

**To: COUNCIL**  
**25 APRIL 2018**

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**EXECUTIVE REPORT TO COUNCIL**  
**The Leader**

**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 Since the Council meeting on 28 February 2018, the Executive has met twice, on the 13 March 2018 and the 10 April 2018. 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](http://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 note the Executive decisions detailed in this report taken since the last Council meeting on 28 February 2018.**

**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 Easthampstead Park Conference Centre (EPCC)**

- 5.1.1 The Executive agreed that Easthampstead Park Conference Centre be sold to a high quality hotel and conference centre operator and that the Borough Solicitor and Chief Officer: Property be given delegated authority to conclude the property transaction.
- 5.1.2 Easthampstead Park Conference Centre was transferred to Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFBC) in 1998 upon the dissolution of Berkshire County Council and the establishment of 6 unitary authorities.
- 5.1.3 Prior to 1997 the building had a variety of uses but was poorly maintained. Since 1999 there had been some limited investment that has improved the facility to its current level. However, in recent years, EPCC had been making a significant annual operating loss in the region of £250,000 per annum. In addition, the repairs and

maintenance requirements for a listed building of this age and scale is significant with an estimated £4m of back dated maintenance work required to ensure the listed building is protected well into the future. Protecting the asset so that it remained as a conference/hotel venue and is not ‘cannibalised’ for residential development was a major Council objective.

- 5.1.4 Given the scale of annual losses and with no realistic prospect of reversing this trend, Christie and Co, the leading property specialist with regards to conference centres, were appointed in May 2017 to determine whether there was a reasonable prospect of selling EPCC as a *going concern* in order to remove BFC’s losses and, equally importantly, to remove the risk associated with the long term and expensive maintenance of a listed building.
- 5.1.5 Disposal as a going concern is essential as EPCC takes bookings many months in advance with wedding bookings taken up to 18 months in advance. It was therefore essential that existing bookings would not be compromised or future ones jeopardised.
- 5.1.6 After a comprehensive process three highly regarded organisations submitted “best and final offers”. Officers, supported by Christie and Co, have assessed all bids and concluded that Bidder C provides best value to the Council. Not only was this the highest capital bid made at the “best and final offer” stage but the development proposals are robust and ambitious.
- 5.1.7 Agreeing a sale will require the relocation of the Council’s Education Centre, IT Training Suite and the emergency back-up for the Forestcare IT data. All bidders were content for the Education Centre to be on a rolling 6 month lease at no additional cost. The Council’s IT training suite will be accommodated in Bracknell Library and while an exact location for the Forestcare IT data back up had not yet been identified the requirements are minimal and is not considered to be problematic.

### **Council Strategy & Community Cohesion**

#### **5.2 Council Plan Overview Report**

- 5.2.1 The Executive noted the latest Council Plan Overview Report covering the third quarter of the 2017/18 financial year (October - December 2017). At the end of the third quarter 154 actions (74%) were on target to be completed within the timescales set; 27 actions (13%) had been completed; 22 actions (11%) were at risk of falling behind schedule and 5 actions (2%) had fallen behind schedule.
- 5.2.2 Progress against the key indicators in the Council Plan was also generally positive with 37 (66%) green – i.e. on, above or within 5% of target; 6 (11%) amber – i.e. between 5% and 10% of target; and 13 (23%) red – i.e. more than 10% from target.
- 5.2.3 The Lexicon continued to attract large numbers of visitors and this is reflected in the early car parking figures that indicate a very positive financial position. The most popular car park as expected is The Avenue whilst the new town centre highway infrastructure is working extremely well in managing traffic flows. Equally encouraging is the information from bus operators that patronage of town centre buses has increased by 17.59% between October and December 2017 compared to the previous year. In addition, the first full quarter since The Lexicon opened has seen a 32% reduction in shoplifting and a 27% reduction in criminal damage

compared to the same quarter last year. This all paints a very positive picture of the impact of the new town centre.

- 5.2.4 Transformation continued across the organisation. In the libraries review, the tender evaluation process for the assisted opening and self-service kiosk technologies was completed and the contract awarded. Design work on physical alterations to the libraries was currently underway. There were also parallel discussions regarding the future of both Bracknell and Harmans Water libraries.
- 5.2.5 We continue to see a higher number of households in B&B than the target. These have been mainly single people with complex needs. The requirement to house them in B&B has often been based on risk assessments provided by support agencies such as the probation service. Actions are being taken to ensure we manage this as well as we can.
- 5.2.6 The Council has lost a number of key staff due to our successful Ofsted report for Children's Services last year and this has inevitably impacted on our current Social Worker caseload figures. This is a challenge as demand through the number of referrals continues to rise.
- 5.2.7 Recruitment more generally is becoming increasingly problematic. Our quarter three figure for voluntary staff turnover is 3.4%, which is an increase of 0.6% compared to the same period last year. There can be seasonal variations which can affect this figure. However, the general trend does seem to be an increasing figure. Since the end of quarter three, the Overview & Scrutiny Commission has held two helpful workshops looking at recruitment and retention.

