

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
24 APRIL 2012
7.30 - 9.15 PM**



Present:

Councillors Finnie (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Angell, Brossard, Ms Brown, Finch and Porter

Executive Member:

Councillor Mrs Hayes

Also Present:

Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Overview and Scrutiny)
Mark Devon, Chief Officer: Leisure & Culture
Simon Hendey, Chief Officer: Housing
Bev Hindle, Chief Officer: Planning & Transport
Steve Loudoun, Chief Officer: Environment & Public Protection
Vincent Paliczka, Director of Environment, Culture & Communities

Observer:

Councillor Leake

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Ms Miller

42. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 January 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

43. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

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

44. Public Participation

There were no submissions from members of the public in accordance with the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

45. Quarterly Service Report (QSR)

The Panel considered the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of departmental performance as reported in the Quarterly Service Report (QSR) for the third quarter of 2011/12 (October to December) relating to Environment, Culture and Communities.

The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities gave a presentation in respect of the Environment, Culture and Communities Department's QSR and Service Plan.

There had been a £500,000 underspend across the budget and some of this had been transferred into the budget for the current year. There had been major budget changes in relation to Street Cleaning, Bracknell Forest Homes and additional works, Highway Maintenance Potholes Grant, Supporting People Handyman Grant and Housing Benefit initial claim.

Major variances in revenue had occurred in relation to the Coroner's Service, the Safer Roads Partnership (SRP), Edgbarrow and Sandhurst Sports Centres income, Bracknell Leisure Centre and Coral Reef income, cemetery and crematorium income, building control, Joint Strategic Planning Unit (JSPU), concessionary fares, Easthampstead Park Conference Centre (EPCC) income, landscape services, and waste management.

Efficiencies had been made in relation to the SRP but there would be the same enforcement and education. The Edgbarrow and Sandhurst Sports Centres income was still recovering from the fire but promotions were being undertaken, and Coral Reef had an excellent year. There had been a loss of business related income at EPCC but business in relation to weddings was booming with bookings up to two years in advance. Economies had been made in relation to landscape services and legal fees. Bracknell Forest Council would be responsible for surface water drainage, and less waste going to landfill sites had led to savings being made.

There had been good performance in relation to capital finance. Capital schemes now identified for carry forwards were refurbishment works in relation to Bracknell Leisure Centre, the Horse and Groom roundabout capacity improvement scheme, mortgages for low cost home ownership properties, South Hill Park Grounds Restoration Project, Special Protection Area (SPA) Mitigation Strategy, bridge structural maintenance, road maintenance surface treatment, Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS) enhancement works, enabling more affordable housing, Cash Incentive Scheme, Cemetery and Crematorium Mercury Abatement, Bracknell Forest Council My Home Buy, Waymead Flats refurbishment, and Local Transport Plan (LTP) Integrated Transport Grant.

SANGS enhancement works was a capacity issue and planning was needed in relation to this. More affordable housing had been agreed but was not yet completed; Waymead Flats would be used for affordable housing after refurbishment.

In relation to staffing, the average vacancy factor was 8.5%, and in relation to the sickness rate, the percentage was lower for the quarter and the year end compared to 2010/11.

Key highlights included the roll out of brown bins for garden waste, the consideration of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) by the Executive in June, and legal enforcement and car parking charges at The Look Out. When consulted, 44% of users of The Look Out said this would not change their use of the car park, 28% said they would not visit, and 16% said they would try to find alternative ways of accessing the SPA which was of concern. There was a need to demonstrate to Natural England (NE) that there would be no impact on the SPA. The air quality assessment continued, and the review of bus services was complete and would be considered by the Executive on 22 May.

