

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
21 JANUARY 2014
7.30 - 9.20 PM**



Present:

Councillors Finnie (Chairman), McLean (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Barnard, Brossard, Ms Brown, Gbadebo, Ms Miller and Porter

Executive Members:

Councillors Mrs Hayes, McCracken and Turrell

Also Present:

Phil Burke, Travel Plan Co-ordinator
Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Overview and Scrutiny)
Mark Devon, Chief Officer: Leisure & Culture
Bev Hindle, Chief Officer: Planning & Transport
Steve Loudoun, Chief Officer: Environment & Public Protection
Vincent Paliczka, Director of Environment, Culture & Communities
Amanda Roden, Democratic Services Officer

27. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 24 September 2013 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

In response to a question arising from the minutes, the Panel was advised that the officers had found it useful to discuss flood risk management with representatives of Thames Water and the Environment Agency at the last meeting.

28. 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.

29. Public Participation

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

30. 2014/15 Draft Budget Proposals

The Panel considered key themes and priorities for Environment, Culture and Communities as outlined in the Council's Draft Budget Proposals for 2014/15.

Draft Revenue Budget Pressures for Environment, Culture and Communities totalled £276,000 in relation to the Development Management Section, Town Centre Regeneration and Traffic Management, and Car Parking Income.

Draft Revenue Budget Savings Proposals for Environment, Culture and Communities included Glide Path Savings in relation to Waste Management, Concessionary Fares, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Administration Charge, Pre-application Planning Charges, Local Transport Plan, Development Management Section, Bracknell Leisure Centre Gym, Bracknell Leisure/Edgbarrow Sports Centre Artificial Turf Pitches, The Look Out Car Park, Coral Reef Car Park, Performance and Resources Finance, Performance and Resources Administration, E+ Smartcard, Emergency Planning, Cemetery and Crematorium, Public Realm Contracts, and Environment and Public Protection Budgets.

Revenue budget savings proposals totalled £1,066,000.

In response to Members' questions, the following points were made:

- It was suggested that low car park use was a result of a lack of retail offering in the town centre, rather than car park charges being too high. Major companies had taken their business elsewhere which had impacted on season ticket sales.
- It was felt that the 'Glide Path' savings suggested in the budget proposals would not have a major impact on services or increase the impact of ongoing pressures on services.
- A higher amount would be clawed back from future revenues in relation to the CIL.
- There were a variety of vacant posts throughout the libraries service leading to potential savings but there would be no noticeable service changes for the public.
- Posts with a back office function had become vacant at Bracknell Leisure Centre providing potential savings.
- A breakdown of the spending and costs in relation to the E+ Smartcard would be provided in reference to the £38,000 proposed budget savings proposals regarding this.
- The proposed reduction of £5,000 was not expected to have a significant impact on the waste and recycling budget.
- A senior road safety adviser would be in post and there would still be campaigns and a good service despite the loss of an assistant road safety officer post.
- All deletions of posts had been considered very carefully. The aim was to balance reductions so that a good service was still offered. There was no plan to replace deleted posts in the future; the aim was to maintain the current level of service with no obvious changes.
- There was a plan to increase the age for concession rates for over 60's in line with minimum state pension age to 62 years.
- No one had been denied access to a Disabled Facilities Grant; there had been less demand for this grant recently.
- Town centre highway works were due to continue next year.
- The suggestion of evening cremations had been made to undertakers but there was no interest in taking this forward at present.
- Building regulations was a separate issue to planning permission. It was the responsibility of the applicant or the building contractor to ensure that building works, including the installation of sewage pipes, were undertaken properly. Inspections could be undertaken by private inspectors and the Council was not involved with all extensions to properties, either private or commercial, being rarely called out or asked to inspect a property. If a planning application had been controversial this could be pursued with local Councillors and

enforcement officers. There was self enforcement through complaint or a resident finding a problem.

