Commission will adopt the proposal that offers the best solution within the context of the above criteria.
- 5.9 The Commission will publish its final recommendations on 1 December. The order will be laid in Parliament in early 2021 and the new arrangements will take effect from the May 2023 Borough elections.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 There are no material financial implications arising from consideration of this report.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.3 The Council is a consultee to the LGBCE's consultation on a warding pattern for Bracknell Forest.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 None required.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 There are no strategic risk management issues arising directly from this report.

Background Papers

Further information about the electoral review process can be found on the LGBCE website:

[http://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Corporate%20Documents/technicalguidance-2014%20\(reduced\).pdf](http://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Corporate%20Documents/technicalguidance-2014%20(reduced).pdf)

Contact for further information

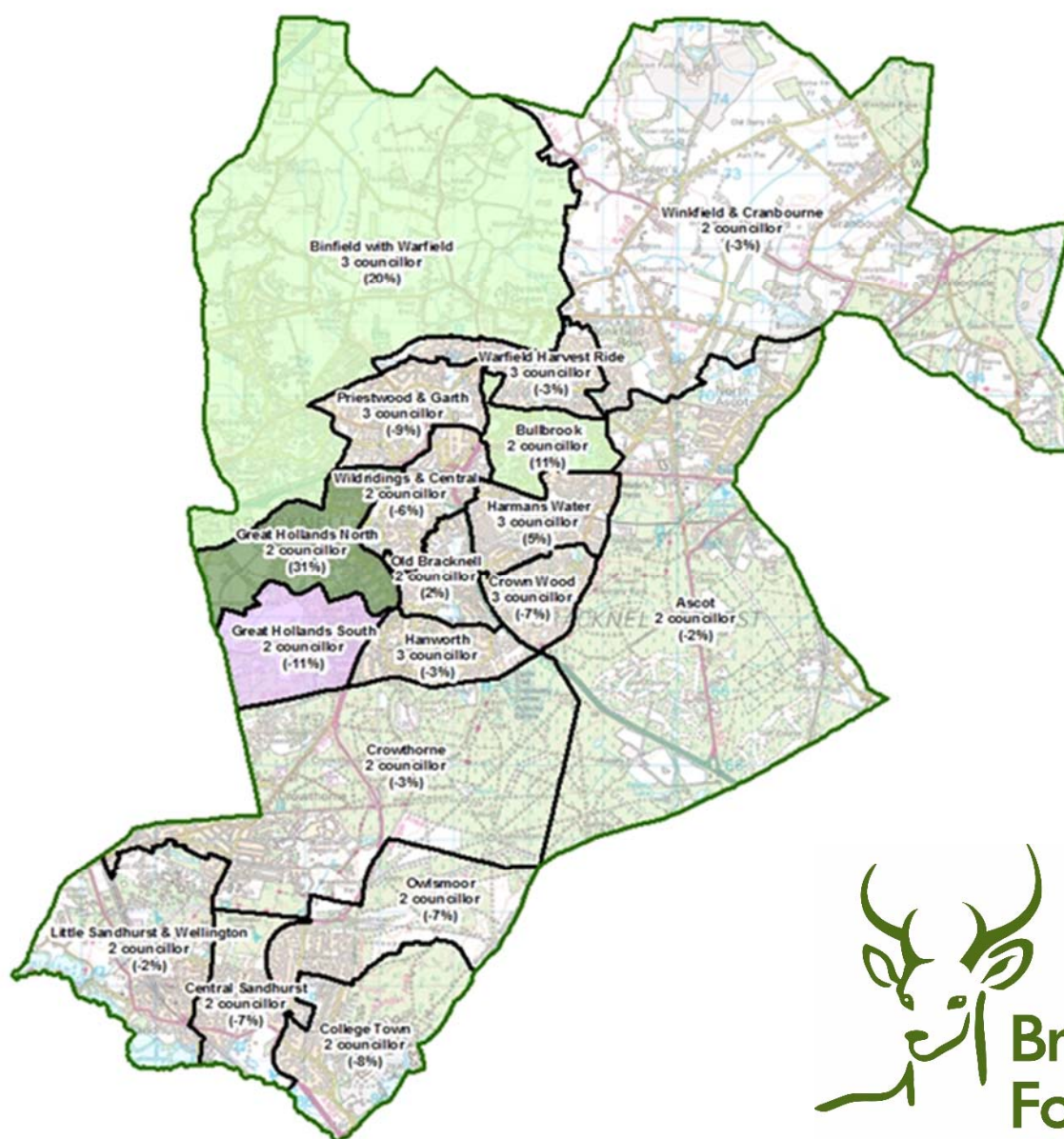
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BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL ELECTORAL REVIEW

Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission's Draft Recommendations – September 2020



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Summary

Introduction

This is Bracknell Forest Council's response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) draft warding recommendations published on 30 June 2020.

This phase of the consultation ends on 7 September however, to accommodate the timing of Bracknell Forest Council's next full council meeting the LGBCE has kindly agreed to accept the authority's submission after this meeting should it be agreed by Council on 9 September 2020.

Following the close of this consultation the LGBCE can decide to extend or open a further round of consultation should they feel it is necessary. Pending no further stages of consultation, the LGBCE's current timetable states that the final recommendations for Bracknell Forest will be published on 1 December 2020.

The Council is grateful for the meeting held on the 31 July between the LGBCE lead Commissioner and review manager and the Chief Executive, Leader and Deputy Leader (also Chair of the Boundary Working Group) which has helped inform this response.

Developing a response to the draft recommendations

The Council's Boundary Review Working Group was reconvened to develop a response to the LGBCE's draft recommendations. The process undertaken was to examine each area and ward proposed by the LGBCE to understand how the commission had reached their proposals with the intention of recommending changes where it was felt appropriate.

At all stages of this process the Working Group was mindful of the advice given at the meeting of the 31 July that any suggestion contrary to the proposed warding pattern had to take account of the three guiding principles used by the commission when forming their draft recommendations. These were:

- To reflect community interests and local identities
- To promote effective and convenient local government
- To deliver equality of representation

Following the formation of the Working Group's initial response, two cross-party, all member workshops were held inviting all Bracknell Forest Borough councillors to comment on both the LGBCE's draft recommendations and the Working Group's proposed response.

Responses from these workshops and subsequent emailed suggestions were considered at the final Working Group meeting held on 19 August 2020 and the final draft response agreed.

Initial response to the draft recommendations

While the draft recommendations differ significantly to the warding pattern submitted by The Council at the Stage 2 consultation, the Working Group and members recognise the strengths of the LGBCE proposals and understand the rationale taken by the LGBCE's review officers in drafting their proposals.

The Council is proposing minimal changes to the vast majority of the wards detailed in the draft recommendations and asks that only some minor amendments are made to better reflect community identity and interests in some areas.

Additionally, a consensus view amongst the constituent elected members and political parties within Bracknell Forest is that single-member wards invite the possibility of poor electoral representation and or governance in these areas increasing the risk that residents are not properly or fairly represented. For example, should the elected councillor in that ward become unwell, etc.

and need to step back from their duties on a temporary basis, there is little inherent resilience to provide cover for casework or other ward-based queries.

Considering this point the Council proposes that the 'Central Bracknell' ward in the draft recommendations is reconfigured as a two-member ward. A proposal is included in this submission that has been evaluated against and meets the three criteria ensuring that individual community identities are retained while achieving good electoral equality and convenient and effective local government.

Ward based response and change requests

The below sets out, area by area, a response to each of the LGBCE's proposed wards.

Crowthorne and Sandhurst: Crowthorne, Sandhurst, Owlsmoor & College Town

Ward	LGBCE Draft Recommendations		BFC Proposals	
	Cllrs	Variance	Cllrs	Variance
Crowthorne	3	-10%	3*	-10%*
Sandhurst	3	9%	3*	9%*
Owlsmoor & College Town	3	9%	3*	9%*

*No Change

No changes are proposed to the commission's draft recommendations and the Council welcomes the addition of another councillor to Crowthorne to ensure better community representation in that area.

The expansion of the 'Sandhurst' ward into 'Owlsmoor & College Town' (around Avocet Crescent) is not considered as an ideal solution by the Council as the communities held within this area very much look towards Owlsmoor and College Town for their amenities and local identity. Bracknell Forest would welcome a further examination of that area to see if it would be possible to reincorporate these residents into 'Owlsmoor & College Town' but, recognise the difficulties around meeting electoral equality.

The area of Derby Field in the north west of the 'Sandhurst' ward has been included in the local plan so it will receive future planning permission for properties that will look towards Crowthorne Parish for their amenities and community identity. Because there is no clear indication as to when an application will be submitted or building commence it is intended that Bracknell Forest will undertake a Community Governance Review of this area to incorporate these residents in Crowthorne Parish and would request the LGBCE amends the borough boundary to match these changes once they have been implemented. It is appreciated that this will be outside of this review process, so no changes are proposed to the commission's recommendations for Crowthorne

Central Bracknell: Hanworth, Easthampstead & Wildridings and Central Bracknell

Ward	LGBCE Draft Recommendations		BFC Proposals	
	Cllrs	Variance	Cllrs	Variance
Hanworth	3	-5%	3*	-5%*
Easthampstead & Wildridings	3	-6%	3*	-6%*
Central Bracknell/ Town Centre & The Parks	1	-3%	2	8%

*No Change

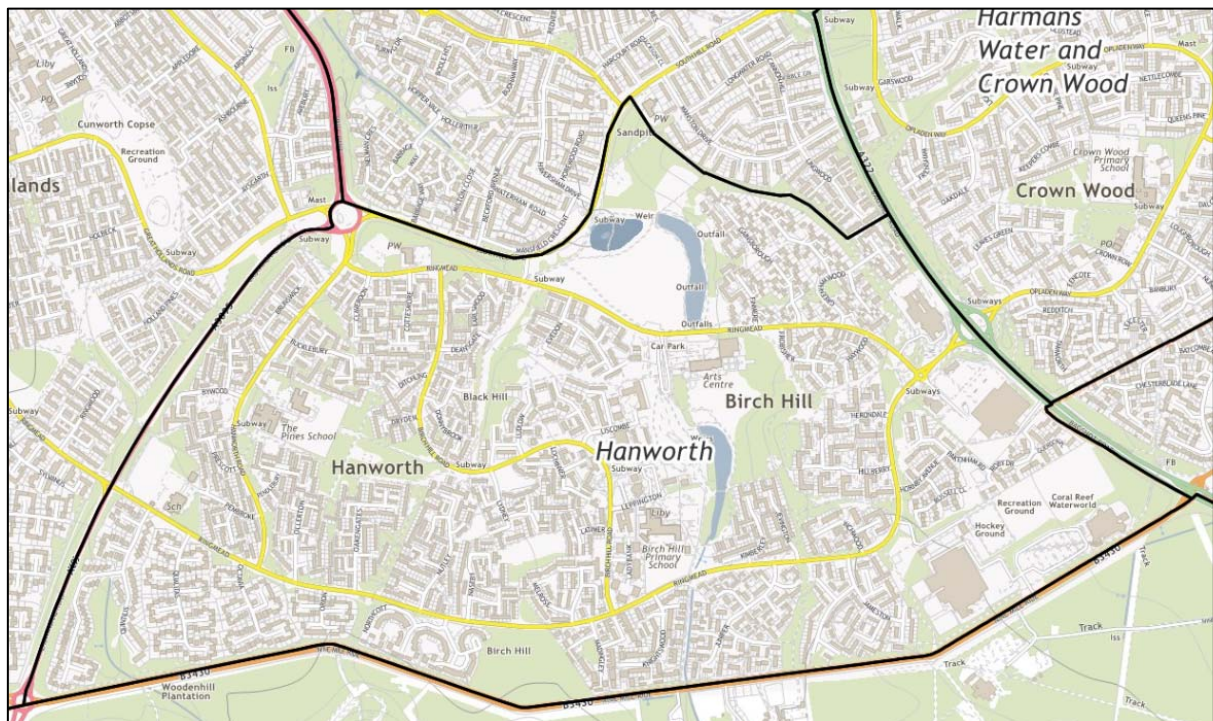
A change is proposed to the 'Hanworth' and 'Easthampstead & Wildridings' wards moving the boundary between 'Hanworth' ward and 'Easthampstead & Wildridings' along South Hill Road to incorporate the area of North Lake and the park into the 'Hanworth' ward.

Evidence submitted from borough and town councillors representing the Hanworth and Birch Hill areas demonstrate that there is a strong view amongst residents that this area along with The South Hill Park Arts Centre are a single combined entity referred to locally as South Hill Park with issues around anti-social behaviour, annual community events etc. often directed to the Hanworth councillors. Therefore, to better meet the criteria for effective and efficient local governance it would be beneficial to incorporate the North Lake itself and the park area (North Field) within the same ward. The evidence presented recognises the commission's comments in paragraph 67 of the draft response that retains the communities of Manston Drive, Longwater Road, Canon Hill and Lingwood in the 'Easthampstead & Wildridings' ward and seeks only to include the North Lake and park area within Hanworth.

Community interest and local identity is not affected as the area of North Lake and the park is already identified as South Hill Park.

No electors currently reside in the area in question and there will be no changes to the elector totals in either ward as a result of this amendment.

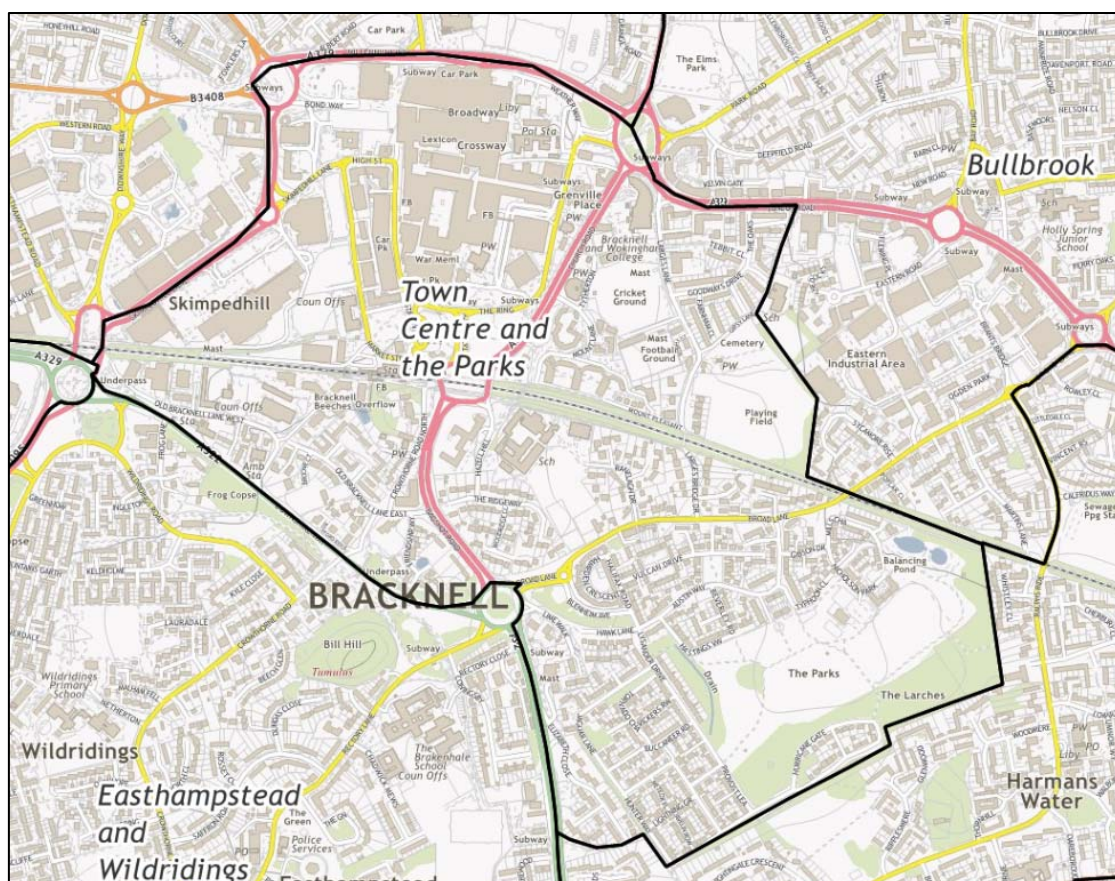
Map of proposed Hanworth ward:



As referenced earlier in this submission there is a strong preference for multi-member wards and no single-member wards. The Council recognises the commission's approach to creating the single-member 'Central Bracknell' ward and respects the community-based argument for its creation.