From 1 April 2012, the Chief Officer: Housing had transferred to the Adult Social Care, Health and Housing Department from Environment, Culture and Communities as Housing Services were now incorporated within that department. Foresters Way would be closed for four days from 30 April 2012, a new Regulatory Services Section would bring more consistencies and efficiencies, and significant land transfers to Parks and Countryside were due to take place in relation to Jennett's Park, Church Hill House and The Parks developments.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were made:

- Some households had two or three brown bins but only the brown bins registered would be emptied. The difference in number in relation to households with multiple brown bins was approximately 500.
- The government expected air quality monitoring and after a preliminary assessment, two areas of concern were found. Further work would be undertaken and submitted to the government. The Bracknell area would be enlarged slightly in relation to the area assessed and the Crowthorne area would be slightly reduced and compared over a longer period of time. There would be another statutory process and consultation and then an action plan would be submitted to the government in relation to cost effective solutions but there was no specific time frame for work to be undertaken. The greatest benefit to air quality was changes in technology over time.
- For residents interested in being involved in coppicing and litter picking, further information could be provided via the Ranger office on 01344 354441. Conservation volunteering was linked to the Take Pride initiative and there was further information on the Council's website at: <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/takepridevolunteering> and also <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/countrysideconservation> .
- Landscaping and the provision of brown bins were two unrelated areas of spend and leaves on public roads and paths would be dealt with as part of street cleansing. Additional street cleansing sweeps were a possibility if problem areas were identified and reported to the Borough Council but some areas of land would possibly be owned by Bracknell Forest Homes or another land owner. There was a need to identify the owner of the land first.
- Panel Members would be provided with figures in relation to the reduction in waste going to landfill sites. It was felt that this was due to people producing less waste in the current economic climate and not purely because of recycling schemes. New machines were being used for composting where possible instead of sending waste to landfill.
- The CIL would be introduced as soon as was practical. As soon as the levy was set it could be reviewed but would need to run for a period of time to assess it and there was an 18 month to two year process in relation to the consultation to gauge impact.
- Progress against the key action to continue to protect the green belt and avoid coalescence of existing communities involved the use of SANGS and recreational space to maintain open space buffers between communities. However, protection of the green belt created more development pressure elsewhere.

The Chairman thanked everyone involved in work on the QSR.

46. **Schools Annual Environmental Management Report 2010/11**

The Chief Officer: Planning and Transport presented the School's Annual Environmental Management Report 2010/11.

78% of schools in Bracknell Forest were registered with the eco-schools programme. The environment was a high profile issue and there was an awareness of this in many schools. Budgets were tight at present and energy savings would lead to financial rewards. Energy consumption was increasing in Bracknell Forest schools and this would be monitored to see how to manage the demand for carbon reduction and financial savings.

There were varied responses in relation to water consumption in schools and some experienced difficulties in reading water meters on site due to them being in inaccessible locations. Water readings were not received until the end of the calendar year and it was suggested that this report be split into two in order to relay information in relation to energy usage and other environmental information when it was available. 97% of Bracknell Forest schools had a travel plan.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were made:

- Garth Hill had heavy biomass energy consumption but work would be undertaken in relation to renewable energy to help facilitate better a biomass network. Energy for schools was purchased via contract. This would be monitored and the procurement of energy reviewed. Schools were autonomous in relation to energy consumption and made decisions as individual schools.
- Schools would be encouraged to give further consideration to reading meters, access to meters and collaborating with other schools to purchase energy and water more economically.
- Schools could use the Invest to Save Programme. Primary measures were used to keep schools safe and there were good cases and a process for repaying funds over time. The private sector could invest in schools and procure energy more economically as they were purchasing on a larger scale.
- There were vast differences between the amount of water used by Bracknell Forest Schools. The water company may not be charging the correct rate or readings could be incorrectly taken.
- Further information on water meter readings and costs from Bracknell Forest Schools would be provided.

47. **Enforcement Policy**

The Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection presented a report on the updated policy for Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Licensing. The policy was before the Panel as part of the consultation process and comments to the Chief Officer were welcomed before the policy was considered by the Executive on 12 June 2012.

There was a requirement to have an Environment Policy and there was legislation and guidance to support this. There had been minor changes since the introduction of the primary authority in 2008. Waitrose were signed up to the primary authority principle and the Council worked closely with them.