- Further maintenance at Coral Reef may be required during the 2014/15 financial year.
- There was a quality improvement programme for parks and open spaces in the borough which would be delivered in two phases and consisted of specific identified sites. The programme would be externally funded from Section 106 contributions tied in with the planning process. It was a legal requirement for open spaces associated with developments to be provided before houses were occupied.
- Highway maintenance or car park maintenance may not always be noticeable to the public if it involved, for example, the replacement of lights. There were some improvements which were specifically designed to improve leisure schemes.
- Although the £80,000 in the capital programme allocated for flood defences and land drainage was unlikely to be sufficient to deal with adverse weather such as that currently being experienced, it was part of a staged approach that would lead to improvements in future years.
- The flood risk planning process had been started with the aim of creating a five year plan.
- A Member commented that the Council's efforts to maintain and improve its assets at a time of financial pressure were worthy of note.

31. **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 second quarter of 2013/14 (July to September) relating to Environment, Culture and Communities (ECC).

Major variances in revenue had occurred in areas including The Look Out/Coral Reef Car Parking Income, Cemetery and Crematorium Income, Concessionary Fares, Planning Policy CIL, Landscape Services, Development Control Income, Planning Policy Strategic Planning, Departmental Running Expenses, Human Resources, and Waste Management.

Key highlights included:

- Restoration of the War Memorial;
- Site Allocation Local Plan (SALP);
- Twin Bridges;
- Residents Parking;
- Public Realm;
- Bracknell Town had won a gold award for the regional Royal Horticultural Society Britain in Bloom awards for the best small City. The Landscape and Street Cleansing teams played a very significant role in this achievement;
- South Hill Park had been recognised as the best local authority park in the Regional Britain in Bloom competition;
- The main contractor for the South Hill Park restoration project had been recognised by the Association of Landscape Industries (BALI) in the category of restoration and regeneration;
- Green Flag Awards had again been received for Lily Hill Park, Popes Meadow and jointly with Sandhurst Town Council for Shepherds Meadow/Sandhurst Memorial Park, and for the first time South Hill Park;
- Recycling incentive scheme;
- Library Management System.

Forward look included:

- Progress on the town centre redevelopment;
- All SALP sites were at planning application or pre-application stage representing over 3,000 houses in the pipeline to be approved early this year;
- Work of the department to seek implementation of the Blue Mountain site for a new secondary school;
- Twin Bridges junction improvement: the next phase was underway and the department had been successful in receiving £1m for the next phase of works from the Department for Transport from the Local Pinch Point Programme;
- Sandhurst Library refurbishment;
- Coral Reef Roof;
- Public Realm;
- New ATP at Bracknell Leisure Centre;
- World War I Commemorations.

A significant underspend was anticipated from January and the department was aiming to spend approximately 80% of its capital budget allocation. There would be high electricity bills at Coral Reef until the combined heating and power units were replaced. Two war memorials had been restored. Work at the Twin Bridges junction had stopped over the Christmas period and then restarted. Bids had been received in relation to the Public Realm contracts; assessment of these was being undertaken and a meeting would be held with contractors. A decision would be made on this at the Executive in February.

There were long lead in times in relation to the design of the Coral Reef roof and closure was planned for October 2015 for possibly four months or longer. There would be a new roof with added features designed. South Hill Park had held a performance in relation to World War I commemorations, and poppies were being planted at various sites around the borough.

In response to Members' questions, the following points were made:

- The Public Realm Strategy with Bracknell Regeneration Partnership was approximately 95% complete; the last 5% was in relation to the lighting strategy. This was not preventing the Council from moving forward though and the document which had been agreed so far had been used for the past 18 months. Advice was being sought in relation to the lighting strategy and the target for completion was the end of February. Work had been undertaken with the Town Centre Manager regarding the durability of the materials to be used in the regeneration.
- There would be a co-ordinated management strategy regarding private and public space in the town centre.
- Multiple complaints were sometimes about the same complaint or issue.
- There was a ten minute grace period once a car was parked in a car park before a ticket had been bought, and it was felt that there should be a ten minute grace period after a car park ticket had expired before issuing a penalty.
- There had been a shortage of planning enforcement staff but now more staff had been employed in this area.
- If a meaningful response to a complex planning pre-application enquiry could not be given within the six week deadline for responding to queries, then more time may be requested to give a more comprehensive response.
- Corridors and roads in and out of the town centre were being improved in line with the regeneration.

- It was suggested that compliments received by the Council be recorded. It would be investigated as to whether a system could be set up for this purpose.

32. **Sustainable Modes of Transport**

The Panel received a presentation on Sustainable Transport Initiatives funded by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF), by Phil Burke, Travel Plan Co-ordinator.