Taking account of both of these interests the Council proposes an adjustment to the 'Central Bracknell' ward and 'Bullbrook & The Parks' ward to create two, two-member wards in place of the one single-member ward and one three-member ward as currently proposed in the draft recommendations.

These are proposed to be named 'Bullbrook' and 'Town Centre & The Parks'



In terms of maintaining community links and identities, currently there is no shared identity between The Parks and Bullbrook other than those shared universally with other wards. i.e. residents in both areas look towards the Town Centre for amenities, etc. Amending the pattern of wards in this way retains each distinct community in its entirety. Pairing the Parks with the Town Centre, i.e. another distinct community, follows the same methodology adopted by the commission in the draft recommendations when creating 'Bullbrook & The Parks'. The Council's proposed solution has the added benefit of addressing our concerns around effective and convenient local government for the residents in the 'Central Bracknell' ward.

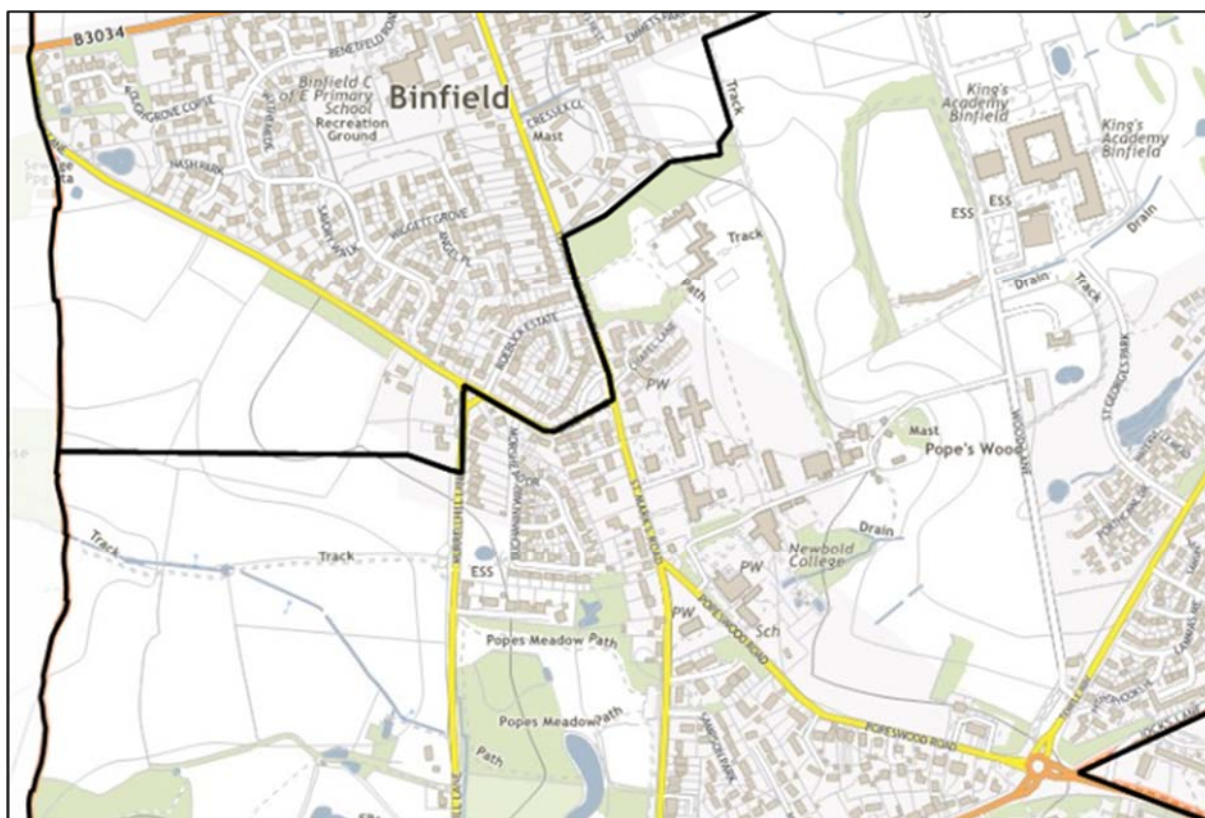
Of all areas considered by the Council when crafting the response to the LGBCE's draft recommendations it is felt most strongly that changes need to be made here above anywhere else in the proposed scheme.

West Bracknell: Great Hollands, Binfield South & Jennett's Hill

Ward	LGBCE Draft Recommendations		BFC Proposals	
	Cllrs	Variance	Cllrs	Variance
Great Hollands	3	0%	3*	0%*
Binfield South & Jennett's Hill	3	-3%	3*	1%

*No Change

No changes are proposed in this area other than a small amendment to move The Roebuck estate and some surrounding houses into 'Binfield North & Warfield East' as these residents most identify with Binfield Village itself, accessing the shops, library and other amenities on Terrace Road South.



As a general point the Council reaffirms the view that the A329M (Berkshire Way) is a hard boundary between the communities of Binfield (South) and the Jennett's Park estate. These two areas have no real community connection with one another or day to day interaction. However, it is recognised that there is no easily identifiable way to meet electoral equality in this area without otherwise compromising another ward, so the Council has accepted the LGBCE recommendations in this area

In terms of names the Council proposes an amendment to 'Binfield South & Jennett's Park' to better reflect the contemporary community identity already established.

North Bracknell: Binfield North & Warfield West, Priestwood & Garth and Warfield East

Ward	LGBCE Draft Recommendations		BFC Proposals	
	Cllrs	Variance	Cllrs	Variance
Binfield North & Warfield West	2	-3%	2*	10%
Priestwood & Garth	3	-3%	3*	-10%
Warfield East	3	-0%	3*	5%

*No Change

When considering the commission's proposals for this area the Council looked extensively at the impact of the proposals on the communities involved. The majority of what has been proposed reflects existing communities well and takes account of local interests.

A single area of concern, however, is the placement of Quelm Park in the 'Priestwood & Garth' ward. Residents in Quelm Park have strong community links to the Parish of Warfield and look north for their community facilities, schools etc. This is in strong contrast to other residents in the proposed 'Priestwood & Garth' ward and it should also be noted that there is no way to access Quelm Park by road other than to drive along Harvest Ride on the very northern edge of the

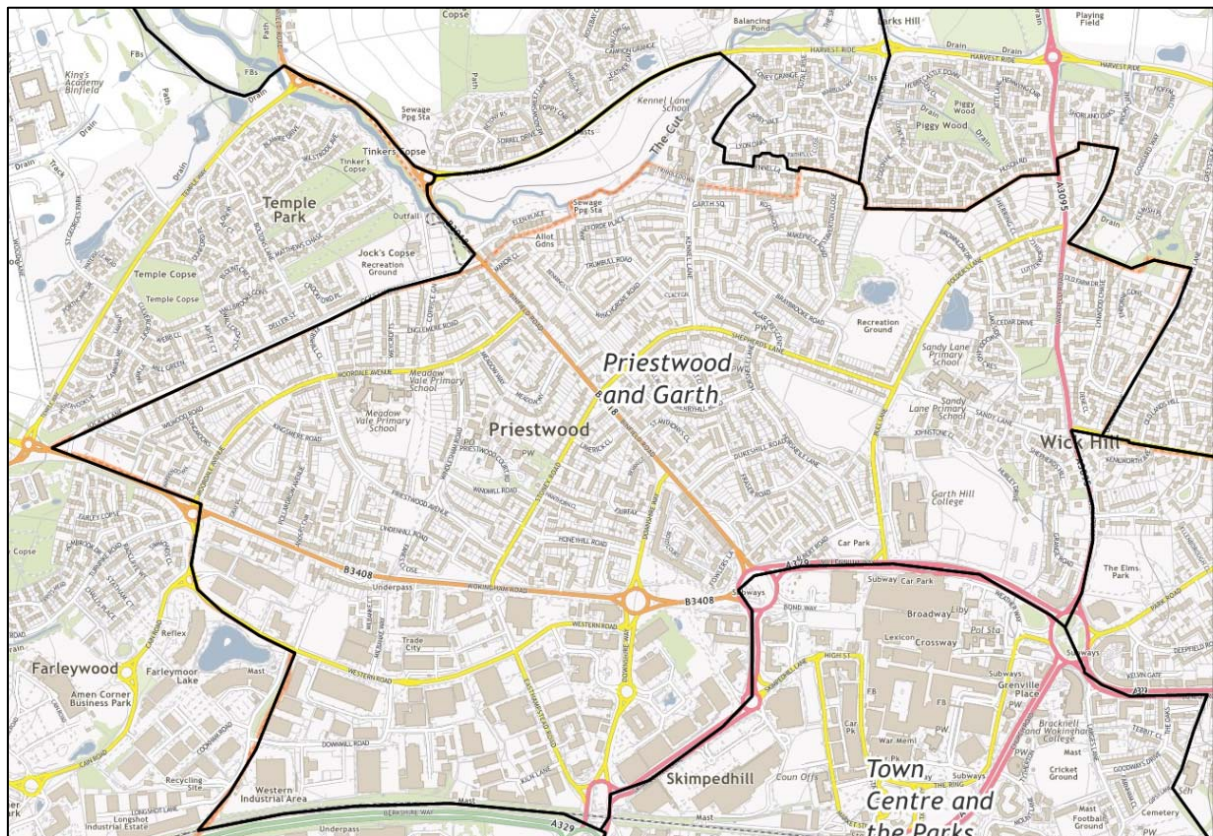
proposed ward. There is no road within the boundaries of the proposed ward that link the two areas.

In looking to address this the Council recognises that, for the purposes of electoral equality, it is not possible to wholly remove Quelm Park from 'Priestwood & Garth' and place it into either 'Binfield North & Warfield West' or 'Warfield East'. However, by splitting the area into two the west part of Quelm Park can be added to 'Binfield North & Warfield West' with the eastern part of the estate added to 'Warfield East.'

To ensure electoral equality some additional amendments would need to be affected in 'Warfield East' and 'Binfield North & Warfield West.'

- 1) A slight adjustment of the boundary between the 'Binfield North & Warfield West' and 'Warfield East'. The community identity is retained.
- 2) The area around Lynwood Chase, currently in the proposed 'Warfield East' ward should be added to the 'Priestwood & Garth' Community with identity largely retained as there is no existing relationship with Warfield Parish that would be detrimentally affected by the proposed change. A small area north should also be included in this area to take account of the current parliamentary boundary however, it would be preferred if these electors could be incorporated into Warfield at a later date through the proper processes.
- 3) A small area in the north east of the 'Priestwood & Garth' ward around Priory Lane should be included in this ward to take account of the existing town council and parliamentary boundaries. In a future Community Governance Review this area could either be retained in 'Priestwood & Garth' or moved into Warfield Parish and Warfield East without detrimentally impacting electoral equality in either area.
- 4) The area around Wick Hill and Elm Park are moved into Bullbrook. These residents already strongly identify with the Town Centre and Bullbrook area as this is their current borough and town council ward.

Map of proposed Priestwood & Garth ward:



East Bracknell: Winkfield North and Winkfield South

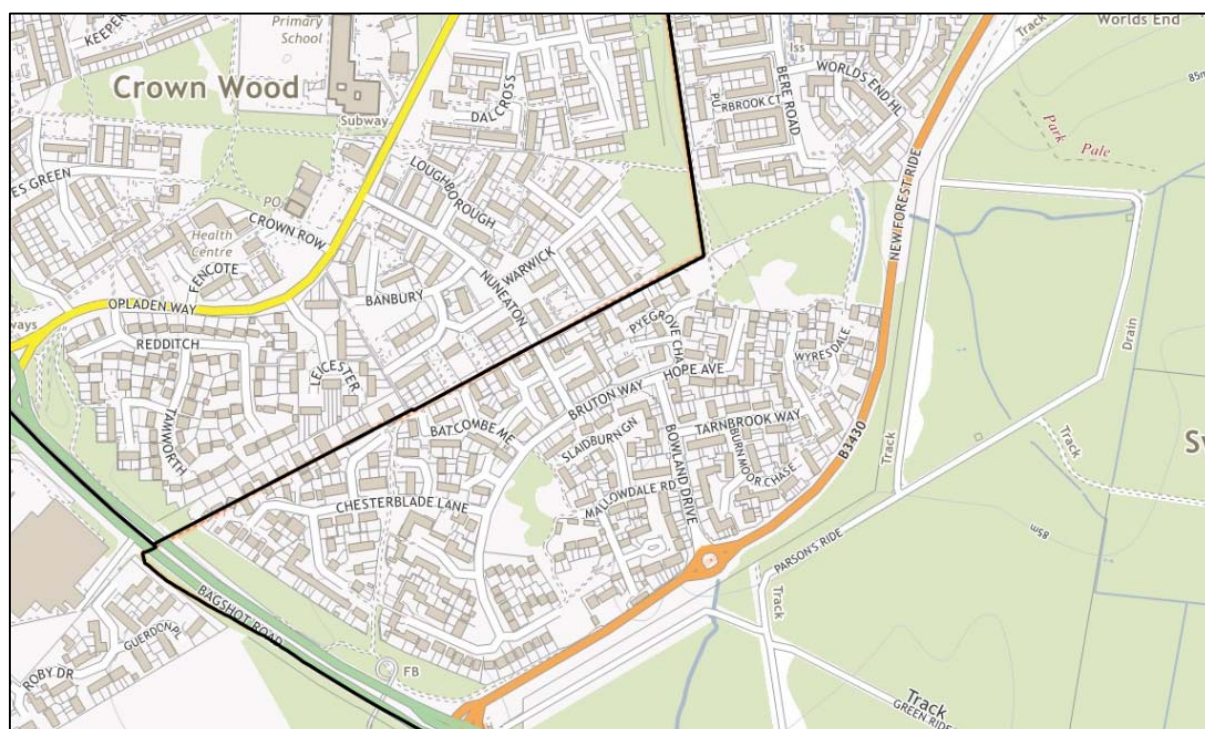
Ward	LGBCE Draft Recommendations		BFC Proposals	
	Cllrs	Variance	Cllrs	Variance
Winkfield North	3	-2%	3*	-2%*
Winkfield South	2	6%	2*	6%*

