

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
8 JANUARY 2019
7.30 - 8.47 PM**



Present:

Councillors Angell (Chairman), Brossard, Mrs Ingham and Mrs McKenzie

Executive Members:

Councillors Mrs Hayes; McCracken and Turrell

Also Present:

Gill Vickers, Executive Director: Delivery
Andrew Hunter, Director: Place, Planning & Regeneration
Damian James, Assistant Director: Contract Services

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Porter, Mrs Angell, Finnie and Mrs Mattick

31. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 18 September 2018 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

32. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

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

33. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

34. Public Participation

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

35. Draft Budget Proposals 2019/20

It was noted members had received a full draft budget pack as well as agenda papers related to items of the draft budget relating to Environment, Culture and Communities. The information was the same but presented in a different format.

Discussion on the budget resulted in the following comments and questions:

- Members queried why an income was not received where an office space was reclassified from Class B to a Class C dwelling. Andrew Hunter, Director:

Place, Planning & Regeneration informed members this fee was set universally across all local authorities so could not be changed locally.

- It was acknowledged this was a consultation process but members queried why some of the proposed fees and charges appeared particularly high. For example, on Page 61 of the agenda there were large increases planned for a marriage in the Haversham room at South Hill Park. Other examples of substantial increases included an 8.2% increase for the internment of a body over 16 years of age in comparison to a 3.5% increase for most other fees and charges. Members also referred to an increase in the fee of citizenship ceremonies held at the weekend. Laura Cooper, Finance Business Partner, agreed to check the reason for the increases with officers responsible for this area and report back to members.
- Members queried why the season ticket for parking at Braccan Walk (Page 77) was proposed to increase by 12.5% as it was thought the hourly rate had been frozen. Damian James, Assistant Director, Contract Services, informed members the season ticket rate was set using the market rate in comparison with other local authorities; benchmarking against other car parks in the area, which were owned privately, and rounding the figure up to £45.00. Some season tickets had been kept low previously to allow the new Town Centre to bed in.
- Members queried why there was a proposed 139.9% increase in the charge for transferring a Hackney Carriage vehicle to a new owner (Page 85). Damian James explained this was due to Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFC) bringing their fees in line with West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough Council's fees as part of a joint Public Protection Partnership.

Actions

- **Laura Cooper to respond to members questions about crematorium/cemetery fees and wedding/civil ceremony fees.**

36. Parks and Countryside Progress Report

Andrew Hunter, Director: Place, Planning & Regeneration presented the report which set out how the department intended to make £400,000 worth of transformation savings and how projects had progressed through the transformation programme which the Council had agreed.

This project was discussed at the March 2018 Gateway Review and recommendations in paragraph 6.3 of that report were agreed at a meeting of the Executive in May 2018. Key areas included income generation, minimisation of land management costs; service efficiencies, and increased opportunities to work with volunteers.

Implementation of the Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) project meant developers had access to open spaces to mitigate their developments and had achieved an income of £266,000 for the Council during this particular review.

Future projects included development of a play area café and water sports facilities at Horseshoe Lake which would generate an income and provide additional recreation facilities for Bracknell Forest. The business case for this project would be presented to members at the next Executive meeting in February 2019.

As a result of discussions the following comments and questions were made:

- It was discussed whether the current car park at Horseshoe Lake would accommodate an increase in vehicles. Members were assured this would be part of the project scope and options being considered included a similar set

up to Dinton Pastures which operated a formal car park and an overflow car park during peak times. Members also queried if provision would be made for parking bicycles and it was confirmed this would be the case. Members asked if S106 funding could be used to fund a footpath to allow local residents to access the park on foot. Andrew Hunter stated they were still looking at the business case and had begun work on a planning application.

