

**TO: EXECUTIVE
20 OCTOBER 2015**

**COUNCIL PLAN 2015-2019
Chief Executive**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to invite the Executive to agree the attached Council Plan and recommend it to Council.

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 That the Executive recommend the Council Plan 2015-2019 to Council attached at Annex A**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 Since becoming a Unitary Authority in 1998 the Council has made savings in its annual revenue spending in excess of £70m. Of this over £18m has been removed from budgets in the last few years. By all comparative measures, the Council provides value for money. However, pressure on public sector spending remains intense and it is predicted that a further £25m of savings will be needed over the next five years.
- 3.2 This scale of savings coming on top of previous economies means it will not be possible to continue to deliver services in the way we have come to accept and expect. In order to meet this challenge the council needs to find a framework for delivering services that allows us to adapt, innovate, find new ways of working and, in some cases, reduce what we do.
- 3.3 The Council Plan is rooted firmly in the Conservative election manifesto of 2015. It puts those election commitments into the post general election financial context to provide the organisation with a strategic approach and framework to meet the challenges ahead.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 To continue with the current framework of priorities and Medium Term Objectives (MTOs).

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Councils approach to service planning has been in place since 2003 and has served the Council well. In essence the approach is based upon a "narrative" which recognises Bracknell Forest as "the borough of opportunity". The Council has striven to provide a borough which is attractive to live and work in with a strong economy, good connections and an outstanding environment. As part of the overall narrative the Council has itself adopted a pragmatic approach to service delivery and has developed a reputation for being effective, whether services are provided directly or otherwise.
- 5.2 The Council has also recognised that it has an important role in shaping the borough and this has been seen through its work to promote the regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre and in its robust approach to providing a local development framework which has protected the environment and provided a policy led framework for managing growth over many years. A key part of the Council's ethos is that it is

supportive of business and the local economy. In short the Council has made genuine and realistic attempts to please most residents for most of the time. The extent to which it has been successful can be seen in the fact that 87% of local residents believe that the borough is a good place in which to live.

- 5.3 This overall approach has been embodied in the planning framework of six overarching priorities supported by a number of medium term objectives which has been in place since 2003. These medium term objectives have provided the strategic framework that has become familiar to Members and staff at all levels of the organisation and which are embedded into the Council's strategies and its policy and performance management arrangements.
- 5.4 The various achievements of recent years have been delivered against the backdrop of increasing financial restraint following the global economic collapse in 2007/8. The approach adopted by the Council has been to deliver savings that have had the minimum impact on front line service delivery, maintaining the pragmatic approach of a mixed economy and focussing on what works in the local context. By adopting this approach reductions of £18m have been delivered since against a net revenue budget of around £90m.
- 5.5 The pressures faced by the Council can only ever increase. All Local Authorities are faced with increasing costs due to demographic pressures, increases in demand for services, inflation, and national and local policy initiatives. In contrast the income available to local authorities has been fixed or is reducing as pressure increases on Government Grants and Council Tax levels. Limited reserves have provided some local manoeuvrability but this is inevitably finite.
- 5.6 Against this challenging background, in the recent general election austerity was a significant issue with the current Government explicitly committing to a number of years of public sector spending restraint as part of its overall economic strategy. The Chancellor has made a significant start on this process by the introduction of in year reductions in public health spending of around 7%. The Comprehensive Spending Review due later this year is only likely to significantly increase the scale of reductions needed in the local government sector over the life of this Council.
- 5.7 Of course predicting the precise forward financial situation is always difficult and inevitably based upon a number of assumptions. However, what is clear is that the Council will need to significantly reduce spending over the next four to five years, potentially in the order of £20 – 25m. Set against a net revenue budget of around £90m this clearly signals that a different approach is needed to provide the strategic framework within which the Council works. With increasing pressures on spending and significant reductions in the amount of money available the expansive narrative of the last decade or so is no longer tenable and a new approach and narrative is needed.
- 5.8 Since the local election Members, both within the Executive and the Overview & Scrutiny Commission, have been working with the Corporate Management Team to review what this different approach could mean. The result is a new approach to strategic planning which is embodied in a revised Council Plan which is included in Annex A for the Executive to endorse.
- 5.9 Given the significance of the document to the strategic direction of the Council it is important that it is subject to debate and consideration by the Full Council. It is therefore recommended that the Executive itself recommends the plan to the next Council Meeting on 25 November.