*No Change

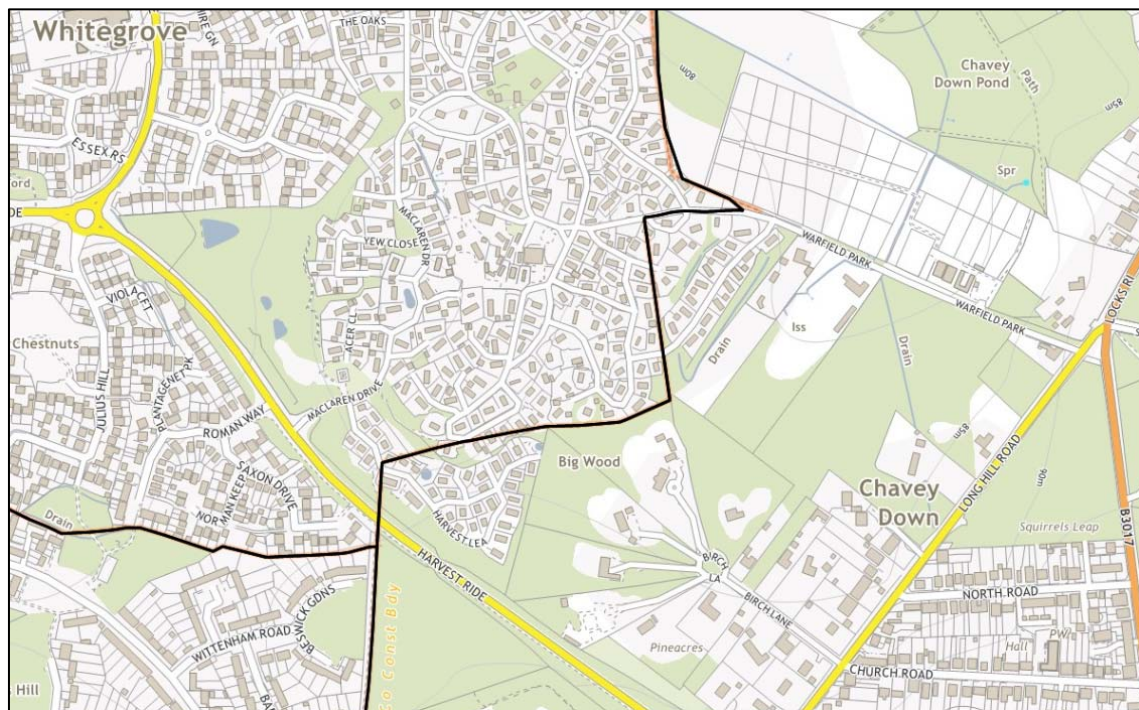
The Council proposes no changes to the boundaries in this area and accepts the draft recommendations as proposed.

The parish/ ward boundary line is noticeably 'defaced' i.e. no longer representative of contemporary property developments in the south of the area along the boundary between the 'Winkfield South' and 'Harmans Water & Crown Wood' wards where it can be seen to cross through the middle of several residential properties. Following the conclusion of this review the Council will seek to undertake a Community Governance Review in this area to rectify the issue and will ask the commission to adjust the ward boundary as appropriate. The same process will also be undertaken around the Warfield Park area to bring the entirety of that development into the 'Warfield East' borough ward.

Southern boundary between Crown Wood and Forest Park:



Boundary between Winkfield North and Warfield East encompassing Warfield Park:



The Council proposes that the 'Winkfield South' ward be renamed 'Swinley Forest.' This name has greater local meaning to the communities in this area as there is little local connection to the locality of Winkfield itself. Therefore, is it also suggested that 'Winkfield North' be renamed as 'Winkfield.'

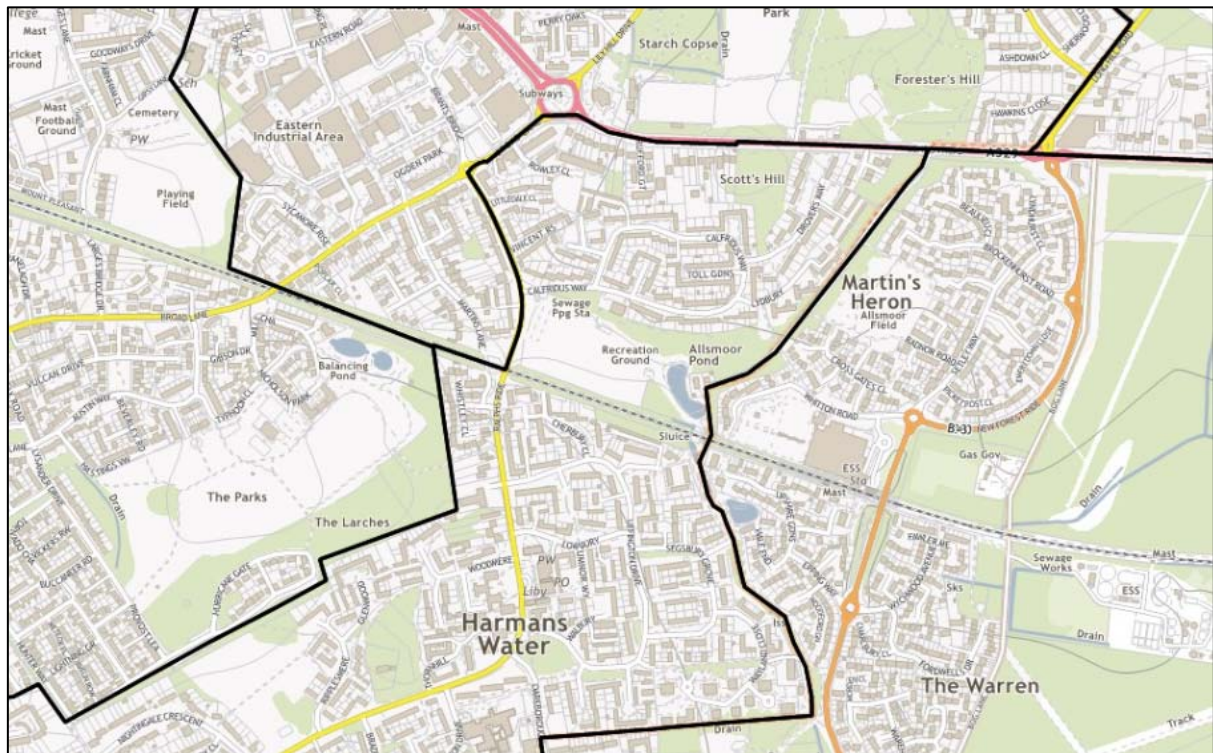
Central East Bracknell: Bullbrook & The Parks, Harmans Water & Crown Wood

Ward	LGBCE Draft Recommendations		BFC Proposals	
	Cllrs	Variance	Cllrs	Variance
Bullbrook & The Parks/ Bullbrook	3	2%	2	1%
Harmans Water & Crown Wood	3	-9%	3*	-9%*

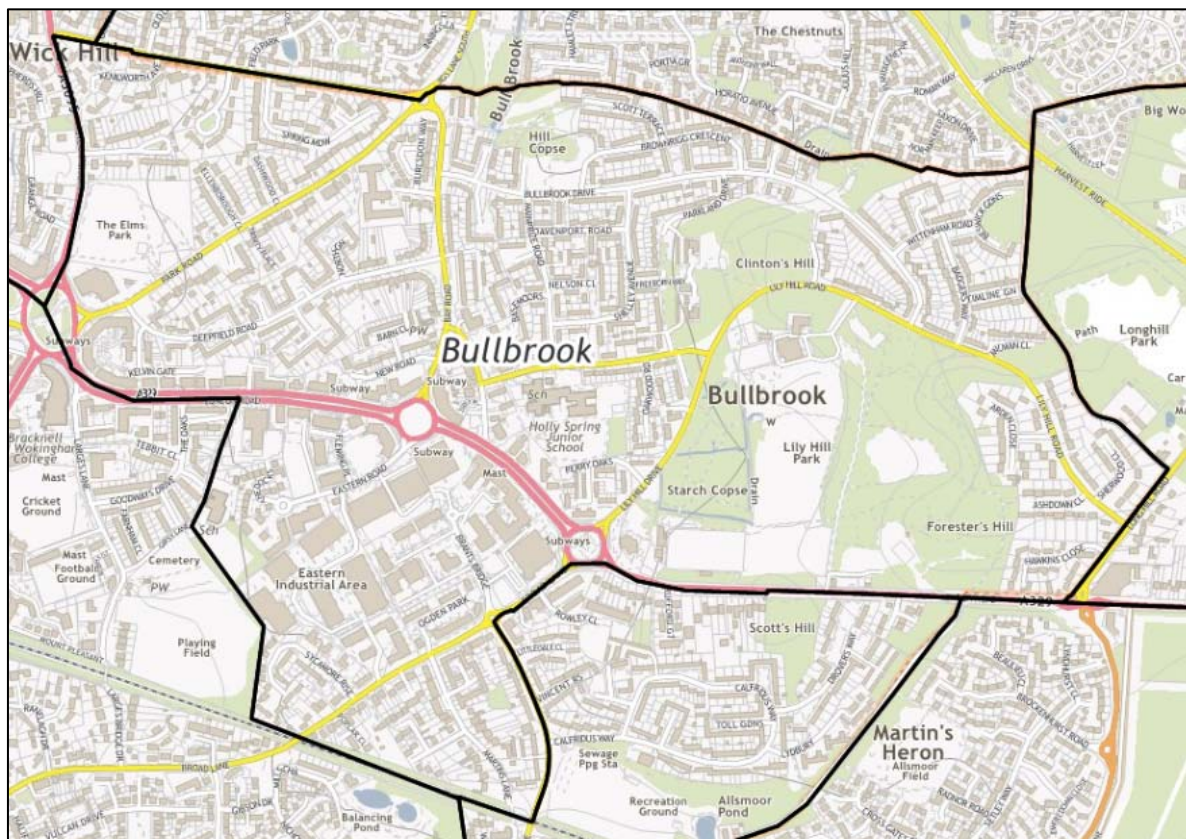
*No Change

The requested changes to 'Bullbrook & The Parks' have been set out elsewhere in this submission. One final requested adjustment is for the inclusion of 'Scott's Hill' into 'Harmans Water & Crown Wood' as this community has closer links with Harmans Water than Bullbrook ensuring accurate community representation

Area of proposed change 'Scott's Hill'



Map of proposed Bullbrook ward



The Council would have preferred a solution that had been able to keep Harmans Water, Crown Wood and Forest Park together as a ward or wards as it is felt that there is a shared community identity and interest between these distinct communities. However, it is recognised that there is significant difficulty in doing this based on the principle of electoral equality and accepts the commission's proposal within the context of the wider draft recommendations as they are proposed.

Summary

The Council has taken account of the response to the Council's first submission and hopes that the commission recognises the value in the changes proposed. These have been put forward as it is collectively felt by the Council that these changes meet the three criteria guiding this process.

Electoral integrity is retained in all of the proposed wards with no area exceeding the greatest level of imbalance in the commission's draft recommendations.

Community identity has been put at the forefront of the Council's considerations as much as has been possible within the wider implications of the draft recommendations and considered on balance within the wider process.

Effective and convenient local government has been considered carefully in all areas proposed and where the Council has concerns, these have been raised in the hope that they will be addressed where possible.

Ward summary

	LGBCE Draft Recommendations		BFC Proposals	
Ward	Cllrs	Variance	Cllrs	Variance
Binfield South & Jennett's Hill	3	-3%	3*	1%
Binfield North & Warfield West	2	-3%	2*	10%
Bullbrook	3	2%	2	1%
Crowthorne	3	-10%	3*	-10%*
Easthampstead & Wildridings	3	-6%	3*	-6%*
Great Hollands	3	0%	3*	0%*
Hanworth	3	-5%	3*	-5%*
Harmans Water & Crown Wood	3	-9%	3*	--9%*
Owlsmoor & College Town	3	9%	3*	9%*
Priestwood & Garth	3	-3%	3*	-10%
Sandhurst	3	9%	3*	9%*
Central Bracknell/ Town Centre & The Parks	1	-3%	2	8%
Warfield East	3	-0%	3*	5%
Winkfield North	3	-2%	3*	-2%*
Winkfield South	2	6%	2*	6%*

*No Change

A detailed and interactive version of the Council's proposals can be seen at:

https://rds.statmap.co.uk/map/map.html?login=bracknellforest_viewer&scenario=FINAL_SUBMISSION&sid=ecef70748c1b71c461eebbf040b2271b

To: Council
9 September 2020

Member Development Strategy 2020–24 and Member Development Report 2019-20 Executive Director of Delivery –Democratic and Registration Services

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The attached paper describes the member development strategy 2020–24. It outlines the principles, actions, success measures and responsibilities that define the Council's approach to member development over the period. It has been created and agreed by the Member Development Charter Steering Group.
- 1.2 The attached annual report appraises all members of the work and progress on member development during the year 2019-20. The report informs members of activities and their outcomes and outlines proposed future actions. It has been approved by the Member Development Charter Steering Group.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the member development strategy 2020–24 be approved.
- 2.2 That the member development annual report 2019–20 be noted.

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The current strategy covers 2016–20 and is coming to an end. The new strategy reflects the importance Bracknell Forest Council places on learning and development for all those who work to deliver good public services. The member development strategy provides a framework to continuously improve learning and development for councillors so they can be effective in ensuring the delivery of the Council's priorities for the benefit of Bracknell Forest residents.
- 3.2 Under the current and new strategies the Council committed to considering annual reports on the progress of member learning and development.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 None. The Council has committed to the Councillor Development Charter Plus standard and this option demonstrates a committed and strategic approach to member development which is driven by a cross-party steering group of members.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The current member development strategy is coming to an end. At last year's review the Member Development Charter Steering Group noted that the strategy should be revised following the development of the new Council Plan.
- 5.2 The Steering Group created the new strategy in a workshop which included officers from member development and the Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection. The group reviewed current and future activities for councillors in

Bracknell Forest against the context of the new Council Plan to create a member development strategy that supports the Council's objectives.

- 5.3 The Member Development Steering Group commits to reviewing the strategy at least annually to ensure it continues to meet members' needs, and to reporting annually to the Council on the progress of member development.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 The costs associated with the member development work detailed in the annual report 2019/20 have been contained within the 2019/20 budgets for approved conferences (£10,220) and member training (£7,190).

Other Consultation Responses

6.3 Principal Groups Consulted

- 6.3.1 Member Development Charter Steering Group.

Method of Consultation

- 6.3.2 Meetings and emails.

