

To: **COUNCIL**
20 JANUARY 2016

EXECUTIVE REPORT TO COUNCIL
The Leader

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Since the Council meeting on 25 November 2015, the Executive has met once on 15 December 2015. This report summarises decisions taken at the meeting by reference to the relevant portfolio within which they fall.
- 1.2 Updated Forward Plans are published every Friday and are available for public inspection at Easthampstead House in the usual way and online at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk. Full details on the decisions taken by individual portfolio holders can also be accessed online through the Council's website.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Council is asked to consider the recommendation set out at paragraphs 5.2.3, 5.5.4, 5.6.4 and 5.7.5.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The reasons for recommendations are set out in the supporting information and in the reports considered by the Executive.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Alternative options are discussed in the relevant individual reports considered by the Executive

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Adult Social Care Health and Housing

5.1 Draft Homelessness Strategy

- 5.1.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a statutory duty on all local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness in their area and to use the review's findings to develop a strategy to tackle homelessness. In line with this obligation the Executive has approved for consultation a draft Homelessness Strategy for the Borough which will replace the Council's previous Homelessness Strategy which ran from 2003.
- 5.1.2 The Strategy sets out four priorities which will set the Council's expectations in relation to homelessness:
- Good quality housing advice and prevention services

- Working in partnership to avoid duplication and maximise expertise
- Meeting the need for emergency accommodation
- Maximising access to housing

5.1.3 Bracknell Forest currently has the second highest homelessness rate in Berkshire with the number of households in the Borough who were accepted as homeless and in priority need being 2.25 per 1,000 households. (This is also higher than the national average of 1.91 households). Once approved the strategy will integrate with and inform the development of the Council's Housing Strategy in order to help the Council make best use of its existing housing stock, maximise affordable housing provision in the Borough and ensure that whenever possible new or redeveloped housing meets the housing needs of the local community and contribute to reducing this homelessness rate.

5.2 Local Council Tax Benefit Scheme

5.2.1 The Executive has agreed that elements of the Council's Local Council Tax Benefit Scheme should be amended to better reflect the challenging budget situation faced by the Council, bring the scheme in line with those of neighbouring authorities and remove a number of anomalies relating to income calculations in the current scheme. It is therefore recommended that the revised scheme, including the following changes, be formally adopted:

- i. That all working age households will pay at least 20% of their Council Tax liability, the maximum discount will be 80% of Council Tax liability
- ii. That for working age household's, child maintenance payments are taken into account when assessing income to calculate the Local Council Tax Reduction
- iii. That when calculating income for working age self employed people it will be assumed that after 12 months the self employed person is earning the national living wage
- iv. That all the income disregards for working people will be increased by £5 a week
- v. That the hardship fund is increased to £20,000 and the criteria for support is amended to include those who had received a reduction in the previous twelve months and face financial hardship due to the proposed changes

5.2.2 These changes will only apply to working age households and were subject to a twelve week public consultation period. In addition to writing to all those of working age who were receiving assistance under the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme, the Parish council, precept authorities, the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the eight largest providers of affordable housing in the Borough were invited to comment on the draft scheme and the proposed changes.

5.2.3 The Executive recommends that Council APPROVE and ADOPT the revised Local Council Tax Benefit Scheme.

Council Strategy and Community Cohesion

5.3 Local Government Ombudsman Investigation Report – Notification of Outcome by Monitoring Officer

5.3.1 An investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman into a complaint about the Council's Appropriate Adult Service and the Emergency Duty Team found that there

was fault in the way that the Council removed a volunteer from his role. The Ombudsman judged this was “maladministration and injustice” by the Council.

5.3.2 Whilst the decision was disappointing and was strongly disputed by the Council, the Executive has, in response to the Ombudsman’s recommendations:

- Reviewed its guidance and procedures for investigating allegations against appropriate adults, ensuring staff know how to report concerns
- Reviewed the frequency of feedback given volunteer appropriate adults

In addition, the Council has also assured itself of the adequacy of the training given to volunteers in other roles.

5.4 Corporate Performance Overview Report

5.4.1 The Executive has received and noted the Corporate Performance Overview Report for the second quarter of the 2015/16 financial year (July to September 2015). Overall progress has been positive with 225 actions either complete or on target and 42 of the Council’s 53 key performance indicators being above or within 5% of the agreed targets.

Culture, Corporate Services and Public Protection

5.5 Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS) Capital Spending (External Funding)

5.5.1 To mitigate the effective of visitors on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area the Borough provides the public with a number of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS). The capacity of the Borough’s current SANGS are coming under increasing pressure and the current allowance of £150,000 in this year’s budget will be insufficient to accommodate the number of SANGS improvement projects already planned and committed to during this financial year.