Transport policy for the Borough was set out in the Local Transport Plan, which included the outcomes of encouraging and providing for healthier modes of transport, such as cycling and walking, and improving the experience of moving around the Borough, particularly using more environmentally-friendly modes of transport.

The LSTF was funded by central government with £580 million. There was a competitive bid format, and the twin criteria of encouraging economic growth and reducing carbon emissions. Bracknell Forest had been successful in securing a bid for £1.64 million over a period of three years.

LSTF projects were split between revenue and capital projects. Revenue projects (promotional work) included schools, businesses, and residents. Capital projects (infrastructure) included Urban Traffic Management Control systems, a Real Time Information system for bus users, and the renovation of the bus station.

The Council was funding Sustrans to deliver the Bike It programme to schools in the Borough which aimed to increase the number of children cycling to school. The officer supporting the programme had been working with 24 schools over three years. Activities included Biker's breakfasts, Dr Bike, skills sessions, and Bike Polo. Funding would run until 2015 and one member of staff at each school would be trained to continue the work if funding was not continued after this time.

Two area-wide Travel Plan Networks had been established with the aim of helping businesses address the transport issues they faced. In the Southern Business Area there was Waitrose, Fujitsu, BMW, Panasonic, IHT, and Boeringer Ingelheim. In the Western Business Area there was Dell, Vodaphone and Hewlett Packard. Work undertaken had included staff surveys, roadshows, a lift share scheme, and negotiations for shared shuttle bus services.

The aim was to work with residents and deliver personal travel planning to 3,000 households over the next two years. Travel information and advice would be offered, with incentives such as free bus taster tickets and encouraging residents to take part in a challenge with rewards for completion. Working with British Cycling and Sky, twenty led cycle rides had been delivered in 2013 and another twenty were planned for 2014, primarily aimed at families and encouraging cyclists back into the saddle.

In response to Members' questions, the following points were made:

- The aim was for urban traffic management to be extended to car parks to show drivers the number of spaces available at each car park.
- Five years worth of licences and management agreements would be purchased whilst funding was in place and the aim was to offset costs with Section 106 funding once LSTF funding ran out.
- Some local bus operators had been approached; outcomes were likely to be dependent upon costs and who was prepared to fund changes.

- Work would be undertaken to improve all of the bus station facilities including the public toilets. Funding was being sought for this and work was due to start this year.
- A database had been available since 2007 open to public and private lift sharers. There was a group specifically for Bracknell Forest Council employees. There was a cost attached to a private lift share database but a closed one was being developed for the Southern and Northern industrial estates.
- The development of a control room function in relation to a traffic management system for Bracknell Forest was required and there would be a three to five year transition from using Reading Borough Council for this function.

33. **Neighbourhood Planning - Update Briefing**

The Panel received a progress briefing in respect of neighbourhood planning in the Borough. Plans were underway regarding the designation of neighbourhood areas and there had been some consultation. Letters had been received from parishes and towns in the Borough but no specific requests to designate a particular area had been made.

34. **Working Group Update and 2014/15 Work Programme**

The Panel noted a report on the progress achieved to date by the Working Groups of the Panel reviewing the Borough's Bus Strategy and the Council's cultural services offering and considered its Work Programme for 2014/15.

The Bus Strategy report was being considered by the Executive, and the Cultural Services Working Group had held an initial meeting. It had been suggested that groups in the Borough in relation to culture be publicised, for example, in the Town and Country local paper.

Suggestions for future working groups included the E+ Smartcard and the possibility of linking this with a prepaid Visa card; a review of Community Transport Provision; and a Public Realm review.

Panel Members were requested to forward suggestions for next year's Work Programme to the Chairman or officers concerned.

35. **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 May 2013 to November 2013 and local and national developments in Overview and Scrutiny.

The Panel would be advised of the amount of income generated to date from the commercial sponsorship scheme.

36. **Executive Key and Non-Key Decisions**

The Panel noted the forthcoming Executive Key and Non-Key Decisions relating to Environment, Culture and Communities.

I044001: Disabled Parking Bays were introduced at request after eligibility had been determined. Disabled Parking Bays were not assigned to a specific person but could be used by Disabled Badge Holders.

CHAIRMAN

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