

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION –
ADVISORY MEETING
8 FEBRUARY 2022
6.30 - 7.31 PM**



Present:

Councillors Angell (Chair), Virgo (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Birch, Brossard, MJ Gibson, Mrs Mattick, Mrs McKenzie-Boyle, Mossom, Porter and Temperton
Mark Glanville, Parent Governor Representative

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Gbadebo and McLean

In Attendance:

Councillor Brown

Also Present:

Stuart McKellar, Executive Director: Resources
Kevin Gibbs, Executive Director: Delivery
Grainne Siggins, Executive Director: People
Ann Moore, Assistant Director: Democratic and Registration Services

56. Minutes of previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Commission held on 13 January 2022 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

57. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest made.

There were no indications that members would be participating while under the party whip.

58. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

59. Public Participation

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

60. Council Plan Overview Report

The Executive Director: Resources at Bracknell Forest Council, Stuart McKellar, introduced the Council Plan Overview Report (CPOR) covering the second quarter of 2021/22. The Executive Director: Resources highlighted that:

- There was a slight change to the format of the CPOR from previous versions as it included a more detailed update on the activity of the Chief Executive's office. This was due to separate quarterly reports being created for the Resources Directorate and the Place, Planning and Regeneration Team.

- The Council was on track to deliver the Corporate Plan except for transformation savings which was RAG rated red. The delay in transformation savings was largely due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the People Directorate. Members were assured the groundwork had been done in this area, but the transformation team were not as far ahead as they hoped they would be at this point.
- Changes to The Lookout Café meant there was a more exciting offer for residents which would help to generate more income and bring visitors back.
- The Council had allocated a number of business grants across the borough.
- The draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the borough was out for consultation and progressing well.
- There was a slight delay on some traffic works around the borough, but these were being addressed.
- There was a global issue obtaining IT equipment, which had been an issue, but good progress had been made this quarter by the team and new starters were receiving kit.
- Work was being carried out to ensure Time Square would be ready when it was reopened to the public. This included a new café area and soundproof, glass booths for staff to meet with residents.
- The Bracknell Forest Giants in the Town Centre had proved hugely popular and brought many people back into town. It was noted there had been good publicity reach for this initiative.
- The corporate peer challenge took place during this quarter and feedback was overwhelmingly positive about Bracknell Forest Council.
- The Council had taken steps to support vulnerable people. This included additional welfare support for children eligible for Free School Meals, such as meals over the holiday period, and that support was continuing currently.
- It was anticipated there would be a small underspend in the budget when previously there was a risk of an overspend. The anticipated underspend was due to the situation not deteriorating as quickly as predicted because car parks and leisure centres were being well used again.

The following questions were asked:

- In response to a query about the amber RAG rating and low number of apprenticeships available in the Council (Page 27) the Executive Director: Resources explained two teams who were currently in the middle of a restructure (Digital Services and Human Resources & Organisational Development) would be creating a total of five apprenticeships in the near future. The delay to creating more apprenticeships was partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic impacting on teams' ability to take on new starters requiring a lot of assistance, particularly in the People Directorate.
- In response to a query about leases at Everyone Active Leisure Centre (Page 29) the Executive Director: Delivery, Kevin Gibbs, stated one lease was currently being investigated, as it was the subject of a complaint, and more would be known once that was concluded.
- A query was raised about use of agency staff and what the Council were doing to employ more permanent staff. The Executive Director: Resources explained senior leaders would be discussing a report tomorrow which drew together all agency staff and should allow better visibility of use of agency staff across the Council. A strategy was also being proposed to gradually reduce agency staff and understand why we have them. It was noted the majority of agency staff were in the demand led sector, so would be hard to reduce, and part of the strategy would look at terms and conditions for permanent staff to promote Bracknell Forest Council as an attractive place to work. This piece of work was being overseen by the Employment Committee.

