

COUNCIL
20 APRIL 2022
7.30 - 9.30 PM



Present:

Councillors Ms Merry (Mayor), Gbadebo (Deputy Mayor), Allen, Angell, Atkinson, Dr Barnard, D Birch, Mrs Birch, Brossard, Dudley, Finch, Ms Gaw, Mrs L Gibson, MJ Gibson, Green, Harrison, Heydon, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle, McLean, Porter, Temperton, Turrell and Virgo

Present Virtually:

Councillors Bettison OBE, Bidwell, Brown, Brunel-Walker, Mrs Hamilton, Mrs Hayes MBE, Ms Hayes, Kirke, Mrs Mattick, Mossom, Skinner and Wade

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Bhandari, Mrs Ingham, Kennedy, Leake, Mrs McKenzie, Neil and Parker

60. Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meetings held on 23 and 24 February 2022 be approved, and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

61. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

62. Presentation from Business Improvement District (BID)

Maria Sabey from Fujitsu and Ian Ferguson from Partnerships for Better Business attended to provide the meeting with an update on the progress of the Business Improvement District.

Arising from questions it was noted that:

- in response to concerns about incidents within the underpasses and local businesses were encouraged to promote buddy systems for those walking through them
- looking at all renewable energy options including neighbourhood energy production to help businesses in the area
- the previous scheme to improve connectivity to Heathrow Airport would be discussed at a future network meeting
- improving the rail connectivity into London was a challenge and that this would be achieved through partnership working to make a commercial case so that operators recognised the profitability
- the original BID levy invoices arrived during the first lockdown period
- the BID was relying on support from officers within the Council to resolve issues with the software being used, issue the reminder notices and sharing updated information

The Mayor thanked them for their presentation.

63. **Mayor's Announcements**

Bracknell Camera Club

The Mayor advised that she had attended the Bracknell Camera Club for a prize giving event and thanked Jeff Lawrence, Chair and the team for providing the resource for friendship and improving camera skills.

Tree Planting

In honour of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the Queen's Green Canopy project the Mayor joined the Leader of the Council, Councillor Bettison OBE, the Chief Executive, Timothy Wheadon and the Lexicon team to plant a wild cherry tree in Bond Square.

Sandhurst Town Council Civic Service

The Mayor attended the Mayor of Sandhurst, Councillor Mrs Davenport's civic service on Sunday 27 February. The event was followed by the Community Awards ceremony honouring local residents for their voluntary service.

Mayor's Challenge - Mum and Baby Group

The Mayor completed the challenge to read and sing at a mum and toddler group in Great Hollands on 28 February and thanked Councillor Temperton for supporting her 'Challenge the Mayor' initiative.

Queens Award for Voluntary Service

The Mayor attended the event in Newbury honouring voluntary groups across Berkshire being considered for The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The Mayor observed that the Queen's Award is considered to be the highest award given to volunteer groups, that to be nominated is a considerable achievement and congratulated all the groups being considered.

Meet the Mayor for new citizens

During the pandemic citizenship ceremonies had been held virtually. A series of 'Meet the Mayor' events had been held at South Hill Park to enable new citizens to have photographs with the Mayor in full regalia and to share their journeys and aspirations for the future.

Ground-breaking for new Binfield Community and Health Hub

The Mayor was pleased to report that she had attended the ground-breaking ceremony for the new Binfield Community and Health Hub on 18 March. The development of a double-height hall, multi-use meeting and activity space including General Practice consultation and examination rooms and minor procedures room was being built at the heart of the Blue Mountain site.

Deputy Mayor events

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Gbadebo had attended the English Language Café end of term celebration at Open Learning Centre. The Mayor thanked all the volunteers and organisers for the resource which helped with language skills for many nationalities.

The Deputy Mayor had also attended the Bracknell and Wokingham Police Cadet Awards Ceremony and the performance of Shrek at South Hill Park.

Pride of Bracknell

The Pride of Bracknell Forest Awards took place at Wellington College on Friday 1 April. Homestart had won the Gold award for Charity of the Year and the Mayor thanked everyone who had been nominated.

50 years of Crowthorne Good Neighbours

The Mayor had attended the celebration to recognise the 50th birthday of Crowthorne Good Neighbours which not only provided transport to medical appointments but gave residents support and friendship.

Forest Springs

The Mayor reflected that the unique initiatives within the town centre were valuable to local businesses, residents and maintained the town's profile. The Forest Springs event over Easter including an interactive digital art installation, water themed attractions and exhibits in the town centre had proven popular.

