

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
17 JULY 2012
7.30 - 9.15 PM**



Present:

Councillors McLean (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Brossard, Ms Brown, Finch, Ms Miller and Mrs Barnard (Substitute)

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
Wayne Scott, Traffic Manager
Richard Walton, Head of Parks and Countryside

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Finnie, Gbadebo and Porter

1. Election of Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Finnie be elected Chairman of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2012/13.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor McLean be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2012/13.

COUNCILLOR MCLEAN IN THE CHAIR

3. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Panel noted the attendance of the following substitute member:

Councillor Mrs Barnard for Councillor Finnie

4. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 24 April 2012 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

5. 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.

6. Public Participation

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

7. 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 fourth quarter of 2011/12 (January to March) relating to Environment, Culture and Communities (ECC).

The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities gave a presentation in respect of the ECC Department's QSR and Service Plan. The Director thanked Chief Officer of Housing, Simon Hendey, for attending his last ECC Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting as the Housing function now fell under the remit of the Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

As at 31 March 2012, the revenue finance major variances under spend was £1,667,000. There had been major budget changes but no major effect on the funding available to spend as these were mainly technical adjustments. There had been major budget changes in relation to Waste PFI Accounting Entries, Highway Maintenance Capitalisation, IAS19 Person Accounting Entries, Recharges, Capital Charges, Street Cleaning, Bracknell Forest Homes and Additional Works, Highway Maintenance Pot Holes Grant, Supporting People Handyman Grant, and Housing Benefit Initial Claim.

Major variances in revenue had occurred in relation to cemetery and crematorium income, building control, concessionary fares, landscape services, waste management, housing benefit subsidy and administration, and departmental Human Resources. Considerably less funding was being spent on landfill and reserves would be carried forward where possible.

The current budget for 2012-13 was £51,076,000. There was not as much uptake of car park season tickets as companies were seeking alternatives. Current trends included additional income for Coral Reef and reduced income for Downshire Golf Complex. Golf courses nationally were suffering due to the particularly wet and windy weather. Section 106 funding was received intermittently from developments.

The Council's Executive had agreed to fund £300,000 this financial year on low cost home ownership. Staff vacancies at the Council were fairly static and sickness rates were good at present. Around 30,000 people had turned out to see the Olympic Torch pass through Bracknell on Tuesday 10 July 2012 at approximately 5.30pm to 6pm. The Victorian Fayre due to be held at South Hill Park on Saturday 21 July had been cancelled due to the heavy levels of rainfall making the ground too wet.

Congratulations were given to everyone involved in the roll out of the brown bins in the borough. Machines had been ordered for pay and display car parking and it was expected that these would be installed in September or October 2012. The consultation regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy was being held for six weeks until the end of August 2012.

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

- £350,000 funding had been spent on pot holes in the borough.
- There were issues with external contracts such as gas works and BT. There was an interface issue as the system Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) used differed from the system external contractors used.
- The use of computers in libraries was an important statistic to measure; as with any service provided by BFC, the uptake of the service was useful to know when planning future service provision. Some of the computers in libraries were old and in need of replacement, and so were not being used as much.
- A Building Control contract had been secured with a major developer which showed that BFC was able to compete with the private sector in this area.
- Research was being undertaken in the area of biomass in order to save money. Potential parties involved were meeting to discuss this further. An aim was to facilitate others to develop a tree station in the borough; it was hoped that plans for this would be finalised this year. The biomass plant at a local supermarket was operational.
- Figures in relation to net additional homes provided annually, the number of affordable homes delivered annually, and the processing of major planning applications were low due to effect of the recession. The targets set were national targets. Jennett's Park and The Parks were still delivering in relation to these targets but the smaller development sites were not delivering as much. Affinity Sutton Housing Association had taken ownership of some properties at the start of the financial year, affecting the figures in relation to affordable housing.
- The unclaimed carcasses of two abandoned horses had been removed from fields in the borough which was an unusual occurrence.
- The inclement weather had affected the grass cutting and landscaping duties of BFC due to the exceptional growing conditions and difficulty in cutting in wet conditions but this did not have a budgetary impact.
- The number of households currently in bed and breakfast was seven at the time of the meeting. The Housing Department had been able to achieve a reduction in the number of households in bed and breakfast recently by using other temporary accommodation solutions. The target was to keep no more than six households in bed and breakfast.
- Garth Hill College were using a high amount of energy due to the size of the College and the number of pupils attending but there were no conservation issues at the site which BFC was aware of. The matter would be explored and further information provided.

8. **Recycling and Waste Minimisation**

The Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection presented an update report on the 2011/12 full year landfill figures, the first quarter figures following changes to brown bin arrangements and work with Green Machine at Longshot Lane on the use and recycling of paint.

The key areas included a reflection of performance and the level of waste going to landfill which had decreased over the last three years now that 33% of waste was being converted into energy and households were throwing away less. Improvements in recycling were continuing in Bracknell.