- In response to a question about the increase in the number of complaints the Council received in 2022, compared to 2021, the Executive Director: Resources explained 2021 was the blip year due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the number of complaints were in line with previous years.
- It was queried why an extra grant for the past two years to assist young people classed as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) to find jobs had been withdrawn this year. Executive Director: People, Grainne Siggins, offered to provide a written response to this question.
- In response to a question about how many Bracknell Forest Libraries were now open as 'open plus sites' the Executive Director: Delivery offered to provide a written response following the meeting.
- Members asked if the SLA (Service Level Agreement) with South Hill Park had been signed and the Executive Director: Delivery explained a specification had been agreed, and was largely being worked to, but the SLA was yet to be signed. It was agreed an update would be provided at the next meeting.
- It was confirmed that it was intended for the Café at Time Square to provide more than tea/coffee in the future. The Council had explored providing accommodation to other organisations at Time Square, including the voluntary sector, although an agreement for Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust to use space for some staff had not been reached.
- In response to a question about the transfer of land assets, such as playgrounds, from Bracknell Forest Council to Parish/Town Councils in the borough the Executive Director: Delivery agreed to provide a written response.
- In response to a query about a parking bay scheme in Bracknell Town it was agreed the Executive Director: Resources would provide a written response.
- The issue of old street signs and parking bay signs was discussed and the Executive Director: Resources advised Commission members there was funding in the proposed budget 2022/23 for local greening initiatives and to make places tidier, which could be used to update these types of signs.
- It was queried why a target had been set of 5,000 for the number of customer visits to Time Square when it was not accessible to the public yet. It was explained this target was set last Summer and agreed it was now inappropriate.
- It was noted that due to technical issues Councillor Bidwell was unable to ask his question directly during the meeting and this would be followed up outside of the meeting.

61. **Work Programme Update**

Each Panel Chair provided a verbal update on work programme progress.

Education, Skills and Growth

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) review scope was agreed.

Health and Care

The Mental Health draft report and recommendations were finalised and would be brought for consideration to the April Commission meeting.

Ideas for the Panel's next review had been discussed but it was noted one suggestion regarding the recruitment marketplace in social care was being reviewed by the Employment Committee.

Environment and Communities

The inaugural meeting of the Integrated Enforcement Review would take place on Thursday 9 February. A number of dates were booked in for March.

CHAIRMAN

Response to questions

It was queried why an extra grant for the past two years to assist young people classed as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) to find jobs had been withdrawn this year. Executive Director: People, Grainne Siggins, offered to provide a written response to this question.

Answer to follow

In response to a question about how many Bracknell Forest Libraries were now open as 'open plus sites' the Executive Director: Delivery offered to provide a written response following the meeting.

Response: Open+ is currently live at Birch Hill, Great Hollands, Harmans Water and Sandhurst. We still have a problem with the northern group (Binfield, Whitegrove and Ascot Heath), which were open before the pandemic, but have since had system problems which have also encompassed the public PCs. These problems are under active investigation.

Work is in progress with Crowthorne and Bracknell libraries, but they are more complicated buildings and therefore need bespoke solutions.

Members asked if the SLA (Service Level Agreement) with South Hill Park had been signed and the Executive Director: Delivery explained a specification had been agreed, and was largely being worked to, but the SLA was yet to be signed. It was agreed an update would be provided at the next meeting.

Response: In addition to the answer given on the night, the service level agreement (SLA) wasn't signed before March 2020. Given the Covid pandemic, the Trust hasn't been carrying out their normal programme and therefore it wasn't seen as appropriate at this stage to push for the signing of an SLA, to underpin a programme that clearly isn't possible. That said, the grant guarantee expires at the end of the 2022-23 budget period and therefore if a new grant award is given, this will be linked to an SLA.

In response to a question about the transfer of land assets, such as playgrounds, from Bracknell Forest Council to Parish/Town Councils in the borough the Executive Director: Delivery agreed to provide a written response.

Response: The programme of transfers are continuing. Although informally it has been said that "the ball was in our court"; this is not correct. The Deputy Head of Legal has confirmed that the documents for a number of sites are with Bracknell Town Council (BTC) for signing. Once they are signed by BTC, the council can then complete the transfer as there are no monies involved.

As soon as BTC leases have been completed, the programme will move on to Winkfield Parish Council transfers. It is our understanding that there is a keenness from Winkfield Parish Council for the Bog Lane site to progress as quickly as possible. Therefore Legal are scheduled to have the title checked to make sure there is nothing in it that would restrict a transfer. This will be with the Property team early in March 2022.

The order that we are carrying out the transfers are firstly to Bracknell Town Council, then Winkfield Parish Council, then Warfield Parish Council and then Binfield Parish Council. The

rationale for doing them one Parish at a time is to ensure that we have sufficient capacity within the legal service to handle this work.

In response to a query about a parking bay scheme in Bracknell Town it was agreed the Executive Director: Resources would provide a written response.

Answer to follow

It was noted that due to technical issues Councillor Bidwell was unable to ask his question directly during the meeting and this would be followed up outside of the meeting.

Councillor Bidwell's question was "A follow on from Cllr Gibson's observation regarding Agency Staff. What controls are in place to ensure that Zero Hour contracts are not in place"

Response: The zero hours contract arrangements could only be possible in Bracknell Forest for staff who are regularly engaged on a casual basis. A six monthly check is undertaken against the casual workers to check their hours of work, employment status and determine whether the regularity of their work should translate to a contract of employment or whether they are genuine casual workers. This way we can prevent zero hour contracts from being used.