- Members asked about the number and consistency of charges for mobile catering units and were informed it depended on timings/needs of each commercial entity.
- Members questioned the proposal to licence commercial dog-walkers in the Borough. Andrew Hunter informed members they had reviewed how other local authorities had implemented similar schemes, such as Swindon Borough Council and that it was not focused on income generation rather protection of public spaces. An informal consultation with commercial dog-walkers had been carried out to assess viability, such as what they would be prepared to pay for a licence. Although the scheme would be voluntary it would look to ensure licenced dog-walkers had the correct insurance and certificates, etc. It was queried how the Council would identify commercial dog-walkers versus residents walking their own dogs and they were informed this could be done easily by checking advertisements, social networking sites, knowledge of Rangers, etc. Members noted the Gateway Review was a forum for reviewing options, not a decision-making body, and felt the need to scrutinise this project further so requested further information including the benefits and challenges, such as cost of implementation. Members were also keen to understand how a potential scheme would be regulated. One possibility suggested was for commercial dog-walkers to wear a lanyard to enable easy identification. Members asked if the scheme would require more staff and were informed Rangers and the pre-existing volunteer network would assist with enforcement. Cllr Iain McCracken, Executive Member for Culture, Resources and Public Protection, assured members the proposal had not been implemented and a paper outlining the pros and cons of the project would be available at a future Executive meeting for members to discuss.
- Members were interested in the programme of activities BFC ran last year and questioned if they would be run again if they had proved successful, such as the open air cinema at Lily Hill Park, and what the impact on rangers who clear up the parks had been. It was noted there was an intention to run successful events again and that rangers were clear on what people could bring and how they would deal with litter following an event. No issues to date.
- Members discussed the internal re-design of staff within Environmental Services and Parks and Countryside teams. Andrew Hunter informed members the intention was to bring teams together and ensure unity between how issues were dealt with and that they were already collectively managing the whole estate as one entity, such as regarding maintenance of land and parks.
- Members asked how the Council intended to achieve their aim of becoming more attractive to film companies as illustrated in paragraph 7.5 and were informed a Pan Berkshire website was going to be launched in February identifying all sites which could be used for filming. In the past it had been found film companies were not directed swiftly enough to the correct person so they went elsewhere. An example of a request received recently was to film railway station. The Council stated they did not own the station but they could film Station Green opposite which generated £350 income for the Council.
- The timescale for implementation of the majority of projects contained in the Parks and Countryside Progress Report was three to six months.

Actions

- **Andrew Hunter to consider the preparation of a paper outlining pros/cons of licensing commercial dog-walkers (following consultation) and Cllr Iain McCracken to take the paper to Executive.**

37. Planning and Building Control Transformation Review

An overview of the project was presented setting out that the project had the intention to make savings of approximately £200,000. When the project was initiated the team surveyed regular users of the services and were intending to seek the views of regular users in three to four months to ensure improvements in satisfaction levels and in terms of timeliness had been achieved. The Quarterly Service Report indicated there had been good progress in this area.

Following discussions the following comments and questions were made:

- The number of phone calls to the department had greatly reduced.
- Building control pre-application discussions with developers over an hour could incur a charge which resulted in an income for the Council.
- Where possible service automation was being progressed.
- Website pages had been improved and received good feedback.
- Development business plans had been created setting out standards.
- Members asked if a small proportion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was retained and were informed 5% was retained to cover costs of administration but this could be higher if costs were increased.
- The planning department were moving to 'paperless' systems over the coming weeks but this would not affect residents. They would still receive a letter to notify them in an application had been received which affected their property.
- The transformation project would close down in the next couple of weeks and outcomes would be monitored to ensure expectations were met.
- Andrew Hunter was asked if there had been anything remarkable about the transformation process and responded he was pleased at the commercial mind-set of staff and their approach to coming up with ideas to make services better.