The Environment Agency had said that street sweepings could not be converted for use as compost anymore due to possible contaminants in them but there was an ongoing debate regarding this. There were now over 13,000 brown bins registered at households in the borough. Green Machine was processing paint and selling it at an outlet at Longshot Lane which provided a good source of paint.

BFC had been encouraging people to bring in their old electrical goods, which could then be repaired and resold if possible. BFC was trying to reduce the amount of contamination in blue bins and to improve the process.

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

- Flats were a particular problem in relation to the contamination of blue bins as there was no single owner of the bins and this was a national problem. Refuse staff were encouraged to spot recycling contaminants and the cleaner the product the better the outcome of recycling.
- Wet leaves collected from drains were taken to landfill.
- A visit would be arranged for Panel Members to Smallmead civic amenity centre and to Green Machine at Longshot Lane, to witness the paint recycling process.

9. Local Development Framework - Update Report

The Local Development Scheme was a three-year project plan, which set out time scales for the preparation of planning documents. The current Scheme for Bracknell Forest came into effect on 8 August 2011 and therefore covered the period to 7th August 2014. A review of progress on the work programme and any issues arising was set out in the Annual Monitoring Report.

The two key development plan documents proposed for preparation within the three year period were the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) and commencement of the Core Strategy Review. The Site Allocations DPD Draft Submission was submitted to the Secretary of State on 29 June 2012. This followed approval by Council on 30 November 2011 and a further period of consultation from January to March 2012.

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

10. Working Group Update Report

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

11. Work Programme 2012/13

The Panel noted the agreed Work Programme for the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel for 2012/13.

12. **Consultation on the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and Greenspace Quality Improvements Programme - Forward Plan Item I034536**

The Head of Parks and Countryside gave a presentation on the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and Quality Improvements Programme.

The focus of the programme was recreational open spaces providing mitigation and infrastructure to enable the Council to deliver sustainable development and growth, such as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs).

Priorities included access to land and strategic recreational corridors, empowering and involving local communities, and healthy active lifestyles. Objectives included provision, maintenance, and use and enjoyment. Sustaining and raising quality standards and meeting the needs of a growing population were important.

Standards focused on Green Flag criteria and included exploring and protecting rare heathland sites, accessibility, and clear signage. Section 106 contributions would be applied in relation to benchmark standards and there were specific legal constraints regarding the use of Section 106 contributions. BFC were consulting on a two phase project regarding improvements to the parks and open spaces of the borough. Phase one was to prioritise green spaces in need of improvement and networks to help map contributions.

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

- BFC had a broad portfolio of land holdings with different areas and functions. Management decisions lay with the land manager and the sectors in BFC were reviewed regularly in relation to the Council's priorities and portfolio's.
- Officers worked together to inform policies regarding the amount and quality of open space and these policies were implemented through Section 106 agreements.
- Links would be created to and between green spaces in the borough.
- A mailshot had been sent to all Borough Councillors and members would be further involved and invited to make suggestions on the Strategy and Programme at the next stage of the process.
- Housing numbers compared favourably in Bracknell against Natural England standards. The Strategy would not conflict with new housing in the borough; it would give opportunities to expand on and improve green spaces.
- There were projects to improve woodland quality and the path network in the borough, and with new housing there would be buffers between the housing and green spaces.
- The natural qualities of green spaces would be reinforced to keep their wild character, particularly in meadows and woodland areas.
- Plants were being introduced in certain places in the borough which were more sustainable in extreme weather conditions, such as at the Italian Gardens at South Hill Park and Crowthorne Woods. There was a higher biodiversity value and reduced costs due to less servicing.

13. **Highway Network Management Action Plan - Forward Plan Item I034415**

The Chief Officer: Planning and Transport, and the Traffic Manager, presented a report on the Highway Network Management Action Plan.

The report invited the Panel to consider and comment on the Highway Network Management Action Plan prior to its determination by the Executive Member for Planning & Transport on 31 July 2012. The Action Plan contained the key actions the Council would undertake to deliver its statutory Network Management duty under the Traffic Management Act 2004.

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

- BFC were limited by existing legislation and only had certain powers to resolve problems with utilities companies in the borough. BFC could enforce utilities work via a permit scheme where companies would need to notify BFC of their works and receive permission for them to be undertaken. In this way BFC could ensure that works were properly planned.
- The Highway Network Management Action Plan would give BFC support, endorsement and direction. The operation of works depended on the operator but BFC wanted to gain more control in this area.
- BFC could issue defect notices, charge financial penalties for over running and would litigate if necessary.
- A Section 58 restriction could be placed on works following road surfacing which would ban works other than service connections and emergency works. This was an automatic restriction.
- Panel Members would be provided with further information on where action had been taken by Bracknell Forest Council against utilities companies undertaking works in Bracknell and the penalties given.

14. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Panel noted the forthcoming items relating to Environment, Culture and Communities on the Executive Forward Plan.

CHAIRMAN