New High Sheriff

The Mayor was pleased to attend the swearing in of the new High Sheriff, Alka Kharbanda who had chosen two themes for her year of office: Education and Hidden Heroes. The Mayor thanked the previous High Sheriff, Willie Harley Russell, for everything he brought to the role, his hard work and achievements.

Welcoming visitors from Ukraine

Both the Mayor and the Leader, Councillor Bettison OBE reflected that they had been pleased to see the overwhelmingly positive response from Bracknell Forest residents to support those affected by the war in Ukraine. The Leader would add further information as part of his executive report.

Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning

Councillor Dr Barnard was proud to announce that 97.3% of schools within Bracknell Forest were rated good or better by Ofsted which was a significant improvement for the school leadership team. He paid tribute to the hard work going on within schools for the last two years.

Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing

Councillor Birch was pleased to report that on 28 March the doors of Heathlands were opened to admit people for re-enablement services to support their return home after being in hospital. This work was joined up with health colleagues who went into people's homes to make sure they remained safe. He stated that Heathlands was a key element of an integrated care system for people with health and care issues. He advised that Frimley began taking in patients with dementia, on the same day, and were up to ten patients at the moment with another three or four being admitted by the end of the week. He noted that within the next week or two they would have utilised all their beds. He congratulated and thanked everyone involved in getting this initiative to this point.

Councillor Birch concluded by advising that Heatherwood Hospital also opened on 28 March. The new elective planned care hospital was a £100 million project with six operating theatres with day surgery facilities with a commitment towards reducing backlogs in waiting lists.

Executive Member for Environment

Councillor Mrs Hayes advised the meeting that the Council had been recognised at the National Energy Efficiency Awards which were designed to reward individuals and organisations that demonstrate commitment to energy and efficiency. Bracknell Forest Council had achieved a Special Commendation and Hazel Hill, Energy Sustainability Officer achieved 3rd place for her role in energy efficiency, recognising the council had achieved an average of Band C across all our properties. The Mayor asked everyone to join her in congratulating her for the award.

64. **Executive Report**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bettison OBE, presented his report on the work of the Executive since that reported at the Council meeting on 23 February 2022. The Executive had met once on 15 March 2022.

The Leader highlighted the following matters that had been considered:

- As part of the LGA programme on behalf of DLUCH a Peer Review was conducted in November 2021. The main outcome was that Bracknell Forest Council was “an organisation that knows what it wants to do and how to do it”. There were eight recommendations with three relating to replacing the Chief Executive with the others relating to emerging from Covid and re-engaging with residents.
- An enhanced partnership agreed with local bus operators was a requirement to access future funding allocations as part of the National Bus Strategy.
- The Highways Infrastructure & Asset Management Plan sets out the future approach to long term maintenance of assets including 460km highways, 534km footways/cycleways, 193 structures (e.g. bridges), 21,598 drainage gullies, 14,138 lamp columns and 20km railings.
- The Highways & Transport Capital programme 2022/23 of £4.013m had been agreed with 85% externally funded.
- Procurement Plans had been agreed for Domestic Abuse Refuge & Outreach Services and Environmental monitoring.
- S75 Agreement with Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group had been extended to allow new agreement to be developed with Integrated Care System for 2023/24 onwards.
- Since the Executive meeting two Government Schemes supporting Ukrainian refugees had been introduced e.g. Family Visa Scheme and Homes for Ukraine. The Council had established a web page with contact information with a range of signposting advice for anyone arriving from Ukraine or their family members, set up a dedicated email address, published guidance leaflets for hosts and guests and had regular engagement with the local

Ukrainian and Russian communities as well as co-ordinating support with voluntary and church sectors. Support measures included a welcome pack from the Kerith Centre, a £200 payment and assigning a link worker. There were some challenges due to lack of information about the number of families arriving, their travel information or where they would be staying. The Council was reliant on families contacting the Council in order to respond to support requirements. Generosity and support for those arriving had been incredibly positive, and the Council would support new arrivals as much as possible.

65. Review of Contract Standing Orders

The Council considered the recommendation regarding the replacement of the Council's existing Contract Standing Orders with an updated version as set out in Appendix 1 of the agenda report.

On the proposition of Councillor Allen, Chair of Governance and Audit Committee, seconded by Councillor Heydon it was

RESOLVED that Council updates the Constitution to replace the existing Contract Standing Orders with the version proposed in Appendix 1.

66. Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny

The Council considered the Overview and Scrutiny annual report which informed councillors of progress made in respect of the operation and development of overview and scrutiny in Bracknell Forest during 2021- 22.

Councillor Temperton enquired whether the list of flats which had met the criteria for introducing food waste collection, established as part of the Food Waste in Flats review, could be circulated.

Councillor Angell, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission reported that the Commission and its Panels had received support from Executive members, officers and external witnesses in terms of information provided and participation in activities. The report included statistics on activities including increased frequency of Commission meetings, review activities, officer and witness attendance. He thanked the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Panels for their hard work to deliver the work programme.

On the proposition of Councillor Angell, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission, seconded by Councillor Virgo it was

RESOLVED that the 2021-22 annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission be adopted.

67. Champions' Annual Report

Each Champion was asked if they had anything to add to their submitted report and answered any questions:

- Councillor Wade, Small Business Champion responded to a question about the lack of green innovation, agreed it was disappointing but believed smaller businesses had been focused on remaining trading during this difficult period.
- Councillor Atkinson, Commuters' Champion responded to earlier comments relating to the reduced frequency of trains on the Martins Heron to London

service as pre pandemic there were 3 or 4 trains per hour. He advised that the South Western Railway's consultation on a new timetable, referenced within the report, would go towards introducing higher frequencies at peak times. He reported that he had met with South Western Railway recently and was updated that they were awaiting a response from the Department of Transport who were required to approve the proposals.

The Council received the Champions' Annual Report for 2021 - 22, and the Mayor thanked the Champions for their work.

68. Councillor Development Annual Report

The Council received the Councillor Development Annual Report which provided an overview of activity which has been completed to support councillor's development in 2021 – 2022. Councillor Allen, Chair of the Councillor Development Charter Steering Group, thanked the officer team behind the development programme.

69. Questions Submitted Under Council Procedure Rule 10

Councillor Temperton asked Councillor Dr Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning the following published question:

The Ofsted/CQC report on our SEND provision was damning and shameful. Despite the claim 'children are at the heart of all we do', we have clearly failed many of our most vulnerable children. Will the portfolio holder for Children, Young People & Learning explain how this happened on his watch and what could have been done to prevent it?

In response Councillor Dr Barnard apologised to those parents, carers and children who had been let down in terms of the service provided for SEND provision in recent years and commended those who contributed to the Ofsted inspection. He requested additional time to provide context to his response. The changes to the service began in 2014 when the service moved from a system of providing a Statement of Special Education Need to developing Education, Health and Care Plans. He explained that he was initially shown data that demonstrated that plans had been moved forward in a timely manner and that, as found in the Ofsted inspection, outcomes for Early Years and overall outcomes were good. He advised the meeting that he initially became concerned in 2019 due to an increase in complaints being received. He reminded colleagues that a complaints dedicated email account was created last autumn to manage this. He advised that another reason was that when looking at inspection reports from neighbouring authorities to SEND they shared partners delivering specialist assessments.

During late 2019 and early 2020 the council put in place a self-evaluation and SEND framework to monitor outcomes and track progress of plan development. He reflected that although the council consulted with partners it had become evident that they did not undertake enough engagement with parents and carers at that time. He added that work with the Schools Forum also highlighted issues. The self-assessment framework was implemented. He asked colleagues to note that when Ofsted began their inspection it was identified that the council knew what was required to improve the service. He commented that it was impossible to know whether faster progress would have been made without the pandemic but, although not an excuse, it impacted on the ability to move plans forward as the council worked with schools in a different way during that period. He advised that operationally additional resources and capacity were introduced and the quality and timescales towards the 20-week schedule was known to be improving. He stated that the relevant data was reported

annually in January so the impact would not be seen for another year. He reflected that 5 of the 6 Berkshire unitary authorities had also received challenging outcomes from their SEND Ofsted inspections. He believed that better performance data could have been shared and two new forums had been established in order to address this: SEND Partnership Board which would be co-chaired by a senior officer and a parent and also the People's directorate Performance Board where data would be analysed in detail. He agreed that it was disappointing for a council professing to be child centred to have not got this right. He stated that he was confident with all the actions taking place this would not happen again. He acknowledged that the impact of the transition between Statements and ECHPs had not been fully appreciated and internal resources had not been developed. He added that work was now ongoing to highlight where there was capacity in the borough's classrooms to try to keep more children within the borough. He concluded that it was his aim to ensure there was a SEND service fit for purpose to meet the needs of Bracknell Forest children.

