

**ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL
23 MARCH 2016
7.30 - 9.05 PM**



Present:

Councillors Angell (Chairman), Porter (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Angell, Brossard, Finnie, King OBE, Mrs McKenzie, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle and Mrs Mattick

Executive Members:

Councillors Mrs Hayes MBE and Turrell

Also Present:

Richard Beaumont, Head of Overview & Scrutiny
Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Overview and Scrutiny)
Mark Devon, Chief Officer: Leisure & Culture
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
Abby Thomas, Head of Community Engagement and Equalities
Councillor Ian Leake, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs Ingham and McCracken

93. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

Councillor King OBE substituted for Councillor Mrs Ingham.

94. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 12 January 2016 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

95. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

The Chairman declared a non-pecuniary interest in the Arts Review referred to in the report on the Transformation Programme (Agenda item no. 6).

96. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

97. Public Participation

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

98. Transformation Programme

The Panel considered a report providing an update on the Council's Transformation Programme and the ways in which the Commission, Scrutiny Panels and back bench members could provide input into the programme's strategic reviews.

The Panel was reminded that the Transformation Programme was a financially driven programme of work set up to look at Council services and spending in a measured way, and aimed at identifying significant savings that could be incorporated into the 2016/17 budget and beyond in the context of a need to find £24m of savings over the next four years. The current work programme of strategic reviews and other projects included reviews (in the remit of the Panel) for the Arts, Leisure and Libraries. Scoping documents for each review had been drafted (attached to the report as Appendices). Each review would feature a 'Gateway' review process at key decision points, with the initial 'Gateway' reviews starting in April at the end of the 'analyse' phase, with the reviews due to be finalised by the end of April (for the Arts), end of May (Leisure) and end of July (Libraries).

It was proposed that full and early Member Engagement in the process would be exercised through 'Gateway' reviews, by an examination of the findings of the 'analyse' phase, questioning the research and evidence identified, and whether the outline options represented a sensible and realistic ambition for the future. The Panel was assured that the risks associated with the reviews and the possible changes that could occur would be closely monitored and a 'dependency map' would be produced to show the links and dependencies across the various reviews. Also, the Council's valued links with the voluntary sector would be respected through the inclusion of its partners in consultations carried out as part of the review.

In answer to a question, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission indicated that the member workshop on the 31 March 2016 had been arranged for Commission Members, for briefing on the scope and methodology of the service reviews, and outlining the process for the Gateway review meetings to be held. The question of whether these could be opened more widely to members would be raised in further discussions to be held with the Chief Executive.

99. Schools Annual Environmental Management Report 2014/15

The Panel received a report presenting a copy of the Schools Annual Environmental Management Report 2014/15, as considered by the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning.

The report took the form of a position statement on the standing of schools in relation to the Eco-Schools Accredited Environmental Management Scheme and contained information, including some benchmarking data about the energy use, water consumption, waste and recycling and transport across schools in Bracknell Forest. The Panel was of the view that it was difficult to assess what progress schools were making, although it was recognised that a lot of good work was going on in schools, initiated and encouraged by the Council, which was not necessarily reflected in the report. It was considered there was room for improvement in terms of recycling and particularly in reducing the amount waste sent to landfill from schools. The Panel was of the view that the Council should continue to guide and influence schools to improve, particularly in those areas where Council performance was affected.

100. **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).

There was currently a focus on finalising documents for the Issues and Options public consultation for the Comprehensive Local Plan (CLP) which would take place in June/July 2016. Further progress had been made on the evidence based studies which would support the formulation of policies within the CLP. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) had now been finalised, following work with the other Berkshire Authorities and Consultants, and had suggested two 'housing market areas' within the Berkshire study area. The Landscape Character Study had also been completed and was now being used by officers in determining planning applications.

It was planned to produce a Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan with other Berkshire Authorities and it was likely that Hampshire County Council would assist in carrying out the work. Subject to the approval of the Executive, the Binfield Neighbourhood Development Plan would shortly be brought into force and would form part of the Bracknell Forest Development Plan.

101. **Draft Overview and Scrutiny Report of the Review of Procedures for Planning Applications and Enforcement**

Consideration was given to a report introducing a review of procedures for planning applications and enforcement undertaken by a working group of the Panel.

The review report was submitted in draft for the approval of the Panel, and contained a number of conclusions and recommendations for the consideration of the Executive. The Chairman commended the report to all members since it provided a valuable point of reference about the planning process. The Panel fully endorsed the report for consideration by the Executive, subject to one addition. The scheme of delegation already provided that planning applications from members of staff in the Planning and Transport Division, or any other officer involved in the decision-making process to be reported to the Planning Committee for determination. The report recommended this should be extended to cover applications by any Council employee and the Panel suggested, in addition, that this should also apply explicitly to any application from a Councillor.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) Subject to the procedural revision in relation to planning applications from Councillors referred to above, the report of the review of procedures for planning applications and enforcement undertaken by the working group of the Panel be endorsed for sending formally to the relevant Executive Member for a response.
- 2) Members serving on the working group be thanked for their efforts in conducting the review.
- 3) The Overview and Scrutiny officer team be thanked for their work throughout the review and for production of the final report.

102. **Quarterly Service Report (QSR) - Information Item**

The Panel considered the latest trends, priorities and pressures in terms of departmental performance as reported in the QSR for the third quarter of 2015/16

(October to December 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.

The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities presented to the Panel a number of highlights from the report, including an update on those areas where the position had moved on since the end of the last quarter. The current expected outturn for the net revenue budget was £24,228,000, an underspend of £330,000 although this was expected to increase in the coming months. The major variances were detailed, the most pleasing of which was a saving of £183,000 in waste disposal costs due to lower tonnages and additional waste income of £58,000 from brown bins and garden sacks. On capital expenditure, there would be an estimated carry forward of £5.63m, of which the most significant sums related to the Town Centre highway works and the Coral Reef refurbishment works, each having been delayed. Additional attention to the planning and programming of capital expenditure was proposed for future years.

The Panel noted the information relating to staffing and recognised that the budget relied on the Department carrying a certain level of vacancies generated by normal turnover. Staff sickness levels were at a low level, a further improvement on last year's good result. The closing date for receipt of tenders for the Coral Reef refurbishment works had been delayed until 11 April 2016. The works would result in temporary closure of the facility for at least a year and good progress had been made on redeployment or secondment of a number of staff to minimise redundancies that would otherwise have been necessary. The decision by Edgbarrow School to end community use of the sports centre during the school day had created some difficulties but further discussions on alternatives were ongoing, in consultation with user groups.

103. **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.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission drew the attention of the Panel to the decision on the award of the main and aquatic contract for the Coral Reef refurbishment, due to be taken by the Executive on 10 May 2016. He believed that the substantial capital expenditure required for the project would have revenue implications for all other Council services and budgets.

RESOLVED that the concern of the Panel be expressed to the relevant people about the programming of this decision, which should not be taken in advance of the conclusion of the strategic Leisure Service transformation review being carried out during April/May.

104. **Mark Devon**

The Panel noted that this was the last meeting to be attended by Mark Devon, after 29 years service with the Council. The Panel thanked Mark for his hard work and loyal service and wished him well for the future.

CHAIRMAN