Representations Received

- 6.3.3 All representations have been incorporated within the final documents.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 The member development strategy and the Charter Plus framework have an inclusive approach embedded within them, and regular evaluation of both will test this principle. Training in equalities issues is also a component of the member development programme.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 Councillors have a pivotal role in taking forward the Council's objectives, therefore effective member development is essential to ensure that councillors enhance their knowledge, capabilities, networks and experiences and learn new skills. Without it there is a risk that the Council will not be as well placed to deliver its objectives.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

Ann Moore, Head of Democratic and Registration Services – 01344 352260
ann.moore@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Member Development Annual Report 2019-20



Foreword

Following the elections in May 2019 the first member development priority was delivering a comprehensive induction to new councillors joining Bracknell Forest Council. The Member Development Charter Steering Group is committed to ensuring that our elected members have the skills to deliver services equal to the 2019 election manifesto. I was pleased to see the positive feedback from new councillors on their induction and I welcome their suggested improvements for the future.



Seeking and responding to feedback is key to our continued improvement. In January, South East Employers confirmed we are making good progress towards Charter plus reaccreditation in 2021. They noted the value of feedback and I would encourage all members to continue providing comments on their development experiences.

The Council Plan puts our election commitments into the current financial context to provide a strategic direction and framework to meet the challenges ahead. This year the steering group revised the Member Development Strategy to focus on five guiding principles which recognise this context and will shape our approach to member development over the next four years.

The coronavirus pandemic brought new challenges for us all, including the lockdown measures required to control the outbreak. This immediately turned attention to helping members get to grips with new technology and different ways of working. Despite the difficult circumstances, both members and officers quickly adopted new approaches to maintain critical council services. This strong response on the Council's day-to-day activities creates new opportunities for member development and provides a solid skills base to build on in the future.

As always, my thanks go to members of the Steering Group and all the officers who have shown resilience and flexibility and made this progress possible.

Councillor Nick Allen
Chairman of Member Development Charter Steering Group

Message from Executive Member

Bracknell Forest remains committed to providing members with the support they need to carry out their roles successfully. This is illustrated in the guiding principles of the new strategy and I very much enjoyed being part of the workshop to create it. I want to thank the steering group for their leadership in establishing the principles and developing the strategy.

I also thank all members for their feedback on development activities. It is so important that development is member led, and clear direction from the steering group combined with good engagement from all members is what ensures this approach at Bracknell Forest.

Councillor John Harrison
Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to appraise all members of the work and progress on member development during the year 2019-2020. The report informs members of activities and their outcomes and outlines proposed future actions.

Member Development Charter Steering Group

The Steering Group meets as needed during the year with updates and important matters dealt with via email and Chairman's briefings. This year the Member Development Charter Steering Group focused on the Charter plus interim assessment and on creating a new member development strategy for the next 4 years. The Steering Group comprised nine councillors meeting with appropriate officers.

The Steering Group members in 2019-20 were Councillors Allen (Chairman), Wade (Vice-Chairman), Dr Barnard, Bettison, Birch, Dudley, Kirke, Mossom and Neil



Induction evaluation

Following the elections in May 2019 an induction programme provided information to newly elected members and an opportunity for returning councillors to refresh their knowledge on key subjects. The programme used a variety of approaches: case studies, presentations, Q&A, and a market place and borough tour. As a result of member feedback, since March 2019 all material is provided in a more manageable form via an electronic newsletter, Democracy Snapshot.

In November, newly elected councillors evaluated the induction at a feedback workshop or via follow up calls. Ten out of eleven new councillors contributed to the following feedback.

2019 New Member Induction Evaluation



What worked well

- Easily accessible information provided to all candidates
- Early provision of key dates to candidates
- Democracy Snapshot newsletter
- Marketplace event increased understanding of services
- Welcome session to get the basics in place early, introduce key member support officers and meet other new members
- Using Bracknell-focused case studies to extend knowledge in a relevant way
- Speed reading course provided practical skills that save time and are in constant use

"The marketplace helped me understand how, as a member, I can champion what departments do."

"I have 20 years' experience with local government and this is the best induction I have ever been through."

Opportunities to improve

- Induction programme was very busy in June and July
- Communication on what to expect at Annual Council wasn't clear
- Make information accessible from any device (will be enabled by Office365)
- Support officers in sharing their knowledge effectively
- Greater focus on community leader aspects of the role
- Consider a checklist to help any new minority group leaders prioritise their initial appointments with officers

Charter plus progress

In January, South East Employers assessed our member development progress in line with the Charter plus requirements. Based on the achievements outlined in Annex B, SEE judged our activities to be very successful and provided the following comments.

2020 Charter plus interim assessment feedback



- The Council continues to meet the standards required for Charter plus accreditation.
- SEE recognises that member development is well embedded at Bracknell Forest Council which is ahead of nearly all comparative councils.
- Assessor noted the steering group's focus on the next strategy and developing the supporting work programme.

"Bracknell Forest demonstrates high innovation with regards to member development."



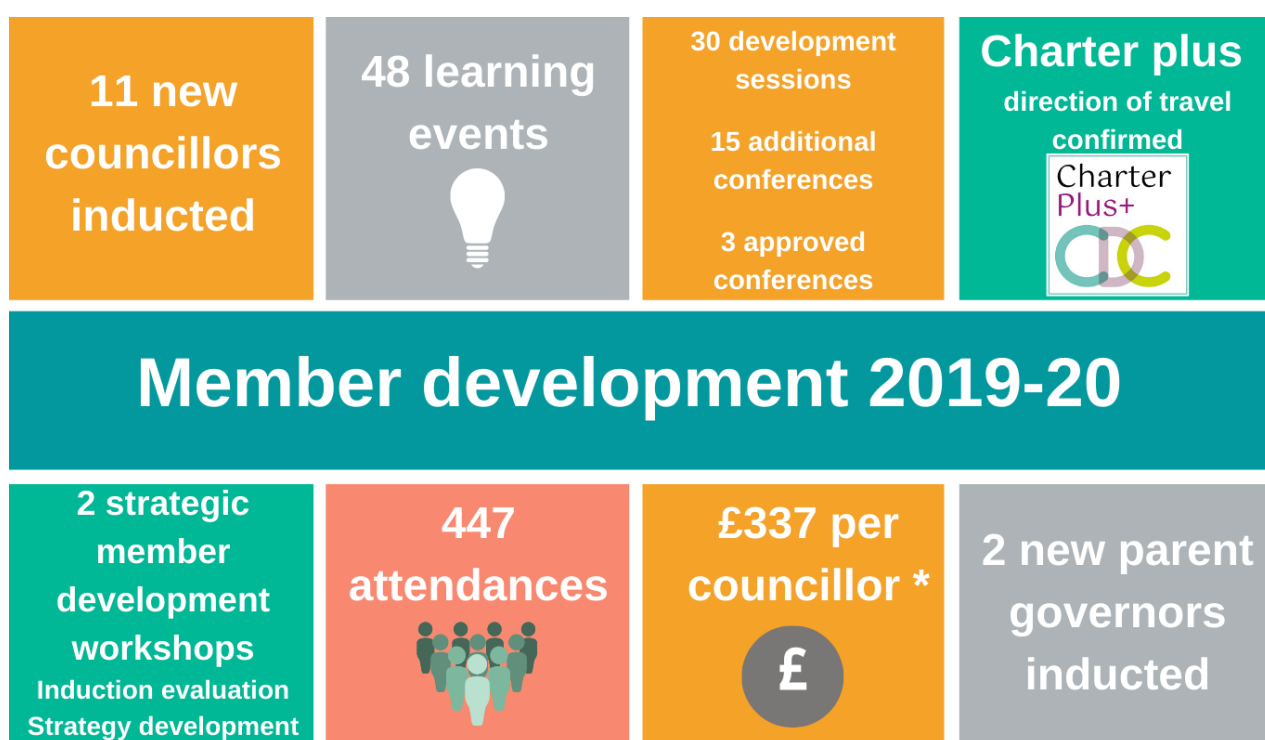
Opportunities to improve

- How to better evaluate development sessions and projects
- Find innovative ways of delivering development to gain best value from our resources.

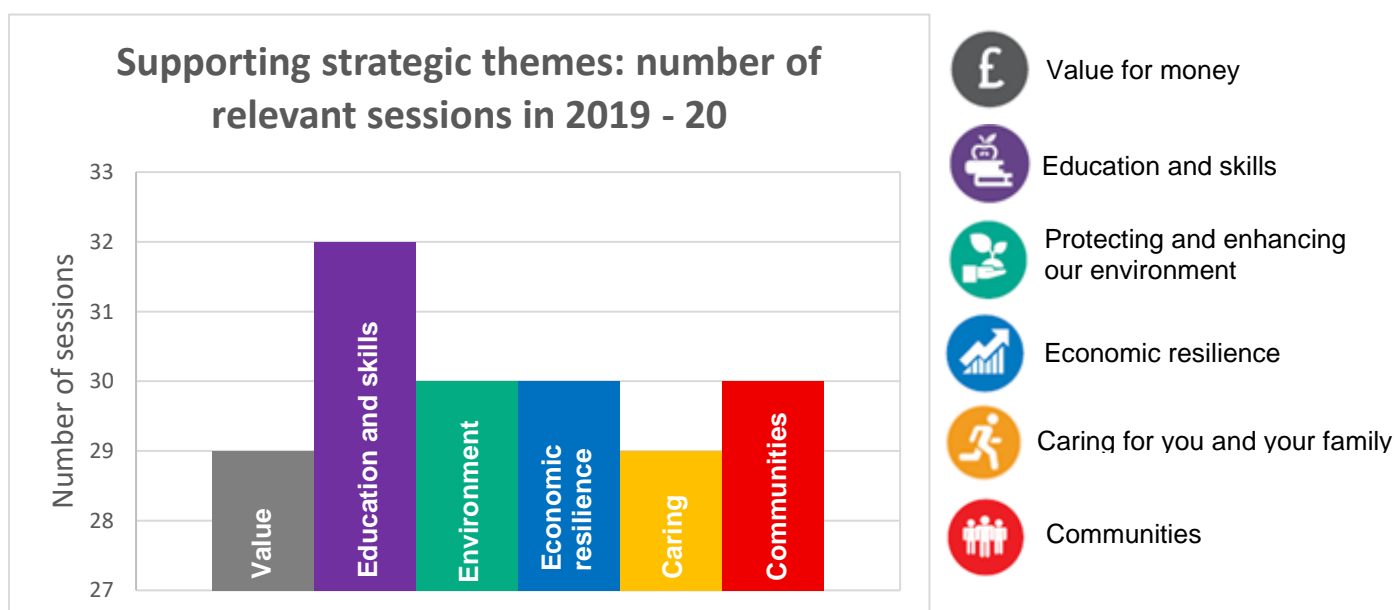
Supporting Overview and Scrutiny

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Commission implemented a new approach to ensure scrutiny activity focuses on the themes of the Council Plan. The new arrangements make it easier for all members to contribute and success relies on their active involvement. Member development supported the new approach with 3 new development sessions reviewing some of the key skills for effective scrutiny: questioning skills, running effective reviews and budget scrutiny.

Member development at a glance



* excludes travel costs and officer time to prepare and deliver member development sessions



In an induction year that also focused on overview and scrutiny this consistent focus across all of the strategic themes is expected. Most of this year's sessions supported the fundamental skills and knowledge required of an effective councillor and are applicable across all themes in delivering the Council Plan.

Code of conduct training for councillors

3 sessions in July and 1 in December 2019

Attended by 54 borough, town and parish councillors



Facilitated by Sanjay Prashar, Monitoring Officer, and Kirsty Hunt, Governance and Scrutiny Manager

This session ensured both new and returning councillors understand the standards of conduct required in public life and the declarations they must make to ensure transparency and impartiality.

The workshop used case studies and discussion to help members explore issues.

"The interactive group discussions helped see other points of view"



Strategic Themes supported: all



Council services market place

Held on 15 May 2019, attended by 21 councillors



Delivered by senior officers from across the Council

This afternoon event was an opportunity for councillors to meet senior officers who were showcasing work from key services across the Council.

"It was a most impressive display... we visited as many stands as possible."



Strategic themes supported: all



Member officer protocol

Delivered on 24 June 2019, attended by 18 councillors



Facilitated by Bethan Evans, Bethan Evans Governance Training Consultancy

This session explored the respective roles of elected councillors and officers. It considered the importance of this inter-dependent relationship in an effective council and built members' knowledge of the codes and protocols which apply.

"Really thought provoking – much better than simply reading through our protocols."



Strategic themes supported: all

Introduction to Local Government Finance

Delivered on 23 September 2019, attended by 20 councillors



Facilitated by Stuart McKellar, Director of Finance

The session provided an understanding of local government finance and budget setting for all councillors, and particularly those in Overview and Scrutiny to help them prepare for the upcoming scrutiny of budget proposals.

"This session is a great idea, especially for new Cllrs like me."



Strategic themes supported: value for money

Bracknell Forest Council's housing role

Delivered on 18 November 2019, attended by 16 councillors



Facilitated by Sarah Gee, Assistant Director Early Help & Communities, and Sharon Warner, Head of Welfare & Housing

This session provided an overview of the Housing Authority's role and statutory duties and covered:

- the most common housing enquiries from residents
- how councillors can best help their residents
- helping councillors dispel myths and increase understanding about the Council's role in housing

"It was all useful – should be a mandatory attendance. Major part of all case work"



Strategic themes supported: communities

Overview and scrutiny questioning skills

Delivered on 3 February 2020, attended by 17 councillors



Facilitated by Sue Keogh, Association of Democratic Services Officers

This session examined how to ask effective questions of witnesses to gather relevant information to inform reviews or monitor performance. It focussed on the skills and approach needed to maintain good working relationships with partners, colleagues and officers whilst undertaking robust challenge.

"This will make me think more about my approach to scrutiny."



Strategic themes supported: all

Business Improvement District (BID) briefing

Delivered on 10 February 2020, attended by 19 councillors



Facilitated by the BID shadow board

The BID shadow board informed members about their plans to improve the Bracknell business areas in the coming five years, whilst establishing the governance and operational structures ready for April 2020.



Strategic themes supported: economic resilience

Climate change market place

Held on 10 March 2020, attended by 14 councillors



Delivered by senior officers from across the Council

This event showcased the projects helping Bracknell Forest Council tackle climate change and allowed councillors to meet officers and understand how projects are making a sustainable difference across a range of council services.

"Excellent marketplace! I've learnt a huge amount."



Strategic themes supported: protecting and enhancing our environment



Strategy review and development

At the start of the year, the steering group reviewed the existing member development strategy (2016 – 2020) and agreed it was fit for the current year, recognising that a thorough process to develop a new strategy would take place later in the year after the publication of the Council Plan.

With the new Council Plan established in November, the steering group held a workshop in January to create the new strategy. The workshop reviewed current strengths and future challenges to establish five guiding principles for the new strategy. These were developed into actions and success measures to complete the new member development strategy which is being recommended for approval to Council in September.

Promoting Local Democracy

Introducing new councillors

Every newly elected councillor took part in an informal interview to introduce themselves to council officers via an intranet blog to help support good working relationships. For National Democracy week the interviews were shared on Bracknell Forest's website to introduce councillors to residents across the borough. The 11 interviews were featured in the local press.

Supporting new Community Champions

Councillor Gaw, the newly appointed Older People's Champion, held a community engagement event in the town centre to celebrate International Older Persons' Day on 1 October. The event was a success as Cllr Gaw and partner organisations signposted their activities and received feedback from relevant users. The event was also covered twice in the local press.

