

ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
03 MARCH 2008
(8.05 - 9.00 pm)

Present: Councillors Brunel-Walker (Chairman), Finnie (Vice-Chairman), Beadsley, Finch, Mrs Fleming, McLean and Mrs Ryder

Also Present: Councillors Mrs Ballin, Mrs Hayes and McCracken

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs Angell and Mrs McCracken

In attendance: Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance and Scrutiny
Mark Devon, Assistant Director (Leisure)
Kaylee Godfrey, Communications Officer
Steve Loudoun, Assistant Director (Sustainability)
Vincent Paliczka, Director of Environment and Leisure
Helen Tranter, Head of Culture and Visual Environment

31. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 2 January 2008 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

32. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or indications that Members would be participating whilst under the party whip.

33. Urgent Items of Business

There were no urgent items of business.

34. Departmental Overview and Performance

The Director of Environment and Leisure gave a presentation in respect of departmental performance with reference to the Performance Monitoring Report (PMR) for the third quarter of 2007/08. The presentation outlined the Department's finances as at January 2008, highlighted variances on revenue and identified capital projects that would be carried forward. Staffing issues, key highlights and a forward look were also included.

The Panel was advised that there was a predicted underspend of £420,000 in the Revenue Budget and 75% of the Capital Budget would have been spent by the end of the financial year. The Panel was informed that revenue savings did not involve any service cuts and had included the receipt of £213,000 following the completion of two significant planning applications, £50,000 from the Development Control Planning Delivery Grant, the introduction of a new street lighting contract which had resulted in a saving of £32,000 and new licensing income streams coming online.

Staff vacancy rates were 8.52%, which was higher than the Department would like and to ensure continuity of service agency staff were being used to back fill the vacant posts which were proving difficult to fill. The total number of sickness days during the quarter had increased by 265 compared to the previous quarter and by 23.5 days when compared to the same quarter the previous year; a situation that had been caused by the time of year being monitored combined with the significant numbers of staff working either outside or with members of the public. A Senior Building Surveyor and Waste Contract Management Officer had been recruited and three chief officer posts in the new structure had been appointed to; interviews would be held for two further chief officer posts shortly.

The key highlights featured the completion of the Development Control data transfer to a fully accessible public system, the completion of consultation on the new Cultural Strategy, the continued work on the potential outsourcing of leisure services to a leisure trust, the installation of the first piece of public art at Jennets Park, the refusal of a planning application for Allsmoor Lane and work to ensure that the new concessionary fares scheme went live as planned on 1 April 2008, allowing travel at all times in the Borough. A Member Seminar on climate change was planned for April.

The following points arose from members' questions and comments:

- A comprehensive health and safety assessment system was in place to keep footpaths in good repair. In areas where repairs were needed potholes were being plugged as a short term measure before comprehensive relaying could take place at a later date.
- The Transport Innovation Fund application submitted by Reading Borough Council was part of a pilot scheme running across all Berkshire authorities to deal with the prioritisation of transport matters that crossed local authority borders.
- There were regular ongoing public promotions to raise awareness of the importance of keeping the Borough tidy and the Director of Environment and Leisure agreed to identify the details of these promotions. The Street Scene Improvement Budget contained provision for a number of street cleansing schemes.
- The condition of the Borough's road network was regularly assessed and any repairs made immediately following the identification of problems. An assessment of the state of all the roads in the Borough would be included in the Highway Asset Management Plan.
- An improvement scheme was in place to raise the standard of the Borough's recycling facilities. Bins that enabled the public to separate recyclable and non-recyclable litter were available by the escalators in Charles Square and more would be installed over time.
- The Assistant Director of Environment and Leisure agreed to clarify the status of the Help Yourself campaign which aimed to promote business continuity amongst small businesses.
- The Forestry Commission had issued a restocking order for Allsmoor Lane and the land owners had until June 2009 to complete the restocking. A prosecution had been brought over the deforestation of Blewburton Walk.

- The contract for the Thermal Flyover had been awarded and this would be implemented when the weather conditions were suitable.
- The Assistant Director of Environment and Leisure agreed to clarify if street rubbish collections were separated into recyclable waste at the point of collection.

35. Strategic Review of Waste

The Panel received a report updating them on the progress made by the Waste Review Working Group. It was reported that the Working Group had made good progress; additional areas for investigation had been identified and work was taking place to develop the framework of the report.

Thanks were expressed to Janet Dowlman, Waste and Recycling Manager, and Steve Loudoun, Assistant Director for Environment and Leisure, for their assistance with the review.

36. Street Cleaning/Street Scene

The Panel received an update on the progress of the Street Cleaning Street Scene Working Group. It was reported that good progress was being made with work taking place to collate the details of the street scene schemes run by the Town and Parish Councils.

Thanks were expressed to Steve Loudoun, Assistant Director of Environment and Leisure, and the Street Cleaning Section for their assistance with the review.

37. Road Accidents Casualties

The Panel received an update on the progress made by the Road Accident Casualties Working Group. The Working Group had investigated the working of the Best Value Performance Indicators, the nature of the targets set and how and why targets had been stretched. An interim report had been produced and this would form the basis for the draft report of the Working Group.

38. Overview and Scrutiny Quarterly Progress Report

The Panel noted a report outlining the activities of all the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the Commission.

39. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for the Next Municipal Year

The Panel were advised that the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report would be discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting to be held on 13 March 2008. As well as an overview of the scrutiny work carried out over the past year the Report contained an indicative work programme for all overview and scrutiny panels for the next municipal year.

In addition to the ongoing examination of standard items including the budget and performance monitoring reports it was expected that a number of reviews would not be completed by the end of the current municipal year and these would continue into

the next and the following new pieces of work had been proposed for the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel:

- Monitoring the development of the potential creation of a leisure trust
- Reviewing progress on implementing the Nottingham Declaration

Scrutiny of the Civic Hub's development would remain with the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

The Panel questioned how the Council restructure would impact upon the current overview and scrutiny arrangements and in particular how the role of the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be developed to include housing in its remit. The Panel were informed that discussions were taking place between the Assistant Chief Executive and the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission about the future structure of overview and scrutiny and it was hoped that a decision would be reached before the meeting of Full Council in May.

40. **Executive Forward Plan**

The Panel noted the items on the Executive Forward Plan relating to the Environment and Leisure Department.

In relation to item reference I010250: Cultural Strategy 2008-2012 the Panel were advised that the decision would now be taken by the full Executive rather than the Executive Member for Leisure, Corporate Services and Public Protection.

CHAIRMAN