5.5.2 Failure to provide the SANGS enhancements that have already been committed to would place restrictions on the occupation of new developments and could potentially delay future developments impacting on the Council’s five year housing land supply targets. The Executive is therefore recommending to Council that an additional £95,000 of developer contributions, from existing Section 106 contributions, to be added to the current financial year’s SANGS budget of £150,000.

5.5.3 Approval of this additional funding will enable a range of works including the following to be carried out:

- Refurbishment of the bridge at Anneforde Place
- Improve the pedestrian entrance to Englemere Pond on London Road
- Carry out work on the reed beds and scrub at Englemere Pond
- Complete a pond restoration project at Shepherds Meadows
- Make improvements to the car park at Horseshoe Lake

5.5.4 The Executive recommends that Council APPROVE the spending of a further £95,000 of developer contributions on SANGS for this financial year.

Transformation and Finance

5.6 Capital Budget 2016/17

- 5.6.1 The Executive has approved the Capital Programme 2016/17 – 2018-19 for public consultation. It is proposed that the Capital Budget be set at £72.5million, with major projects for the coming year set to include: Binfield Learning Village, the transformation of Coral Reef, construction of an additional chapel at the Cemetery and Crematorium and investment in wider town centre infrastructure works.
- 5.6.2 The proposed Capital Programme has been developed on the assumption that it will be funded by a combination of Government grants, other external contributions and borrowing in addition to £5million of capital receipts. Whilst internal resources will be used in the first instance the size of the planned programme means that there is the likelihood that the Council may need to borrow additional capital funding from external sources. Consequently it will be necessary in future years to balance the level of the Capital Programme against other budget pressures and to prioritise those schemes planned for 2017/18 onwards. It will of course, also be necessary to review the plans in the light of the Provisional Local Government Settlement, which the Government had not published at the time of the Executive meeting.
- 5.6.3 The full report can be viewed at <http://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=102&MId=5858&Ver=4> but the covering report and Annex G of the Borough Treasurer's report are attached to this report.
- 5.6.4 Virements over £0.25million from the ECPB Approved Basic Need Grant require approval from Full Council. The Executive therefore recommends that Council APPROVE:**
- i. Virements totalling £0.481million to the 2015/16 Children, Young People and Learning Programme, as set out in Annex G of the Borough Treasurer's report, in order to meet the demands of the School Places Plan**
 - ii. £0.05million in the 2015/16 unallocated Basic Need Grant be used at Ascot Heath Schools as described in paragraph 5.35 of the Borough Treasurer's report.**

5.7 Revenue Budget 2016/17

- 5.7.1 Again, subject to further review in the light of the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement the Executive has agreed for consultation draft revenue budget proposals for 2016/17. The draft proposals show an expenditure of £80.735million before inflation and include the Treasury Management Strategy for the year. In response to the continuing national downward pressure on public spending the Council has adopted a new Council Plan which sets out a new narrative for the authority and both factors have influenced the draft budget for 2016/17.
- 5.7.2 At the time the draft budget was set, it was anticipated that the Council would receive an income of up to £65.991million and that the Council would as a result face a potential budget gap of approximately £6.044million in 2016/17.
- 5.7.3 There are a number of potential options that the Council might use to bridge the funding gap. To help with this task a Transformation Board has been set up. The Transformation Board is taking the lead on reviewing the way in which all Council services are delivered over the next four years with the aim of identifying significant savings that can be incorporated into the 2016/17 budget and beyond. The first phase of the Board's work programme will focus on the following areas: Adult Social

Care Commissioning, Highways and Transport, Housing Benefits, Cultural and Leisure services and Public Health.

5.7.4 The full report can be viewed at <http://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=102&MId=5858&Ver=4> but the covering report and Annexes F and G of the Borough Treasurer's report are attached to this report.

5.7.5 Virements of over £0.100million require approval from Full Council. The Executive therefore recommends that Council APPROVE virements over £0.100million relating to the 2015/16 budget as set out in Annex F and G of the Borough Treasurer's report.

5.8 Annual Audit letter

5.8.1 The Executive was pleased to announce that the Council's External Auditor Ernst and Young has given an unqualified conclusion on the Council's financial statements and its arrangements for securing value for money and for the second year running has made no recommendations about how the Council might improve its processes.

5.8.2 The judgement should help assure residents that the Council's finances are well run and that their money is being properly managed and accounted for.

7 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

7.1 The Borough Solicitor's comments on each item referred to in the annex can be found in the reports presented to the Executive.

Borough Treasurer

7.2 The Borough Treasurer's comments on each item referred to in the annex can be found in the reports presented to the Executive.

Equalities Impact Assessment

7.3 Equalities issues, where appropriate, have been addressed in the reports to the Executive.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

7.4 Any strategic risks have been identified in the reports to the Executive.

Background Papers

Executive Agenda – 15 December 2015

Contact for further information

Katharine Simpson, Corporate Services - 01344 352308

Katharine.simpson@bracknell-forest.gov.uk