Promoting democracy in schools

The Mayor visited Wildmoor Heath primary school to announce the results of their school council elections and to talk to the children about democracy

Supported by the leader of the opposition, the Mayor hosted visits to the Council Chamber for Easthampstead Park secondary school council and children from Great Hollands primary school. The older pupils discussed what democracy means and what would encourage young people to engage more. The primary school children asked lots of questions to help them learn about the Council.



Wildridings primary school council also visited the Mayor in the Council Chamber where they did an activity exploring fairness.

Looking forward to 2020 - 2021

The member development programme 2020-21 is being developed. It will focus on delivering the five priorities of the new strategy and will look for innovative evaluation approaches to continually improve the offering to members.

As the second year of an administration, 2020 - 21 is an ideal time to implement a feedback and reflection programme for members. In previous years, this has been based on 360 degree feedback. Member development will review options for the best approach and create a project plan to deliver.

In September 2020 all member development material on DORIS will move to the Council's new intranet on SharePoint. SharePoint is more flexible and can be accessed from mobile devices which may create new opportunities to support member development.

At Annual Council in May 2021 the steering group will propose a name change to become the Councillor Development Charter Steering Group. Residents refer to councillors, not members, so this change helps our communities understand why we support development activities. It also aligns with the updated framework for the Charter Plus standard.

Events Delivered 2019 – 2020

Additional Conferences	Facilitators	Number of Councillors Attended
New Councillor Induction Workshop	South East Employers	1
Leadership Academy	Local Government Association	1
Leadership Essentials: Effective Scrutiny	Local Government Association	2
Achievement Awards for Children and Young People Looked After	Bracknell Forest Council	5
Digital Showcase	Local Government Association	1
Developing and sustaining effective local SEND systems	Local Government Association	1
Young Councillors' Weekend	Local Government Association	1
Annual Local Government Finance Conference	Local Government Association	1
Preventing Youth Homelessness by Design - Positive Pathway Frameworks for Young People	Local Government Association	1
Leadership Essentials: Getting your message across	Local Government Association	1
UK Bus Summit 2020	Transport Times	1
iESE Innovation Club Event - Lewes and Eastbourne	iESE	2
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Councillors Weekender	Local Government Association	1
Bracknell Forest Foster Carers Celebration Evening	Bracknell Forest Council	3
Public Sector Transformation Awards 2020	iESE	1
Sub Total – Attended		23
Sub Total – Cost		£2,722
Sub Total (event, accommodation, subsistence and travel) – Cost		£3,101.44

Approved Conferences	Facilitators	Number of Councillors Attended
Local Government Association Annual Conference	Local Government Association	3
Institute of Licensing: 'Annual Training Conference for 2019'	Institute of Licensing	1
The National Children's and Adult Services Conference	Local Government Association / Directors of Adult Social Services	4
Sub Total – Attended		8
Sub Total – Cost		£3,739.25
Sub Total (event, accommodation, subsistence and travel) – Cost		£4,935.80

Member Development Sessions	Facilitators	Number of Councillors Attended
New Member Welcome Session	Bracknell Forest Council	11
All Member Welcome Session	Bracknell Forest Council	37
Your Role as a BFC Councillor - Part 1	Bracknell Forest Council	7
Market Place	Bracknell Forest Council	21
Borough Tour	Bracknell Forest Council	22
Planning Committee Training	Bracknell Forest Council	14
Licensing Training	Bracknell Forest Council	13
Your Role as a BFC Councillor - Part 2	Bracknell Forest Council	8
Planning Committee Training	Bracknell Forest Council	14
Member Officer Protocol	Bethan Evans	18
Code of Conduct (4 sessions)	Bracknell Forest Council	54
Appeals Training	Bracknell Forest Council	5
Employment Committee Training	Bracknell Forest Council	9
Senior Staff Appraisals and Performance Related Pay (4 sessions)	Bracknell Forest Council	15
Speed Reading for Digital Devices	Balkie-wood Consultancy	6
Trustees Roles & Responsibilities Training (2 sessions)	Involve	9
Heathrow Expansion	Bracknell Forest Council / Heathrow Expansion Team	Unknown
Governance & Audit Training - Treasury Management	Bracknell Forest Council	7
Introduction to Local Government Finance	Bracknell Forest Council	20
Social Media Training	Comms2point0	8
Housing	Bracknell Forest Council	16
Member Induction Feedback	Bracknell Forest Council	7
Media Training	Media First	2
New Member Development Strategy	Bracknell Forest Council	7
De-escalation Training	Involve	1
Questioning Skills	Association of Democratic Services Officers	17

BID Briefing	Bracknell Forest Council	19
Education	Bracknell Forest Council	16
Running Effective Reviews	Link Support Services (UK) Ltd	19
Climate Change Market Place	Bracknell Forest Council	14
Sub Total – Attended		416
Sub Total (event only) – Cost		£7,712
Sub Total (event, accommodation, subsistence and travel) – Cost		£7,712
Overall Total - Attended		447
Overall Total (event only) - Cost		£14,173.25
Overall Total (event, accommodation, subsistence and travel) - Cost		£15,749.24

Bracknell Forest Council Member Development progress since last review



Committed

Recommitment to Charter until 2022

All member support officers included in day 1 induction for new Councillors to establish a supportive relationship

Election hub and portal created to provide quick, easy and up to date access to relevant information for all candidates and agents

Induction programme offers a variety of timings and locations with some briefings being filmed. Sessions take various forms: case studies, presentations, Q&A, market place and short, focussed sessions

Overview of Committee roles published for greater insight into the role of a Councillor, including the skills required or developed in each committee role.

Newsletter extended to all prospective candidates to provide election information, member induction information and support to a wider group

Chief Executive briefings for all election candidates – a choice of days and videos provided via portal to offer flexibility

- Partners involved in joint training opportunities, e.g. involve included in new member induction course

Democracy Snapshot e-newsletter provides Councillors with regular, timely and up-to-date induction information

- consistent tone, style and branding creates strong identity for member development services
- able to introduce key officers involved in Member Support

Development opportunities highlighted via newsletter as well as online, targeted emails and in 1:1s. Also make use of existing political party member WhatsApp group

Met with minority group Leader to understand how best to support the needs of the minority group

- Create 4 year external engagement plan

Local engagement activities including visits to schools, hosting schools in the Council Chamber and Q&A sessions for adults with additional needs.

Collaboration with other partners (town and parish councils, charities) on engagement events

National Democracy Week programme focussing on women's suffrage in 2018 and introducing new Councillors in 2019

Successful bid for additional funds for engagement activities related to women's suffrage

- Shared training with Parish and Town Councils is embedded and appropriate sessions are routinely offered



Strategic

Induction followed logical sequence of practicalities and logistics (first week) followed by broader Council information to help new members get started (first months)

Recognised that members taking on new roles need targeted support:

- checklists created to help new Executive Members and new Community Champions become established and effective in their roles;
- information provided to ensure role on outside organisations is understood

- Workshop with steering group to begin new Member Development Strategy, aligned to strategic themes of new Council Plan

- Create the new Member Development strategy and ensure it is communicated across the Council

All new Councillors offered personal development plans, with 90% uptake (10 out of 11 Cllrs)

- Evaluate the 360 degree feedback programme and implement a suitable approach to deliver benefit for the new administration

Have run joint events and activities to encourage councillor/officer team building (e.g. Market Place and Borough tour).

- Renewed approach to Overview & Scrutiny to support more effective scrutiny and ensure targeted resources are scheduled to review decisions in the most appropriate way.

- supports the development of subject matter experts and provides a clear framework for succession planning.
- provides a way to identify any knowledge gaps that are common across many members.

- Embed the new Overview & Scrutiny arrangements

LGA Political Skills Framework reflected in Councillor role profiles and in the areas covered by 360 degree feedback

- Deliver a market place event for external organisations to provide learning, networking and team building opportunities between officers, Councillors and external partners



Effective

Mentoring arrangements in place for both newly elected Councillors and new Executive Member

As a result of feedback, development sessions now feature more case studies, more facilitated discussions and are focussed on the Bracknell experience

Newsletter is used by Councillors to highlight useful learning and resources to their peers

Evaluation session scheduled for new Councillors to feedback on their first six months and the effectiveness of the initial induction. Output will feed into new member development strategy

Continue to monitor training attendance and report to steering group

Annual reporting to members on use of development budget, cost per head etc.

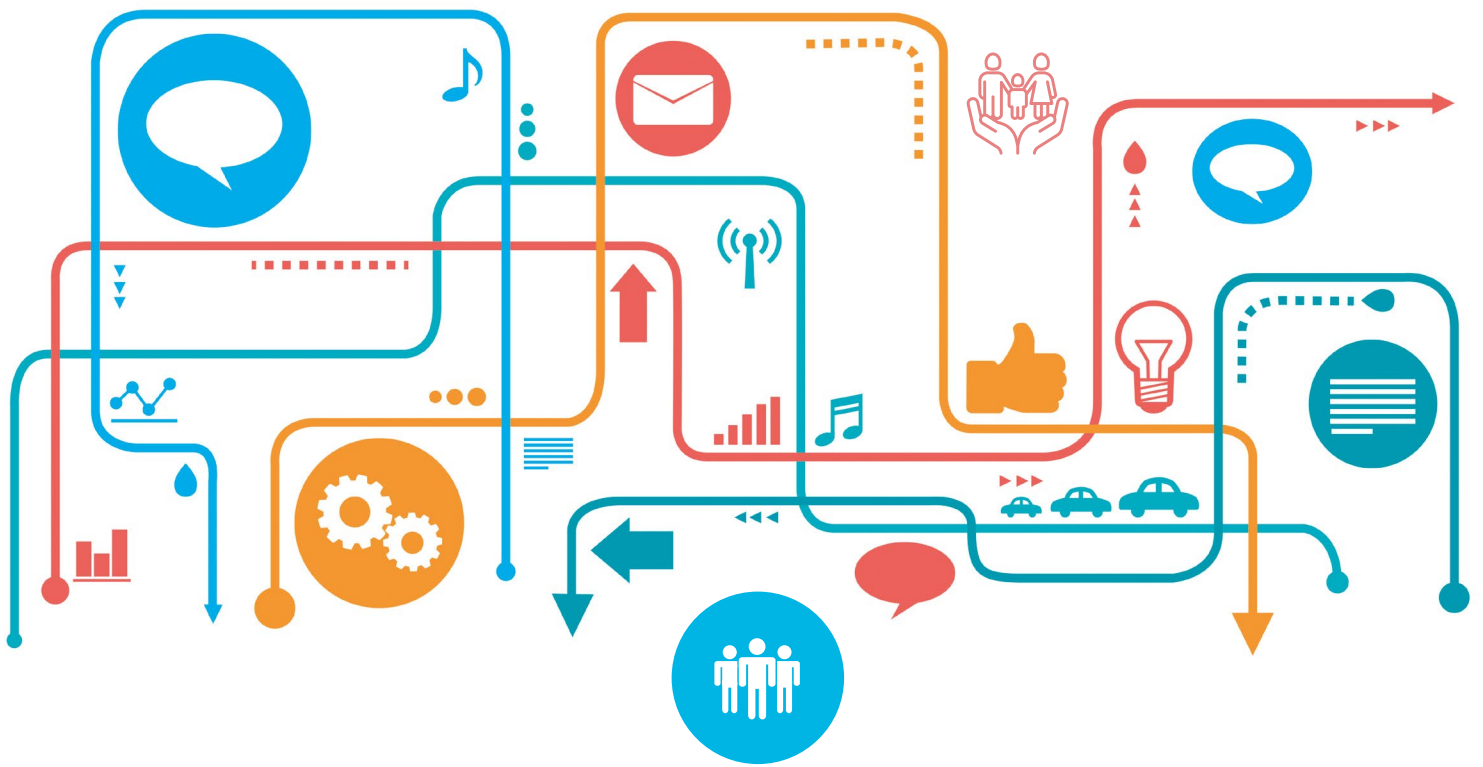
Commitment from a new member to help develop training in an area of interest and expertise



Completed improvement from 2018 review

Planned future improvement

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Member development strategy




2020 - 2024



Introduction

Bracknell Forest Council recognises the importance of learning and development for all those who work to deliver good public services. The council has sought to continuously improve learning and development for councillors, in the knowledge that organisations with effective learning and development are open, accountable and make better decisions. The member development strategy provides a framework for the council to deliver effective member learning and development.

The council's commitment to member development has created strong foundations for the new strategy, which is the latest in a series of progressions:

2020	Strategy 4: maintain Charter Plus during economic challenges and technological opportunities	
		
2016	Strategy 3: maintain Charter Plus during economic challenges	✓
		
2012	Strategy 2: achieve SEE Charter Plus accreditation	✓
		
2008	Strategy 1: maintain South East Employers' Charter accreditation	✓

The vision for member development

For all members to be engaged in the learning and development programme, taking advantage of learning opportunities and accessing support to fulfil their roles and help the council deliver its services and objectives for the benefit of the Borough and its residents.

Strategic context

The council is committed to providing the strong leadership, financial stability and corporate governance to make sure that core services are maintained. We will establish a framework for delivering services that allows us to adapt, innovate, find new ways of working and, in some cases, reduce what we do. To do this, it is essential that members are provided with the information and development opportunities they need to respond effectively.

The Council Plan focuses on the things that matter most to residents and is based upon a narrative which recognises Bracknell Forest as “the borough of opportunity.” Bracknell Forest is a place where diversity is recognised as a strength and where reducing inequalities benefits everyone. We will encourage vibrant local groups and work to ensure everyone feels connected and able to actively participate.

To deliver on all our objectives and ensure that Bracknell Forest stays prosperous and remains a good place to live, work and play, The Council Plan focuses on 6 strategic themes:

- value for money
- economic resilience
- education and skills
- caring for you and your family
- protecting and enhancing our environment
- communities

Elected members are accountable for the delivery of the Council’s objectives. This relies on them having the key skills and knowledge to help provide the best possible services to residents and to support hidden communities across the borough.



Guiding principles

1. Continue to build on established activity

There is continued senior level commitment to member development across councillors and officers, with direct support provided by a dedicated member services team.

The development programme benefits from the expertise of departments across the council at all levels and there is an embedded expectation of high-quality training and support which generates strong engagement in development activities.

This strategy will maintain and build upon these key strengths of member development at Bracknell Forest. Appendix A gives details of how these strengths will be sustained.

Success: achieving Charter Plus accreditation in April 2021, and a successful interim assessment in late 2022.

2. Recognise the requirements of the councillor role and deliver training and support that is tailored to the role

Councillors use many skills and balance varied responsibilities. Strong community leadership, clear decision-making and effective scrutiny are supported by a good understanding of council policies.

This strategy will focus on councillors as community leaders, rather than as professional officers with technical expertise. It recognises that detailed service knowledge is provided by officers and will enable councillors to support the development of and scrutinise successful strategies, rather than deliver services.

Success in this area will further establish councillors within their communities and help set realistic expectations with residents. It will enable councillors to step back from detailed processes and work within their broad community role.

3. Ensure content is engaging, relevant, up to date and pitched at an appropriate level

Builds on principle 2 and ensures that all training focuses on what is essential and relevant for the role, pitched to the needs of the members.