### **Planning & Transport**

#### **5.3 Capital Programme 2018/19 Integrated Transport**

- 5.3.1 The Executive approved the Capital Programme for Integrated Transport for 2018/19 and its implementation. The programme supports the adopted Local Transport Plan which sets out the key challenges facing Bracknell Forest through the period 2011-2026.
- 5.3.2 Historically, funding for the programme has been made up of an Integrated Transport Grant from central Government, alongside developer contributions for transport mitigation measures (S106/CIL). However, this year the Council has also been successful in securing additional funds from central Government through the Local Growth Fund (LGF) towards implementing transport measures linked to economic growth and carbon reduction. Previous LGF schemes included Warfield Link Road, the Coral Reef Junction improvement and Bracknell town centre accessibility improvements. A current LGF scheme is the A329 London Road Corridor improvement which would continue in 2018/19.
- 5.3.3 Further Government funding of £3.29m has now also been secured for the conversion of Downshire Way to a dual carriageway. This work is due to start in 2018/19 and continue into 2019/20. The total cost of the project will be £4.7m.

#### **5.4 Highway Maintenance Works Programme 2018-19**

- 5.4.1 The Executive agreed the Highway Maintenance Works Programme. This includes £1.369m for non-routine highway maintenance schemes which is funding provided

via the Department for Transport's Highway Maintenance Capital Funding. This is a reduction on last year.

- 5.4.2 There was, however, an additional £200,000 from the Council's own capital programme by way of capitalised revenue for road maintenance and street lighting. This funding is generally used to support the schemes within the estates and for footpaths.
- 5.4.3 In addition to the capital programme, the Council also made provision in its revenue budget with around £2.2m included in the 2018/19 proposals. This will be used for routine and reactive maintenance purposes on all our highway network assets, our winter service and our 24/7 emergency event response service.
- 5.4.4 Even with this level of funding, the level of maintenance demand far exceeds the available budgets. Accordingly funding has to be targeted. The Local Transport Plan defines how we prioritise spending according to an assessment of need having regard to the condition of the asset.

## **5.5 Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Supplementary Planning Document (SPASPD) – Adoption**

- 5.5.1 The Thames Basin Heath SPA covers parts of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. It is home to three important bird species, (the Dartford Warbler, the Nightjar and the Woodlark) and is protected by international law (the EU Birds Directive and the EU Habitats Directive), national legislation (the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017) and by planning policy as a 'Special Protection Area' (SPA).
- 5.5.2 A public consultation on the draft SPASPD took place between 8 January 2018 and 19 February 2018. Details of the consultation were sent to key stakeholders including: Parish Councils, other local authorities, developers, housing associations, local environmental groups and government agencies. The draft document was also made available on the Council's website, in local libraries and Council reception areas and the consultation was published on 10 January 2018 in the Bracknell News paper.
- 5.5.3 There were a total of 63 consultation responses from 16 respondents to the consultation on the SPD. Their responses were subsequently collated and, where appropriate, changes were made to the SPD. The Consultation Statement summarised the main issues raised during the consultation and how these issues were addressed in the SPD.

## **Adult Services, Health & Housing**

### **5.6 Housing Strategy 2018 – 2036**

- 5.6.1 The Executive agreed the Housing Strategy for Bracknell Forest 2018 – 2036. This sets out the Council's key principles of:
  - supporting a vibrant housing market
  - increasing the percentage of affordable housing
  - providing the right homes for vulnerable people
  - contributing to sustainable communities
  - using Downshire Homes Limited as a vehicle to provide accommodation to key groups of vulnerable people and reduce costs to the Council.

The Housing Strategy statement was developed within the context of the Council's other key strategies and plans. The Council was currently consulting on the draft Local Plan which would be key to achieving the Housing Strategies key principles.

## **6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

### Borough Solicitor

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

### Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The Borough Treasurer's comments have been addressed in the reports to the Executive.

### Equalities Impact Assessment

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

### Strategic Risk Management Issues

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

### Background Papers

Executive Agenda – 13 March 2018 and 10 April 2018

### Contact for further information

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