

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
12 JANUARY 2016
7.30 - 9.35 PM**



Present:

Councillors Angell (Chairman), Porter (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Angell, Brossard, Mrs Ingham, Mrs McKenzie, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle and Mrs Mattick

In Attendance:

Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Overview and Scrutiny)
Mark Devon, Chief Officer: Leisure & Culture
Janet Dowlman, Head of Environmental Services
Andrew Hunter, Chief Officer: Planning & Transport
Damian James, Head of Performance and Resources
Steve Loudoun, Chief Officer: Environment & Public Protection
Vincent Paliczka, Director of Environment, Culture & Communities

81. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 22 September 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

There were no matters arising.

82. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

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

83. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

84. Public Participation

No submissions had been made by members of the public under the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

85. 2016/17 Draft Budget Proposals

Although there was a need for further savings to be identified following notification of the Government grant settlement, the Panel was invited to scrutinise the firm budget proposals before it. The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities presented a report on the key themes and priorities for Environment, Culture and Communities as outlined in the draft budget proposals for 2016/17. The initial preparations for the budget had focussed on the Council's Commitment Budget for 2016/17 – 2020/21, bringing together existing expenditure plans, taking account of approved commitments and the ongoing effects of service developments and efficiencies that were agreed when the 2015/16 budget was set.

A number of changes were proposed to the Commitment Budget since it was last considered by the Executive, amounting in total to an increase for the Council of £1.032m. Of particular interest to the Panel were a departmental saving resulting from the Street Lighting Invest to Save Scheme (-£0.175m) and updated Waste Disposal projections based on the latest tonnages for recycling (£0.179m). The Panel also noted the draft revenue budget pressures for the Department totalling £263,000 for 2016/17, although these were more than outweighed by savings proposals amounting to £1,161,000.

Arising from questions and discussion, the Panel noted the following in relation to the budget pressures and savings proposals:

- In response to the reduction in income at Bracknell Leisure Centre (due to competition from small scale local gyms), plans were in hand to enhance the offer included within the Platinum Card package through discounts on catering and other facilities and working with staff to improve the all round customer experience for users. Officers were recommended to publicise the new package as widely as possible, and particular mention was made of obtaining copy in 'Town & Country' and other local newssheets.
- An outline of the duties of the posts of Strategic Planner (New Communities) and Development Engineer was given, together with reasons for continued funding for them.
- The dispute in relation to the waste Contract had been settled and the additional recycle income was now assured.
- The additional income from increasing charges for brown bin emptying relied in part on continuing to sign up new customers for the service.
- The increases in Cemetery and Crematorium fees and charges were felt to be reasonable and had been set taking into account the fees charged by neighbouring authorities and the quality of the service offered in Bracknell Forest which was valued and appreciated by users.
- The e+card savings arose from lower running costs rather than any reduction in the discounts offered.

Turning to the Capital Programme, the Panel noted that total capital spending proposed for Environment, Culture and Communities in 2016/17 amounted to £20.185m (of which £4.733m was external funding). The most significant project was the Coral Reef Transformation at an estimated £8.358m in 2016/17. The tender process for the project had been reset with prices from contractors now due in by 8 March 2016. The acquisition of the former Magistrates Court building would increase the Council's landholding to support a possible future phase of town centre development. Referring to the new schemes in the programme, Members requested further information on the location of the amenity land adjacent to Crowthorne Road where it was proposed to fell ageing pines and replant native, deciduous trees, and the sites of the road junctions earmarked for traffic signal preventative maintenance. The Panel expressed its support for the Invest-to-Save scheme to provide an additional chapel at the Easthampstead Cemetery and Crematorium.

86. Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan Update

The Panel considered a report summarising the up to date position on the various documents comprising the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan (BFBLP).

The Issues and Options public consultation for the Comprehensive Local Plan (CLP) was due to take place in June/July 2016. The Member Working Group had been

closely involved in steering the work on preparation of a wide range of evidence studies which would support the CLP. The studies included:

- Strategic Housing Market Assessment – close to completion
- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment – additional work required to take account of further guidance
- Functional Economic Market Area – the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was leading this work
- Landscape Character Study – first part completed
- Green Belt Review – work to be carried out by consultants, commissioned jointly with Wokingham Borough Council

The Panel also noted that four neighbourhood plan areas had been designated in Bracknell Forest: Binfield, Bracknell Town, Warfield and Winkfield. Consultation was also under way on the designation of Sandhurst neighbourhood area. The Binfield neighbourhood plan had been examined and would be the first to go to a referendum in March.

87. **The Waste Challenge**

The Panel received a report and presentation on the 'Waste Challenge', a review of the current provision of waste collection and disposal services together with an outline of the various challenges that lay ahead in meeting future recycling targets within available budgets and legislative constraints.

Having received details of the breakdown of waste collected and disposed of, the Panel noted the following key points:

- The current recycling rate in Bracknell Forest was 39.3% (compared to 44.7% nationally).
- EU recycling targets were 50% by 2020, 60% by 2025 and 65% by 2030. The country faced substantial fines from the EU if targets were not met, which may be passed onto underperforming Authorities.
- Pre AWC the council were sending 40,000 tonnes to landfill. It had reduced to 12,600 tonnes which gives rise to a significant saving not least in respect of landfill tax now running at £82.60t.
- The council were having to pay and estimated £600,000 a year more than it needed to due to waste was going into the green bin that could either be recycled via the current arrangements or home composted
- If half the recoverable materials from landfill bins could be captured (1,967 tonnes) and 1,564 tonnes could be diverted by home composting/encouraging less food wastage, the recycling rate could be raised to 44.5%.

The Panel received answers to a number of questions on matters of detail. It was noted that the Re3 contract set a limit of 20,000 tonnes on the amount that could go for energy from waste (EfW) treatment. If there was a change to how recycle rates were calculated so as to allow for bottom ash from EfW that was recycled to be included, this would make a significant contribution toward reaching the 50% target. Reference was made to the parts of the Borough with a higher proportion of flats and smaller properties which were less well-suited to accommodating bins and containers for more convenient kerbside collection of recyclable materials. The value of learning from other Councils and stepping up efforts to educate residents to encourage better and more responsible recycling habits were commented on.

The Council would need to formulate its proposals for change by around 2017 so that these could be incorporated in a new collection contract due to start in 2019.

88. Working Group Update Report

The Panel received a progress report of the Working Group reviewing the Council's planning function. The Working Group had met eight times and was due to consider its draft report (containing a number of recommendations for the Executive) at its next meeting in February.

89. Work Programme 2016/17

The Panel considered its Work Programme for 2016/17. There were two future possible review topics remaining in the 2016/17 programme:

- A review of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in terms of the Council's involvement.
- To review Parks and Open Spaces.

The Panel agreed to continue reviews in the order as set out in the Work Programme, but not to rule out other suggestions that may come forward during the year.

90. Overview and Scrutiny Progress Report

The Panel received the Overview and Scrutiny bi-annual progress report setting out the activity and developments over the period June to November 2015.

91. Quarterly Service Report - Information Item

The Panel considered the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of departmental performance as reported in the QSR for the second quarter of 2015/16 (July to September 2015) relating to Environment, Culture and Communities. The report highlighted exceptional performance, remedial action being taken against under performance, significant changes in risk, significant customer feedback and inspections and significant changes in service use and the associated financial impact.

Arising from a question, the Panel was informed that there was approximately 5 years capacity remaining at the Easthampstead Cemetery. This meant that in order to continue to provide a service for the interment of remains, the Council would need to acquire land and make it suitable for burials.

92. Executive Key and Non-Key Decisions

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

CHAIRMAN