Sessions will recognise the spread of experience across members and strive to include aspects of development for all.

As well as foundation knowledge, sessions will review what has changed and will concentrate on delivering more of the Bracknell Forest experience through discussions and case studies.

Success will be measured using a more focussed evaluation approach to understand whether content has been designed and delivered at the appropriate levels.

4. Use a diverse and flexible range of delivery methods

Changes in technology are creating new opportunities for development and training. There is also scope to review our approach in more traditional areas. This strategy commits to delivering elements of the programme in different and innovative ways, with an emphasis on providing flexibility to increase relevance. Different formats will also support our resilience during challenging times or business disruption.

This approach recognises that people learn in different ways, have varying needs and different time constraints so this principle underpins the commitment to ensure all members are able to access high quality development. It also aims to get maximum benefit from our resources against a background of economic challenges.

We will use feedback to identify suitable topics and evaluation to understand how successful we have been.

5. Capitalise on opportunities to work with others

This strategy will look for opportunities to partner with other organisations. Suitable opportunities are those where a partnership will enhance the development activity, or where partnering achieves the learning objective more efficiently. The strategy will always ensure equality of provision regardless of political party and will build on this by seeking out opportunities for cross-group member development support.

Success will be measured through annual reporting showing an increase in the proportion of shared activities compared with previous years.

Actions

Principles 1 and 5 uphold the solid foundation already in place at Bracknell Forest which the other principles build on to deliver enhancements. This section describes how these improvements can be realised in our member development approach.

Principle 2 puts the role of councillor at the heart of member development. To support this, member services will work with other officers to create councillor journeys for relevant services. A councillor journey describes the touchpoints for a councillor in the cycle of a service or project. For example, a journey could describe the school admissions process through the year or outline the life cycle of a planning application from a councillor perspective. The journey should highlight when and why a councillor might interact with the process, either through normal council business or on behalf of a resident or stakeholder.

Councillor journeys should form the basis for any training and development associated with that topic. A key theme of councillor journeys is identifying opportunities to tackle inequalities as Bracknell Forest recognises that addressing inequality provides a strong foundation for cohesive and confident communities. Councillor journeys will centre the training on the role of community leader, decision-maker or critical friend with a clear understanding of how to support, enhance or scrutinise the process to deliver for all our communities.

Driven by principle 3, officers will agree early in the planning stages what knowledge or skill councillors will get from a particular piece of training. Session planning should focus on the benefits of councillors having this ability - for the councillor, for their residents and for the service. Member services will seek to maximise training which benefits all three, as shown below.

Who benefits from councillors having this knowledge or skill



For each topic, member services will also aim to introduce more stretching learning objectives for returning councillors who express an interest in that area via their personal development plan.

Guiding principle 4 suggests more e-learning provision and this strategy seeks to explore other options as well. Member services will focus on retaining the benefits of interactive learning despite the distance. We will prioritise areas where the remote activity can enhance the experience, for example using webinars, virtual syndicate rooms and other interactive resources. Members are already building their experience of remote meetings and interactions and we intend to maintain this as part of the strategy.

Roles and responsibilities

Member development has good engagement across all levels at Bracknell Forest Council. The table below outlines the interests of relevant groups in achieving the strategy,

Delivery of strategy			
Responsible	Accountable	Consulted	Informed
Member services	Steering group	Members CMT External partners Senior officers	Council SEE Public (via report)

Actions and responsibilities in support of member learning and development	
<p>The Member Development Charter Steering Group will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lead and innovate the Council's approach to member development, in conjunction with the Executive Member; • monitor the progress of the member development strategy; • review the strategy at least annually and update as required to ensure it continues to meet members' needs; • advise officers and the Council on member development activities, and • report annually to the Council on the progress of member development. 	<p>Councillors will be responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying their own learning and development needs, including any requirements that build resilience against disruption to business as usual • engaging in personal development planning • participating in a feedback and reflection process (previously 360 self-assessment process) • engaging in the member development programme • creating a continuous learning environment that focuses on dignity, openness and respect for other's voices • sharing learning with others, and • accessing learning opportunities
<p>Directors and senior officers will enable their teams to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide briefings to members on key areas of service delivery and development; • work with member development officers to outline councillor journeys for their services; • positively contribute to the development and delivery of the member development programme, and • support the work of the Member Development Charter Steering Group 	<p>The Head of Democratic and Registration Services, with the Governance and Scrutiny team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop and evaluate the member development strategy; • seek to maintain the Charter plus standard; • help to identify member learning and development requirements, and work collaboratively to facilitate their delivery; • provide development in a range of formats which reflect different learning needs and offer resilience against business disruptions • promote the member development programme; • hold the dedicated budget for member learning and development (see Appendix B for details of priorities), and • represent the Council at relevant regional and national network meetings

Monitoring for success

The Governance and Scrutiny team will monitor the progress of the strategy. Indicators of success include:

- positive feedback in member services surveys
- engagement in the Personal Development Plan and feedback and reflection processes
- engagement in the Member Development Programme
- positive satisfaction scores for learning and development activities
- positive satisfaction scores for learning and development providers
- retention of the Charter Plus accreditation
- an increase in the number of partner organisations we have jointly worked with to deliver training or other member events

Equality

Access to training and development will be equitable and based upon individual and Council needs. Member services will make sure that there are no physical, social, religious or cultural barriers to members taking advantage of development opportunities. Members and officers will strive to create a learning environment that focuses on dignity, openness and respect for other's voices.

Appendix A

The principles of the South East Councillor Development Charter Plus are embedded at Bracknell Forest and provide strong foundations for this strategy. Below are the actions required to maintain these core strengths.

What we will do to maintain a clear commitment to member development

- seek commitment to and approval of the strategy and our approach to member development from members and officers
- make planning and delivery of member development the responsibility of members and officers
- support the Member Development Charter Steering Group to oversee member development and monitor the implementation of this strategy
- manage the member development budget effectively
- ensure equality of opportunity and access for all learning and development activities
- provide appropriate training to member services staff

What we will do to foster a strategic approach to member development

- oversee the Member Development Programme and additional briefings and activities with the Member Development Charter Steering Group – to include consultation, communication and monitoring and evaluation
- annually refresh the Member Development Programme based on member need within the strategic context, including corporate risk management
- champion and promote learning and development activities within political groups through representatives on the Member Development Charter Steering Group
- deliver an induction programme to all newly elected members
- provide appropriate training to members dependent upon their roles and responsibilities
- involve external partners in relevant learning and development activities

What we will do to ensure that member learning and development is effective in building capacity

- ensure that members are clear about the outcomes and benefits of learning and development activities for them as individuals and for the council
- develop members' skills and capabilities across a range of areas including personal development, leadership skills, communication skills and ICT competencies
- develop members' knowledge of particular issues or legislation
- develop members' awareness of local and national issues
- develop members' understanding of key issues, for example community development, community cohesion and equalities and diversity
- utilise a range of methods to deliver the Member Development Programme, including approaches which can continue during challenging times or disruption to business as usual
- provide opportunities for members to network with each other, other authorities, other partners and the community
- evaluate the outcomes and benefits of learning and development activities through participants' feedback
- monitor and record attendance at learning and development activities
- report annually to Council as part of the Member Development Annual Report

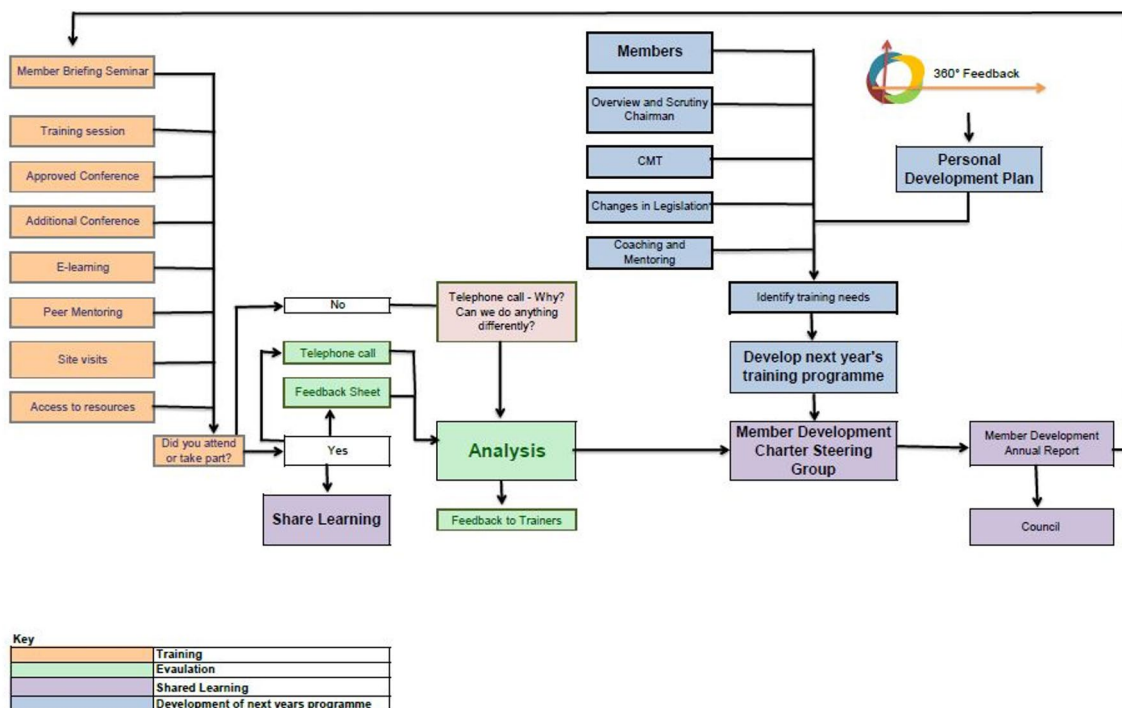
What we will do to support councillors in their various roles

- schedule learning and development activities into the council diary and publicise forthcoming activities
- schedule learning and development at appropriate times and offer multiple sessions where possible
- provide assistance for those with caring responsibilities to attend learning events
- endeavour to meet individual identified development needs in the way that is most appropriate for the member concerned
- make the best use of technology and resources to support members
- actively promote local democracy, the role of councillor and civic life
- promote and improve the work/life balance of members

What we will do to sustain a Member Learning and Development Programme

- develop a varied Member Development Programme covering induction; core knowledge and skills; service specific issues; Council and Committee issues; and individual needs
- support Members in identifying their own learning and development needs, including preparation for or during challenging times or disruption to business as usual
- encourage Members to complete a Personal Development Plan (PDP)
- encourage Members to complete a feedback and reflection process (previously 360 self assessments) at least once each four year Council term
- ask for feedback on the content and quality of each learning session and use it to further develop the programme, according to the learning and development cycle shown below
- provide Members with the opportunity to identify and take into account their own preferred learning style
- ensure that learning and development opportunities, including PDPs link back to the one of the council's six strategic themes

Learning and development cycle



Appendix B

Managing resources

In addition to officer time there is a dedicated budget for member learning and development. The budget delivers a mixture of internally and externally provided sessions and programmes, including any significant projects such as software licences. The Member Development Charter Steering Group agrees the proposed programme against the budget for each year, and reviews the budget spend via the annual report. The budget holder is the Head of Democratic and Registration Services.

The budget covers specific member attendance at agreed conferences. A conference or seminar that is not on the approved list may be funded from the Member Services budget, and attendance will be considered in line with the procedure in the Members' Allowances Scheme. This also applies to any other individual training activity.

Individual members' needs will be considered once the costs of the core work programme have been determined. If there are insufficient funds to meet demand, priority will be given to those training needs identified through the PDP and the feedback and reflection processes.

Parish and Town Councillors will be invited to member briefing seminars when the content is relevant to them. Places on sessions delivered by an external facilitator may be offered to neighbouring authorities and charged at a level to at least fully cover the cost. Parish and Town councillors who are not also Borough councillors will be invited to attend at a subsidised rate.

The Head of Democratic and Registration Services will bid for additional funding for specific initiatives if opportunities arise.





Champions' Annual Report

2019-2020

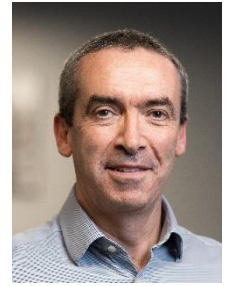
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The purpose of this report is to appraise all Members of the work and progress undertaken by the Council's Champions during the year 2019-2020. These reports cover the period May 2019 to May 2020. With the continual changes in Covid, these reports do not necessarily reflect the current Covid impact.

The report informs Members of activities and their outcomes and outlines proposed future activities.

Commuter Champion – Councillor Nigel Atkinson



Overview

This is my first year as BFC Commuter Champion and I have focused on local commuter public transport issues, using my knowledge as a regular train commuter myself.

I wrote a strategy paper in October 2019, setting out some key issues for local commuters, covering train operating companies and Network Rail, and local bus companies.

1.0 Great Western Railway (GWR)



New trains for journeys through Crowthorne and Sandhurst stations were supposed to have entered service last year but have been delayed by “engineering issues”. These trains are being rebuilt from former London commuter trains and will be bi-mode diesel and electric, using the third rail electrical power supply for part of the Reading to Redhill and Gatwick journeys. This is a welcome move from an environmental and sustainability perspective, as they will be replacing diesel only trains. However, it is important that these ‘new’ trains are of an equivalent standard to brand-new trains being introduced elsewhere.

With the departure of former GWR Managing Director Mark Hopwood to South Western Railway, a priority for the coming year will be to arrange a meeting with Matthew Golton, who has been appointed as Interim Managing Director for GWR. Issues to focus on will be the suitability of the new trains, service frequencies for Crowthorne and Sandhurst commuters and capacity and security improvements for cycle storage at both stations. I have recently corresponded with David Strunz, Assistant Regional Development Manager at GWR and he has offered a site meeting when lockdown arrangements ease, to look at possible cycle storage improvements (subject to funding) at Crowthorne station in particular.

Covid-19 has impacted the railways significantly since mid-March 2020. Train operating companies including GWR have been operating under ‘Emergency Measures Agreement’ (EMA), which effectively means that the Government is running train services, at least for a 6-month period to October ‘20. A dramatic decrease in passenger numbers has impacted revenues and so there will be limited opportunities for investment. Any new investment in the short term will need to be approved by the DfT (Department for Transport), under EMA.

Commuter parking and parking overspill into neighbouring streets around Crowthorne and Sandhurst stations is an ongoing issue. On 21st June 2019, I visited Crowthorne Station with Councillor McKenzie-Boyle, to see these issues, with insufficient commuter parking spaces. Any development of the adjacent Derby Field should include provision to increase the capacity of the station car park.

2.0 South Western Railway (SWR)

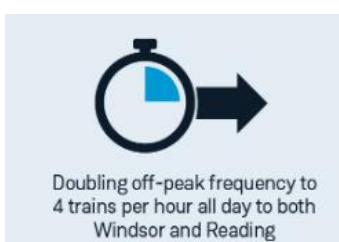


Poor journey times for commuters and other travellers on the Waterloo to Reading line has been an issue for many years. I spent 6 months campaigning for improvements to this railway line, which is used by a large number of

residents in Bracknell Forest. The Waterloo to Reading line is also due to receive new trains and I have been campaigning to ensure that these trains meet our commuters' requirements in terms of being able to work on the train.