- 5.10 Turning to the Council Plan, Members will see that it is centred upon a new narrative or philosophy for the organisation, with six strategic themes or priority areas;
- Value for money
 - A strong and resilient economy
 - People have the life skills and education opportunities they need to thrive
 - People live active and healthy lifestyles
 - A clean, green, growing and sustainable place
 - Strong, safe, supportive and self-reliant communities
- 5.11 Key messages within the narrative are that;
- many residents of Bracknell Forest are affluent, well educated and independent. We want to continue to support that by providing core services that all residents can benefit from
 - but we recognise that we need to prioritise if we are to live within our means, and that will mean making difficult decisions
 - we will prioritise people and areas with the greatest need, early help and prevention so struggling or vulnerable people can maximise their opportunities to become independent.
- 5.12 Each theme is underpinned by a number of key measures of success and a selection of associated performance indicators. Individual Department Service Plans will, of course, contain further performance indicators reflecting the day to day operations. Progress against the Council Plan will be reported to Executive via a quarterly overview report from the Chief Executive. At the end of the financial year an annual report will be published summarising progress made over the year.
- 5.13 Implementing the Council Plan over the next four years will mean that some services will change significantly and may be run in a different way. Some of the notable points from the Council Plan are;
- All services to be fundamentally reviewed over the next four years, including consideration of the basic purpose levels of service and alternative delivery models
 - Charging appropriately for services, including reducing the subsidy on some services
 - Seeking opportunities to generate additional income

Within this change of approach it's important to recognise that Bracknell Forest Council is a high-performing organisation, this gives us a strong foundation from which we can find new ways to innovate so we continue to be a high-performing organisation. To develop and underpin the changes a Transformation Board is being established with external support and challenge from two private/independent organisations; Activist and iESE.

- 5.14 Any time a change to a service is considered the council must consult with residents and service users. The Council Plan contains a commitment to consult on major changes and assessing how those changes will impact on communities.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 In the event of service reductions arising as a result of the Council seeking to achieve its predicted savings targets, these will need to be carefully managed to minimise the

risk of legal challenges. Where challenges against service reductions have been presented before the courts in recent years these have highlighted the need for Councils to engage in meaningful public consultation and have regard to its equality duties prior to decisions being made.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 In parallel with the Council Plan a new Medium Term Financial Strategy is being developed to identify the scale and timing of the financial challenge facing the Council. The Council Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy are complementary, with the Council Plan articulating the Council's strategic approach and priorities within the overall financial envelope.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 An initial Equalities Impact Assessment screening is attached at Annex B.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 The Council Plan is the over-arching framework and strategic approach for the organisation for the duration of the current administration. This has primarily been motivated by the anticipated future budget cuts, and the need to respond to these with a new approach. It is important that the council has a framework in place so that it can face the budget challenges ahead in a coherent and consistent way, and in this way effectively manage risk.

Other Officers

- 6.5 N/a

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 Executive
Conservative Group
Overview and Scrutiny Commission
Corporate Management Team
Departmental Management Teams
Corporate Performance Group
Senior Leadership Group

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Face to Face meetings
Email
Telephone

Representations Received

- 7.3 The Council Plan has been in development since the May 2015 elections. Representations received have been incorporated in to the document as it has developed.

Contact for further information

Genny Webb, Chief Executive's Office - 01344 352172

Genny.Webb@bracknell-forest.gov.uk