National media campaigns were making it harder to seek and enforce regulatory compliance and the process was more complex meaning that a court case could be lost on a technicality.

48. Food Law Enforcement Plan 2012-13

The Council had responsibility for the enforcement of food law, in particular food hygiene and food standards in the Borough. The Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection presented a report setting out the basic framework within which a mandatory service was provided together with a work plan setting out the proposal for delivery for the Panel's comments prior to approval by the Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection.

Complex prosecution could demand several weeks of officer time and the Council could be audited against delivery. There were a number of food standards inspections and the government wanted a focus on intelligence led inspection work. There was help to deliver successful outcomes for business.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were made:

- There were two to three members of staff working on food safety issues at the Borough Council who undertook other work as well. There was no surplus or shortage of staff to work on food safety issues.
- If there was doubt regarding the promotion of a food product, a sample would be taken and submitted to an analyst to check its content.
- The Food Standards Agency did prescribe time limits for specific numbers of inspections to be undertaken. If there were pressures due to circumstances then staff from one area would be re-resourced to another area to cover any shortage.

49. Local Development Framework - Update Report

The Chief Officer: Planning and Transport presented an update report in respect of the Borough's Local Development Framework (LDF).

The LDF set out policies and proposals for the development and use of land in an area taking account of social and environmental factors. The site allocations document was finished and at the publication stage; it would be submitted to the Secretary of State after analysis. A review of the Core Strategy had been undertaken and was at the preparation stage in relation to new guidance and legislation. A Member Briefing Seminar would be arranged for Members in May 2012.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were made:

- As no new information had been received regarding the site allocations document, it would be taken forward in consultation with the portfolio holder as it had been through Council in 2011. This was the last stage of the process and consisted of a set of representations for the inspector to consider. Minor changes only were needed and the document had approval to be submitted, unless any critical new information emerged.
- In relation to the introduction of a national framework, the local authority had a 'duty to co-operate' with neighbouring local authorities and this had come through localism. It was queried whether cross boundary views and impact had been taken into account but there was no further need to consult and there was a need to make the framework in line with policy.
- Plans would usually be consistently rolled forward in relation to the Core Strategy Review. The national planning policy framework had been shortened, and a new plan would take approximately three to four years to

complete. Although there had been many policy changes nationally, existing Borough policies continued to carry some weight.

- The Core Strategy was not meant to be a set of neighbourhood plans as these would need to conform with the development plan. The Core Strategy Review gave an opportunity to frame plans coming forward.

The Panel noted the documents that currently formed part of the Bracknell Forest Borough LDF and the stage reached in the preparation of other documents that would eventually form part of the Bracknell Forest Borough LDF on adoption.

50. Working Group Update Report

The Panel noted the update report in respect of the working groups of the Panel.

51. Overview and Scrutiny Progress Report

The Panel noted the bi-annual Progress Report of the Assistant Chief Executive on Overview and Scrutiny activity over the period September 2011 to February 2012 and local and national developments in Overview and Scrutiny.

52. Executive Forward Plan

The Panel noted the forthcoming items relating to Environment, Culture and Communities on the Executive Forward Plan and the following points were made:

Item I034348

If not already included, the ramblers and walkers groups would be added to the list of consultees for Forward Plan Item I034348: Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plan 2012-2017.

Item I034536

The Executive Member for Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection would be consulted as to whether the timeframe and decision date in relation to the Forward Plan Item I034536: Consultation on Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and Greenspace Quality Improvements Project could be extended to allow the Panel to consider the Strategy at its next meeting on 17 July 2012.

Item I034415

The Executive Member for Planning and Transport would be consulted as to whether the Highway Network Management Strategy document could be forwarded to Panel Members in advance of the decision date for the Forward Plan Item I034415: Highway Network Management Strategy, or the decision delayed to enable the Panel to consider the Strategy at its next meeting on 17 July 2012.

Item I034415

A change of title for the Forward Plan Item I034415: Highway Network Management Strategy would be considered.

CHAIRMAN