Q4 2019/Q1 2020 was a challenging 6 months for SWR. A prolonged guard strike throughout December 2019, followed by an announcement in January 2020, that it had lost £137m in the year to March 2019, has raised questions about the continuing ability of SWR to operate its franchise and that nationalisation may be likely, with the Government taking over services. More recently, Covid-19 has resulted in SWR also operating under Emergency Measures Agreement, effectively being run by the Government.

These factors have made it difficult to engage with SWR, but commuters still face the same issues and so it is important that we continue to lobby SWR to ensure the best possible outcomes for our commuters and other train users.



There has been some good news, however. SWR introduced additional peak hour trains in early 2020, including a new early morning service which has reduced the delay impact caused by a train being cancelled. The 4 trains per hour franchise commitment has not been achieved yet and I will continue to lobby for this.

I have been active in trying to lobby for investment and service improvements on the Waterloo to Reading line. On 2nd October 2019, I met with Steve Tyler, SWR Performance and Planning Director, to discuss train punctuality and the new trains to be introduced. On 7th November, I attended an SWR/BFC stakeholder meeting with David Wilby, SWR Regional Development Manager. One of the key concerns that I raised at this meeting, was to seek clarification that the new trains to be introduced would be suitable for journey times of an hour or more, with sufficient seat legroom and fold down tables at seats, to allow commuters to work on their laptops on the train. Recently introduced trains on SWR have been widely criticised for their upright 'ironing board' seats. These are acceptable for short inner suburban journeys but are not suitable for our line.

Following on from this meeting, I attended the annual SWR Stakeholder Conference in Woking on 18th November 2019. From the floor, I asked Andy Mellors the then SWR Managing Director to give some reassurance that the new trains (pictured right, with the permission of SWR) would be suitable for our journey lengths and that they would not have the 'ironing board' seats. He answered that the trains would have a new, more comfortable version of this seat and invited me to see a sample seat mock-up at their Wimbledon depot. This visit hosted by David Wilby, took place on 26th November 2019 and although the new seat was more comfortable, I still have concerns about the seat pitch and a lack of fold down tables.



SWR has offered me the opportunity to visit the factory in Derby manufacturing the new trains, to see the seating configuration. Unfortunately, due to the SWR train strike, franchise financial issues and more recently Covid-19, this visit originally scheduled for February 2020 has not taken place yet.

Separately, I emailed Mark Hopwood, the new Managing Director of SWR on 26th January 2020, to raise my concerns on the above, as I had raised these with his predecessor. I also raised concerns about substitute inner suburban train stock that was being used on the Waterloo – Reading line due to stock shortages on other lines, and the fact that these trains were not suitable for our commuters. I sent a follow up email on 16th February 2020 asking for a reply, but unfortunately have not received a response to date.

The SWR/BFC stakeholder meeting scheduled for 26th March 2020 was unfortunately cancelled due understandably, to the impact of Covid-19.

As a more longer term objective, I am in the process of trying to form a lobby group of local councils along the Waterloo to Reading railway line, to seek significant Department for Transport funding to upgrade the railway line, with the aim of reducing journey times and improving the timetable robustness by introducing train passing places. To date, Wokingham Borough Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council and Runnymede Borough Council have all confirmed their interest in joining this lobby group. Our local MPs James Sunderland and Adam Afriyie have also positively indicated their support. The impact of Covid-19 has put this group on hold for the moment, but I shall be arranging an initial meeting as soon as it is appropriate to do so.

As with GWR, I have also lobbied SWR for cycle storage improvements at Bracknell and Martins Heron stations. I spoke to David Wilby on 23rd June 2020 and although he was very supportive of this, he advised that under their Emergency Measures Agreement, they are not able to fund any such improvements at the moment.

3.0 Buses – public service vehicle funding

In February 2020, the Government announced £5 billion of new funding to overhaul bus and cycle links for every region outside of London, introducing 4,000 new zero emission buses to support the Government's net zero carbon 2050 target. Further details of this and the allocation of vehicles for our region is expected in a Government announcement in the autumn. I have been lobbying for the introduction of electric buses in Bracknell over the last 9 months and it is hoped that we will be able to benefit from this Government funding in the near future.

4.0 Courtney Buses and White Bus



Local operator Courtney buses was recently acquired by Reading Buses. Pre-Covid-19, we tried to arrange a meeting with Courtney Buses to understand what benefits for local commuters, this acquisition will deliver. Reading Buses operates several low emission buses and it is hoped that Bracknell will see some similar vehicle types introduced into the Courtney Buses fleet. It is hoped that this meeting will take place as soon as appropriate, given the wider Covid-19 issues.

In times of increased car ownership and reduced public transport patronage, it was pleasing to see White Bus introduce a new service X94 last year, linking Ascot Heatherwood and Frimley Park Hospitals. I will continue to promote bus transport and to lobby wherever possible to make the bus a more viable proposition for our commuters, particularly for integrated bus/train journeys.

5.0 Berkshire Local Transport Body and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

I am a nominated substitute on the Berkshire Local Transport Body and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and attended meetings in May, September & November 2019, and June 2020. This body provides funding from a multi-million-pound devolved Government transport budget. Recent and ongoing Bracknell Forest highway projects that have benefited from this funding include the A322 Downshire Way dualling and the A3095 improvements.



BFC Highways and Transportation officers were successful in a recent bid for support funding for Sunday and evening bus services. This £85k of funding will maintain these services for 2 years, by which time hopefully The Deck in Bracknell will be open and driving the night-time economy to further stimulate bus patronage.

Reading Buses was also successful with its connecting people IT application. This is aimed at 'pushing' transport information to smart devices via apps, including Courtney Buses' Thames Valley app, in an effort to make public transport more relevant and attractive to passengers and non-public transport users. The Thames Valley app also has mobile ticketing, using a debit/credit card to avoid having to pay by cash when boarding.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank BFC Highways and Transport officers for their help, advice and support to me in the role of Commuter Champion over the last 12 months.

Councillor Nigel Atkinson

nigel.atkinson@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Older People's Champion – Councillor Moira Gaw



Overview

For the year to the end of March 2020, the principal focus has been on continuing and embedding transformation within the council, due to the necessity to curtail and ensure that commitments are met, and service are maintained.

1.0 Tackling Isolation and Loneliness

The website is the easiest way to access services – www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk. Once contact is made be it by phone, carer, letter, friend or personal attendance, concerns can be directly addressed. Despite moving to a paperless society, the service still has enough capacity to facilitate those with technology issues directly addressed.

The social prescribing team are available to address needs in a holistic way and have proved to be particularly important during Covid-19 with support for the lonely, the vulnerable and the socially isolated. This work is supported by an online Community Map which lists different groups of interest for those seeking interaction with like-minded people or those who may want to try a different interest.

2.0 Celebrating Older People in Bracknell Forest



The sun shone on October 1ST and it was a privilege to meet so many older residents and hear about their fantastic skills and achievements, from singing in the Sydney Opera House to long walks and marathons, supporting others in their community and learning new skills. Painting, yoga, indoor bowls, swimming, tai chi, wine-tasting and rambling were a selection of the newfound hobbies which residents were keen to talk about.

It was also a great opportunity to connect Bracknell Forest residents to the many facilities available to them in the Borough, along with key providers such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Keep Mobile, The Early Learning Centre and Library, Silva Homes and Age Concern UK. This event shapes the beginning of an Annual Celebration for older residents in the Borough.



3.0 Health and Wellbeing

Bracknell Forest has recognised the challenges the pandemic presented to Care Homes across the borough and the impact the virus and associated restrictions is having on care home residents, their families and front-line staff across health and social care. Joint working between the Council and its partners to build and maintain local care homes resilience is strong and will continue as the journey towards recovery and renewal progresses. Full details can be found by following the link:

<https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/coronavirus-information-and-support/council-services/health-and-social-care-service-updates>

Working in partnership with the local NHS to deliver state of the art 66 bed dementia care centre at Heathlands in Wildridings, remains a priority and is on target for the operational date of 2021. Work has just begun on this exciting new venture which will see the joint working model reflect the future care and nursing home provision in the Borough.

4.0 Information and activities for Older people

The Bracknell Forest “Help Yourself” community web site, designed to help connect people to information, activities and services to stay independent and well, is popular. The online community map provides details of 450+ community groups and activities:

<http://health.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/>.

The principal interface between the community and the Council is by way of the Customer Services Team. The team is conscious that older people can need more help and to this end, the following is a brief outline of provision available:

If you set up an online account -

<https://myaccount.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/> you can log enquiries, and track progress. You can also view your council tax account through here.



5.0 Community Activities

The pandemic has shown us that the community spirit thrives and continuing collaboration with the voluntary sector is key to harnessing the joint effort in the fight to eliminate isolation and loneliness.

Involve, the local voluntary sector lead, can provide information on volunteering and affiliated services. In conjunction with Healthwatch they have provided a scaffold, supporting elderly and vulnerable residents during the last three months in terms of befriending, shopping, dog walking, or simply just checking in to ensure all is well.

U3A continues to grow and has shown resilience by being able to adapt over the year as premises became challenging to find. There is a very wide and varied programme to cater to all tastes. During the pandemic the weekly quizzes have been a focal point for members. The Open Learning Centre and the Library have supported and continue to support the older community by facilitating clubs, offering various entertainment, a place to meet and different courses.

Our parks and open spaces which have been community treasures during the last three months are facilitating the health and well-being in older people. Blue line signage will start

to appear which will assist with exercise parameters by displaying distances of circular routes.

The Public Health Team provides very popular “Fit for All” classes, ideally suited to people who are either new to exercise or lack confidence in joining in. Over 80% of members are older people. Classes are located across the Borough and new ones are being added in response to demand. Recognising the importance of keeping mobile for those with inherent disabilities classes such as armchair aerobics and armchair yoga are being offered by residents for residents across the Borough. Everyone Active has a catalogue of classes targeted for the over 50’s including the very popular Wednesday morning Yoga class.

The key benefits of Community Choirs are emerging as a great way to become part of a mutual interest group. The emotional and physical benefits include effective bonding and broadening social networks, improved breathing and cognitive stimulation.

6.0 Staying in touch

You can use Facebook or Twitter to get in touch with us:

www.facebook.com/bracknellforestcouncil or www.twitter.com/bracknellforest and tell us what **you need. Make sure you don’t put any personal information on there.**

Calling 01344 352000 will put you through to Customer Services where you can log an issue which will be verified by a reference in case of any follow up. Additionally, you can refer any issue to a ward councillor or Champion.

It has been a great pleasure visiting the various facilities across the Borough which specialise in looking after Older People. I have been amazed at the facilities and innovation. It will be a priority of mine to continue to work closely with those organisations. Helping in the drive to facilitate a new town destination where older people can regularly meet is also a key objective.

Councillor Moira Gaw

moira.gaw@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Small Business Champion – Councillor Bob Wade

1.0 The Business Environment

Britain is amid what looks like the deepest recession since the 18th century. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) forecasts that Britain will suffer the biggest slump of any major economy this year, with GDP contracting by 11.5%. Official statistics forecast a major slump in the jobs market with unemployment widely expected to hit 9%.

Britain is facing a potential irreversible “cultural catastrophe” with a projected £74bn drop in revenue for creative industries and the loss of 400,000 jobs because of the coronavirus pandemic. This impact is being felt in Bracknell Forest.

Further, hotels, hospitality, pubs, restaurants, and some retail units, together with indoor gyms and leisure centres are still locked down with little prospect in the short term of resuming viable businesses in spite of the “1 metre plus” self-isolation rule.

Around half of charities based in the Thames Valley region consider their future to be under threat, and many feel the Government has not done enough to support the charity sector amidst the Covid-19 crisis. Further, many have furloughed their staff. This ongoing situation has inevitably forced charities to reduce the level of support.

The good news is all Bracknell Forest primary and secondary schools are open with between 50 to 80% pupil attendance. This has enabled many parents to return to “normal” working.

High Street retailers are still confronted with the impact of Covid-19, additional financial commitments, and further competition from internet business. Online shopping has increased rapidly during the Covid-19 lockdown indicating deliveries up 40%.

The issues of high rents, business and VAT rates are still making recovery extremely challenging, which HMG is considering. Further, UK and European governments are also reviewing the taxing of global on-line companies such as Google and Amazon etc.

It would be amiss to mention the “B” word! Brexit negotiations are challenging, having been overshadowed by Covid-19. The CBI suggests that if no resolution is achieved before December, it will be catastrophic. Small businesses were not ready last time there was a no-deal Brexit threat - this time they will not have had a moment to prepare for it!

It is interesting to note that the proposed “air corridors” make close links with the EU viable but less so with the wider world (according to “the science”) making the paths of Covid-19 and Brexit coalesce!

2.0 HMG National Grants and Schemes

As a result of the pandemic, HMG has instigated a whole range of measures to ensure business viability. However, not all small businesses have been “fully protected”.

- Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme
- 'Bounce back' loans scheme to launch
- Furlough Scheme
- HMRC Time To Pay

- Job Retention Scheme
- Hardship Loan Scheme
- Mortgage & Rent Breaks
- Statutory Sick Pay
- Discretionary Business Grant Scheme
- Business Support Helpline

It is noted that the Furlough scheme will be phased out ahead of many businesses being able to get back to full operation - the hotel, restaurant, pubs, internal gyms, and theatre businesses etc. Farming is particularly challenged by the need for pickers. The UK “call to arms” has not really taken off and the pandemic/migration issues have frustrated the usual migrants.

To assist with the bewildering list of financial initiatives, over the past few months there have been many on-line training sessions for SMEs enabling business managers to work through all the choices open to them.

For example: “SME Survival Plan” covering:

- Getting cashflow smart during Covid-19
- Bounce Back Loans & CBILS – which is best?
- Can you get Government Grants?
- Raising Funding during Lockdown!
- Working with your bank, debtors & creditors during Covid-19
- Preparing to restart your business!
- Other government schemes that you could qualify for!
- Leadership & Entrepreneurial Advice during Covid-19

3.0 The Lexicon

The Lexicon development is now returning to “some normality” with over half of the outlets open and currently footfall of around 40% (compared with this time last year). This situation should involve after “Super Saturday” (4th July) changes in lock-down.



The Town Centre Vision for 2032 to connect the town centre to the train station and other gateways, creating a resilient and sustainable economy, continues.

The refurbishment of Princess Square is happening and good progress on the development of The Deck (the old Bentalls site area), is work in progress.

The Bracknell Town Centre vision and the Lexicon strategy aim to integrate the Peel Centre with the rest of the town centre is still envisaged.

All in all, the Lexicon has proved to be a great and successful innovation promoting an excellent working environment for many businesses and their staff.

4.0 Easthampstead Works

In September 2019 **ProjeKt Ltd** formally launched the '**Easthampstead Works**' project, providing low-cost commercial/ studio space for creative start-up enterprises. The scheme also includes café facilities and space for community groups.

Contact: 01344 233141 or
michelle@easthampsteadworks.co.uk

Covid-19 Testing has also been administered on site in the car park.