38. LED Lighting Task & Finish Group Update

Members received an update on the progress of the LED Lighting Task & Finish Group. Members thought the four site visits undertaken by members of the Group along with two officers had proven very useful. During the visit lights were dropped from 100% to 70% then down to 50% and most members thought there was little noticeable difference. Cllr Chris Turrell, Executive Member for Planning and Transport informed members most local authorities in the UK were for implementing LED lighting and there had been a financial saving due to this project. The system informed the team quicker about maintenance issues ensuring lights were corrected quickly. Over 11,000 lights and 1,000 lanterns had been installed to date. Members were informed there were different types of lighting options available, such as the Y type light, and that teams were working across the Council to ensure foliage was well maintained to ensure lighting was able to work properly. The implementation phase was due to finish by the end of January 2019. It was noted there was a small amount of funding available to address areas where a number of complaints had been received and assessed as requiring more lighting and they were now looking at implementing LED lighting in subways and on street signs in the future.

39. Houses in Multiple Occupation Task & Finish Group Update

Cllr Brossard, Chair of the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Task & Finish Group, informed members four meetings had taken place to date. A meeting was to be held on Thursday 10 January 2019 with an Estate Agent specialising in HMOs to help members understand how they manage their portfolio of HMOs. One further meeting would be required with a landlord to understand potential issues over bins/ parking, etc. Members queried how standards could be enforced; what the signs of an unlicensed HMO were and queried conversion of outbuildings on grounds, not the dwelling itself. Members agreed to discuss these issues with the Estate Agent. The project would close by the end of February 2019.

40. Quarterly Service Report (QSR)

Gill Vickers, Interim Director: Delivery gave an overview of quarter two which included the second chapel opening at Easthampstead Crematorium on 1 November; extension of the waste collection contract and sale of Easthampstead Conference Centre.

Damian James informed members that new waste vehicles had been ordered to work under the new contract from 1 April 2019. The implementation of collection of additional materials with kerbside recycling went very well and the number of residents joining the recycling incentive scheme continues to increase with many local good causes supported and another competition held to win an iPad by using up reward points. The waste electrical and textile roadshow at BLC in September was again popular with residents dropping off 1.32 tonnes of small electrical items and 720 kgs of clothing.

In the Autumn Budget Statement the Borough was awarded an additional highway maintenance grant of £754,000 from the Department for Transport's, "pothole repair fund". To date the Council had spent approximately £561,600 of this grant re-surfacing sections of Berkshire Way, Old Wokingham Road and Maidenhead Road. The grant had been used to re-surface important roads, rather than to merely 'repair potholes', in order to prevent the future formation of potholes. Further works are now planned for March - weather permitting.

Cllr Dorothy Hayes MBE, Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration noted residents had taken on the challenge of recycling and segregating as had been seen over the Christmas period and further projects were underway.

Cllr Iain McCracken, Executive Member for Culture, Resources and Public Protection thanked the Council's Rangers and staff for enabling the Council to retain all six green flags.

Gill Vickers, Interim Director: Delivery responded to a question from members regarding self service technology rollout and confirmed it was live in all libraries now. Open Plus Technology was being tested at Binfield then would be rolled out further.

Andrew Hunter, Director: Place, Planning & Regeneration provided an update to members on Quarter 3 including:

- The improved land supply position and the change of assessed housing need (to be kept under review).
- The Council's CIL target had been reached in Quarter 2.
- Work was continuing on the London road scheme and would be finished by end of February 2019. Night closures would be coming up to enable final resurfacing.

- Previously it had been noted there was a dip in performance on planning applications but this had picked up again.
- Some planning appeals decisions were still being overturned and this required further investigation.

Members asked if there was an update on a permanent market place in Bracknell Town Centre and were informed they were talking to market traders about opening on an additional day of the market and that planning permission would need to be refreshed to allow it to remain outside Princess Square. Members asked if the Martins Heron roundabout works were on track to finish in February 2019 and it was confirmed they were. Members welcomed A3095 improvement scheme and the first communication which went out to residents.

Actions

- **Andrew Hunter to keep members up to date on the calculation for assessed housing need.**

41. **Executive Forward Plan**

Members received and noted the scheduled Key and Non-Key Executive Decisions of a corporate nature.

CHAIRMAN