Councillor Temperton thanked Councillor Dr Barnard for his full and honest response and asked whether relevant performance data would be published on a quarterly basis to ensure that progress could be celebrated or tracked. He confirmed that it was the intention for such data to be available and shared through the Quarterly Service Reports and Council Plan Overview Report reports. He concluded by thanking Councillor Temperton for her involvement in officer recruitment process which had focused on performance management. He concluded that as the aspiration had been for all schools within the borough to be assessed as good or outstanding it was also his aim to ensure the quality of the provision for all Bracknell Forest children with additional needs whether supported within or outside of the borough.

Councillor Temperton asked Councillor Dr Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning the following published question:

Which Bracknell Forest Schools have accepted students from other schools as a 'Managed Move' since September?

In response Councillor Dr Barnard stated that the council did not hold data from managed moves between schools in Bracknell Forest but did have data for moves between Bracknell Forest mainstream schools to College Hall. He explained that the managed move process was to avoid a pupil being permanently excluded. Discussions were held between the original school and an alternative school to see whether, with support, a child could move from one to another. He commented that it was an option to help students make a fresh start in a new school. He advised that for schools to receive pupils they needed to have capacity and the resources to provide appropriate support. He reported that since September 2021 College Hall had received ten transfers from Garth Hill College, three transfers from Easthampstead Park and two from Brackenhale Secondary School.

Councillor Temperton queried whether those schools which had pupils transferred were also receiving transfers into their schools, asking for clarification on the circumstances that a school could refuse a space and what happened when a placement failed. Councillor Dr Barnard replied that schools were autonomous and managed locally with some professional input from the local education authority. He advised that schools could refuse to accept a potential transfer if they did not have the space or if they did not consider they could meet the needs of that child. He confirmed that if a child had been moved already it was unlikely that they would be offered a place in a third mainstream school but it would be for the two schools to agree. He concluded that he was aware that some schools were disproportionately

taking on more transferred pupils but they were considered to be in a good position to offer the appropriate support and were achieving good outcomes for those pupils.

Councillor Bidwell asked Councillor Heydon, Executive Member for Transformation and Finance the following published question:

This month Bracknell Forest residents will face increases to NI, doubling of the cost of energy bills and an increase in council tax, the maximum permitted. Although there has been social media advice on how to receive the £150 council tax grant can the responsible councillor advise:

- *How much money was in the hardship fund?*
- *What has been the take up e.g. number of residents and amount of money given?*
- *How many residents who applied via the BFC website have been denied and why?*
- *What is the council's strategy for broadcasting the availability of the hardship fund other than the BFC website?*

Councillor Heydon, Executive Member for Transformation and Finance advised the meeting that the initiative was delivered within Councillor Birch, Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Housing's portfolio so deferred to him to respond.

Councillor Birch stated that the hardship fund was a discretionary local welfare scheme. He explained that in 2021 the Council had run two separate schemes for those in financial crisis e.g. The Home emergency grant and the Local Crisis Grant Scheme. He stated that recognising there was a gap in support, in October 2021, the new local welfare scheme was launched, and since that point take up had increased. The scheme existed to support those in financial crisis and who may not be able to meet their essential urgent living expenses such as gas and electric charges, basic white goods and furnishings. He reported that the core budget was £25,080 which had been supplemented since 2020 by one-off grant allocations from other government funding such as the Household Support Fund and a carry forward of £25k had been requested for the 2022-23 budget. He reported that more than £30k of emergency support had been issued by the welfare team since the new scheme had gone live. He commented that the council and its welfare officer team remained committed to ensuring that most vulnerable got the right support that they need. He thanked Sharon Warner, Head of Welfare and her team for their efforts. He expanded that the fund existed in addition to other forms of support and applicants may not qualify for this fund but may qualify for support. He explained that each application was considered on its merits against criteria of the scheme. He reported that details of the scheme had been promoted and shared with partners and stakeholders such as Pilgrim Hearts, Citizens Advice Bureau, Job Centre Plus and within officer teams supporting Bracknell Forest families and the most vulnerable. He added it had been shared with those who would be able to identify an individual or a household in crisis. He concluded that the fund would not be more widely promoted as it was targeted funding.

Councillor Bidwell asked to be provided with numbers as per his published question and Councillor Birch replied that the council had received 241 applications.

CHAIRMAN