5.0 Bracknell Forest – Economic & Skills Development Partnership



Bracknell Forest **Economic & Skills Development Partnership (ESDP)** facilitates and promotes the continued economic development of Bracknell Forest.

The ESDP's first meeting since the start of the Lockdown restrictions, is to be held remotely using Microsoft Teams on **Tuesday 14th July between 0900 and 1100hrs.**



ACTIVATE LEARNING

Peter Reynolds, Director of Career Pathways for **Activate Learning**, gave a presentation on how students are encouraged to develop their skills and attributes in the Health Sector and he also gave an overview of 'T Levels'.

He included a practical demonstration of the challenges students face when training to work in the Health Sector, including how difficult it is to learn the apparently simple skill of feeding patients. In support of Health and Social Care T-Level courses, the LEP has match-funded a Care Suite at Reading College which replicates a hospital ward where students can practice their skills. It has already been shown that many of those using the Suite perform better in their hospital placements.

THE SMART CITY CLUSTER

Chris Mansfield, Bracknell Forest Council's **Town Centre Project Manager**, gave a presentation on the **Smart City Cluster** project secured by the **Thames Valley Berkshire LEP** to pilot Internet of Things initiatives for business communities and local authorities. The funding for the project is shared by Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham Councils with two projects undertaken by each authority.

One of Bracknell Forest's projects aims to improve the accessibility of disabled places to customers on buses by using onboard sensors to indicate place availability before catching the bus.

The second project, aimed at encouraging school children to walk to school, has introduced a tap sensor device which would be placed in streets surrounding secondary schools for pupils to 'tap in' each time they walk to school. In return they receive discounts and offers from retailers. Such a concept could be extended to company employees in the future.

BRACKNELL INVESTMENT GROUP

Bracknell's first **Business Improvement District** went live on **1st April**. Heather Martin was appointed the BID Manager. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, Heather has been unable to continue in the role. **Rob Reading** has now been appointed as **Bracknell BID Manager**.



Contact details: rob.reading@pfbbuk.co.uk or telephone 01344 949080.

The Bracknell BID has put together an '**E-Bulletin**' that includes a comprehensive guide to assist businesses during the COVID-19 crisis, including sources of help currently available from Bracknell Forest and Berkshire Growth Hub.

See: https://mcusercontent.com/70a3faa1ddb6f6df60a2f424e/files/f95c2d9d-0e82-4b56-9fa5-5d22ea8680b5/Bracknell_BID_COVID_19_Business_Support_Information_20200406_Final.pdf.

The latest **Bracknell BID E-News** issue 15 includes:

- Simple Tips for Business Success as we Ease Out of Lockdown
- Latest Covid-19 Government Industry Guidance
- Important information from HMRC
- Template for employers claiming for 100 or more employees through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
- PPE suppliers in the UK
- A comprehensive coronavirus Business Support Guide has been updated to reflect the latest guidance from HMG.
https://mcusercontent.com/70a3faa1ddb6f6df60a2f424e/files/58d60d9d-82e4-46a6-a8c7-47c481c67e83/Bracknell_BID_COVID_19_Business_Support_Guide_20200615.pdf

For more information about the BID, including the BID Prospectus and Business Plan, see: <https://www.bracknellbid.co.uk/>

BFC/ESDP JOINT 2020 PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

The 2020 photo competition, **Stay Safe and Inspired**, has now been launched. The theme emanates from the Covid-19 outbreak and is aimed at encouraging amateur photographers to submit photos of their gardens, window boxes, home working arrangements or out for daily exercise.

To enter see: <https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/bracknell-forest-photo-competition>

6.0 Thames Valley Berkshire Local Economic Partnership

Covid-19 Recovery Business insights Survey

With the UK lockdown from Covid-19 starting to ease, **Thames Valley Berkshire LEP** is leading on the development of a **Berkshire Local Industrial Recovery Strategy**.



To inform the Recovery Strategy, the LEP wants to hear

from as many Berkshire based businesses as possible, about current and future impacts of the pandemic on their business and use these insights to inform future investment in Berkshire in skills, infrastructure and business support.

The LEP and its key partners want to ensure that the voice of all business is heard to help businesses to navigate and recover from these unprecedented times. Working closely with the six local authorities in the Berkshire area, the LEP is looking to provide a vision for economic recovery from the pandemic so the survey can inform future investment decisions.

Note, the future of commercial buildings looks uncertain due to Working from Home.

7.0 Working from Home (WFH)

For those who work in offices, the pandemic has completely changed the daily routine. The time and hassle saved without a commute in the WFH world has made a permanent change appealing. It appears that many people do not want to return to the office full-time. However, many do miss conversations and corridor catch-ups with their colleagues.

There are benefits of working remotely. Periods of silence are good for problem solving. Moving away from constant interactions helps to process and creatively come up with new ideas. However, social isolation and an awareness of business goals and encouragement can have a serious impact on some, especially new recruits.

What will the post-pandemic workplace feel like? A balance must be made concerning WFH, which depends upon type of job and the “maturity” of the worker. HR will need to assess all staff functions to determine the best balance and ensuring performance with mental wellbeing. At work, desks will be farther apart, more people will work at home, at least part of the time, and office seats will be fewer and not allocated.

8.0 Syngenta Development Proposal

Lord Grimstone of Boscobel, Minister for Investment made the following observations and comments in support of the BFC Local Plan & Jealott’s Hill proposal:

- I believe they will help ensure the retention and growth of Syngenta at Jealott’s Hill as a world-leading R&D facility in the sub-region.
- The economic benefit to Bracknell, the Thames Valley and the UK overall should be significant. According to Syngenta, it will help retain 850 jobs, create 2,000 new jobs, deliver more than £50m in business rates, and between £6.4 - £7.1 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) over the 20 years following completion.
- I recognise the importance of a housing development of this scale in an area of high housing demand and low affordability for the area’s population.
- Strategically, the growth of the science park facility supports the Industrial Strategy; Grand Challenges; the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) aims and priorities; and your vision for Bracknell to be an “exceptional place for business”.

I am happy to support this strategically important investment for Bracknell and for the UK, which can help to place the UK at the forefront of global agri-tech in the 21st century.

9.0 Retention of businesses

National Picture

- 19,000 retail units failed in 2019; 18,500 failed in 2018
- Anchor store failures: Woolworth, BHS, Beales, Debenhams
- Anchor Stores struggling: Marks & Spencer, John Lewis
- Airlines, Banks and Post Office down-sizing
- Delivery firm DPD is hiring 6,000 staff in the UK to cope with the growth of e-commerce. Elsewhere, B&Q and Screwfix announce the creation of 3,000 to 4,000 temporary jobs, half in the UK, due to elevated demand.

The situation over the past year 2 years is still not encouraging. As can be seen above, on-line businesses are thriving at the expense of large shopping outlets. However, it has to be said that High Street shops that have embraced e-commerce have seen very significant returns which have offset the downturns through their shops.

Local Picture

- UK Property Forums has announced that drugs giant Eli Lilly has taken all 42,500 sq ft of office space at 8 Arlington Square Bracknell, moving from its UK research centre in Surrey. The property deal is the biggest in Bracknell since 2013

Many retail outlets have failed for various reasons including rents, business rates and e-commerce advantages exacerbated by Covid-19. As can be seen above, pharmaceuticals, not surprisingly, are buoyant. The good news for Bracknell Forest is Eli Lilly found Arlington Square a good place to put their R & D operation.

Many pubs and restaurants have been offering Takeaway services during lockdown.

10.0 Infrastructure Impact

Significant improvements have been made throughout Bracknell Forest to manage and improve traffic flows because of the housing and Lexicon developments. During the peak of the pandemic many road improvements have been completed with the minimal disruption. With the move to using bicycles, BFC are reviewing the current provision, especially since “Working from Home” has and is likely to reduce the projected traffic flows both in terms of volume and timing.

Note, a past survey indicated that approximately 90,000 commuters come into East Berkshire each day as a similar number leave!

11.0 Housing

The pandemic has stalled the provision of new housing. Not only building properties but also the associated conveyancing delays due to social-isolation issues. However, there are signs of this market improving.

A recent survey indicated that “social isolation” has caused a significant number of people to be reassessing their home, job, and relationships. This may impact the place and type of homes where people will now wish to live.

12.0 Networking

Networking is primarily about nurturing relationships. This has become more significant during the self-isolation of the pandemic. What is done right now — from sending emails to making calls to sending texts — is more important than ever. Zoom and MS Teams meetings abound on a regular basis.

The use of social media is now more important as a means of keeping connected. There are on-line courses for SMEs including:

Social Media Training for SMEs

- Learn how to use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram for Business Leads
- Generate more leads and sales from your social media activity
- Develop and raise your brands profile / image across the UK
- Learn how to gain more followers that will engage with you and resulting in sales
- Understand the importance of using social media to generate highly qualified leads for your business
- Discover who are your audience and target market
- Find out the best times and ways to engage with your target audience
- Learn which social media platform is best used to promote your industry/ sector

Work continues within the Economic Development Partnership and LEP activities in promoting business in Bracknell Forest.

As Small Business Champion, I spend time liaising with business contacts, social media sites and newspapers to keep abreast of the business challenges. This work extends to supporting retail outlets through local council support in promoting their needs.

13.0 Conclusion

The state of the world is now very unpredictable because of Covid-19. It is unlikely to settle down until a vaccination regime is in place; some months or years away. Life as we know it has and will continue to change.

Currently, of the 9 million people furloughed throughout the UK, it is predicted that around 1 million will be made redundant after the government scheme is phased out. Air travel likely to be in recession for several years, since there is a nervousness to travel this way and pressure from the “green” lobby. This will significantly impact the futures of commerce and tourism.

Further, the current situation is compounded by the Brexit process. The impact of e-commerce, artificial intelligence, health management, the green agenda, and new ways of working all compound the challenge of managing the world of business. Ironically, the links with our near neighbours are stronger than those afar because of the pandemic. Nationalism seems to be replacing Globalisation, but the world can only resolve the current pandemic by close collaboration.

Locally, over the past months, Bracknell Forest Council has managed issues around the homeless; providing healthcare support to several thousand shielded residents; administering the various government financial support packages (circa £10M); ensuring all primary and secondary schools get back to some semblance of normality; maintained refuse services and recycling centres; promoting the Lexicon and its future development; working within the Thames Valley LEP to ensure monies are made available within Bracknell Forest to promote businesses and infrastructure improvements; continued to promote the work of the Economic Skills and Development Partnership including the Bracknell BID; and, most

importantly, managed to maintain the wide range of services essential to the running of Bracknell Forest. These efforts have enabled the way of life and business to continue as well as possible under incredibly challenging circumstances.

Clearly, life will not return to the “old” normal. The impact of “Working from Home” (WFH) has and will impact the operation of businesses, organisations, and the Councils. In future, WFH will reduce the need for large offices and where people live and commute. Hopefully, it will ultimately lead to a better quality of life, less congestion, and a greener environment.

Councillor Bob Wade

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Footnote:

In 1665, the Black Death killed some 100,000 in London due to lack of sanitation and narrow streets. A year later, not only the Great Fire of London destroyed an estimated 70,000 homes of the city's 80,000 inhabitants, but also the plague. It was thought after the fire was a great opportunity to rebuild London with improved layout and sanitation. Unfortunately, the debate took longer than the “locally” produced replacement buildings in much the same places!

The sanitation problem was not resolved until the Great Stink in 1858 – 192 years later!

Let us learn from history and make sure our vision of post Covid-19/Brexit changes are realised before we slip back to the “old ways”!

Large Business Champion – Statement

As per the Leader of the Council's memo to Members at the time, Cllr Ankur Shiv Bhandari asked to be temporarily relieved of his duties as Large Business Champion during the last year as his own business required significantly more of his time. This situation has now eased, and Cllr Bhandari was reappointed to the role at the recent Annual Council and will resume reporting to Council at the next relevant occasion.

Voluntary Sector Champion – Councillor Mike Gibson



“May you live in interesting times” is an old saying reflecting the difficulties of experiencing abnormal conditions which lead to turmoil and heartbreak in our everyday lives. Covid-19 has certainly turned the world upside down, taking that occasionally overused phrase and giving it an emphasis, no one would have imagined last year.

Of course, the pandemic has had a major impact on every aspect of our lives over 2020 and this is no different for the voluntary sector. While the effect has caused massive issues, the way the voluntary sector has responded has been magnificent.

I echo the words of my predecessor, former Councillor Finnie,
“As I have said in the past, we are very fortunate in this community to have such an active and wonderful voluntary sector.”

This has never been proved so true as over the last year. I would also like to begin by thanking the officers, that help facilitate the relationships between Voluntary and Public Sector and Involve who continue to play, under Philip Cook’s leadership such a major role in our local communities. I salute all those myriad groups that perhaps do not have such close workings with the council but nevertheless are the main constituents of the voluntary sector.

I started my first year as champion with the view of the role as to learn more about the voluntary sector in Bracknell & Wokingham and the difference between the council’s relationship between the many groups and organisations. The one thing that was common for a lot of groups was the work that councillors put in. Councillors are expected to be community leaders, but the amount of additional work put in by councillors is phenomenal and I would like to acknowledge all those councillors who go above and beyond.

I have been able to talk to various groups and people before the Virus hit and my membership of the CAB and former membership of Involve has provided valuable insight.

Covid-19



Involve and Public Health England have been coordinating volunteers and councillors have been an active part of this. I would like to single out Councillor Gill Birch as she has done an incredible amount of work with organising volunteering groups and is only one of the many hard-working volunteers at this time.

Whilst Involve has been regularly briefing residents and councillors through its newsletter, I would like to refer to some recent points made by its general manager, Philip Cook. The Community response has very successfully been delivered via Healthwatch and Involve.

- Involve will be withdrawing from this service by the end of July and Healthwatch will continue ensuring people have the support they need.

- Generally, in the sector, charities and groups are busy supporting their clients whilst working out how to deliver in the new world and abiding with rules and regulations.
- There are charities/ groups who will have their income affected and Bracknell Forest Council has generously invested in a Grant Writer to help secure money for charities and groups in the area that will be most affected.
- The volunteer response to Covid-19 was fantastic and involve are developing ways to keep people volunteering and keep a community spirit present in the borough. There are concerns about volunteering and those organisations that rely on volunteers who are aged over 70.

I think the last point, while a concern, shows the tenacity of our volunteers and that we have volunteers from all walks of life.

I should also thank Cllr Sandra Ingham our representative on Involve for keeping me informed.

The council

The council is looking at all aspect of the new normal and looking at the Voluntary sector is no different.

I have been participating as part of a working group with Cllr Dale Birch Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing (Deputy Leader of the Council) with Cllrs Tony Virgo, Rob McLean and Moira Gaw. Whist it would be wrong for me to pre-empt these discussions, rest assured it is at the fore front of my mind of future working relationships with the voluntary sector.

In Conclusion

I will continue to be a conduit between the Council and the Voluntary Sector. It is my aim to promote closer and better relationships with the voluntary sector over the coming year. There is an opportunity for the new normal to reflect this and the council is actively working towards these ideals.

The excellent spirit shown at this difficult time of pandemic should not be forgotten and these values will not be lost but built upon for the wider community.

My humblest thanks go out to all those who participate in volunteering.

Councillor Mike Gibson

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