

COUNCIL
5 FEBRUARY 2003
(7.30 pm – 9.20 pm)

Present: Councillors Adams, Baily, Mrs Ballin, Barnard, Beadsley, Bettison, Birch, Mrs Birch, Blatchford, Browne, Edger, Fawcett, Finnie, Flood, Glasson, Grayson, Harrison, Miss Haydon, Mrs Hayes, Henfrey, Jones, Kendall, Mrs Mattick, McCormack, McCracken, Mills, North, Piasecki, Mrs Pile, Mrs Ryder, Sargeant, Mrs Shillcock, Simonds, Thompson, Turrell, Wade, Ward and Worrall

Apologies for absence were received from:
Councillors Ms Brown and Egan

73. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on [4 December 2002](#) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

74. Declarations of Interest (Item 4)

Councillor Mrs Ryder declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 due to her involvement with voluntary groups, including as Chairman of the Voluntary Sector Compact.

75. Mayor's Announcements (Item 5)

(i) Charity Performance of Aladdin

The Mayor thanked the Councillors, officers and all those who had supported the charity performance of Aladdin at South Hill park on Sunday 5 January. She was very pleased to announce that the event had raised £2,428 for the Paul Bevan Hospice.

(ii) Charity Pancake Race

The Mayor's Charity Pancake Race would be taking place on Shrove Tuesday, 4 March. The Mayor announced that, in keeping with the Council's new tradition, she would be entering a 'Mayor's Team' for the race. Other Members and officers were encouraged to participate. All proceeds would be donated to the Paul Bevan Hospice.

(iii) Golf Day

The Mayor's Charity Golf Day would be held on Tuesday 22 April, at Mill Ride Golf Club, Ascot.

(iv) Notable Achievements

The Mayor was delighted to advise the Council that Trisha Bennett from the Leisure Services Department had been appointed through the Local Government Association to the Active Communities Partnership. Trisha also continued to serve as Chair of the National Association of Community Workers and deserved the appreciation of the Council for these additional activities in her professional field.

Members joined the Mayor in congratulating Councillor Bettison for his nomination by the local Government Chronicle as one of the top fifteen councillors in the Country.

(v) Children and Young People's Champion

At the Mayor's invitation, Councillor Miss Haydon reported on the Christmas boxes appeal. She thanked all Members who had contributed to providing Christmas boxes for the Council's Looked After young people and Care Leavers. She also highlighted the dedication and effort of the staff in Social Services and Housing who had delivered the boxes to the children and young people.

76. Executive Report (Item 6)

The Leader of the Council reported on the main activities of the Executive since a meeting of the Council on [4 December 2002](#). These had included

- considering the implications in the separation of funding for the LEA and Schools
- the South Hill Park revenue grant
- The Personnel Best Value Improvement Plan
- The Corporate Stationery Contract

The Leader then reported on the outcome of the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment, which had resulted in an overall assessment of the Authority as 'Fair'. He demonstrated how the scoring methodology had lead to this result even though the assessment had been only two points short of qualifying as an 'Excellent' authority.

Consultation on the Budget had included two meetings with Rt Hon Nick Raynsford, the Local Government Minister. The Council's final Formula Funding Share had been announced on 3 February as £102.89m, representing an improvement of £0.36m on the draft settlement. Consultation would continue on the budget until the Executive meeting on 18 February when final proposals would be settled and recommended to the Council.

The next few months would see further work on the Customer Contact Initiative, the review of overview and scrutiny arrangements and the preparation of departmental Service Plans.

Councillor Bettison then responded to questions on the report.

77. **Scheme for Public Participation**

Two questions for the Executive Member for Social and Health Care Services and Housing had been submitted under the Scheme for Public Participation, on behalf of the Bracknell Forest Coalition on Charging.

(i) "In its Guidance on Fairer Charging, published in November 2001, the Government asked local authorities to consult on and approve their new charging policies by October 2002, in order to give sufficient time for implementing the very considerable changes contained therein. Please could you tell us why Bracknell Forest has yet to approve its new policy and is not set to do so until March 2003, despite this policy being a major change and having a significant impact on the Council's budget?"

Councillor Barnard advised that the Guidance on Fairer Charging, published initially in November 2001, was part of an evolving set of requirements aimed at improving access to social care. The Council had fully considered all aspects of this and subsequent related guidance. It had revised its eligibility criteria for services to both adults and children. It had also established a Charging Policy Steering Group to look at all aspects of the Guidance in relation to charging. This Group had invited the Coalition to work with the officers involved in conducting a series of successful consultation exercises last year. The proposals would be considered by the Select Committee on Social Care on 10 February and by the Executive on 18 February 2003.

Councillor Barnard then responded to a supplementary question.

(ii) "The Voluntary Sector Compact has a code of good practice for communication and consultation, which says that partners will ensure that when consultation takes place, the outcome is able to influence decisions. As a partner to the compact, can you describe how you have followed this code in the case of the clear feedback from service users in the consultation on fairer charging and the development of that policy?"

Councillor Barnard responded that the outcomes from the consultation exercise had been taken fully into account when considering any changes to present practice or policy, as demonstrated in the very detailed paper due to be considered by the Executive on 18 February 2003.

Councillor Barnard then responded to a supplementary question.

78. **Questions Submitted under [Council Procedure Rule 10](#)**

Notice had been received of six questions to Members of the Executive as follows:

(i) By Councillor Glasson to the Executive Member for Social and Health Care Services and Housing

"Having withheld the results of last year's consultation on service charges for some three months, how does he now hope to provide for any kind of adequate discussion on the outcome of the consultation, and of the policy which must flow from it, when the policy must be agreed by the Executive and implemented by the 1st April?"

In responding to the question Councillor Barnard asserted that the information on the consultation had not been withheld. Following the consultation exercises, which Councillor Barnard listed in detail, efforts had been made to arrange a feedback session with stakeholders during December 2002, prior to the publication of the consultation summary. For various reasons this had not been possible to arrange. Following the decision of stakeholders to pursue alternative courses of action, the decision was taken to publish the consultation summary but because of the Christmas break Councillor Barnard had been unable to discuss the matter with the Leader of the Council until early January. The release of the information was authorised on 14 January and Councillor Barnard confirmed that there had been no request for this information prior to that date.

The views of stakeholders had been taken into account in preparing the policy, which would now be considered in accordance with Council procedures. The Select Committee on Social Care had had the opportunity at its previous meeting to ask questions about the Fairer Charging proposals. Dates were currently being offered to stakeholders to further discuss the policy amendments and confirmation of a date was awaited from them.

The report for consideration by the Executive on 18 February would be an interim position as Best Value groups, involving stakeholders, were currently working towards revising the complete policy. Councillor Barnard concluded that he was confident that there was good consultation, discussion and engagement at both officer and Member level.

Councillor Barnard then responded to a supplementary question.

(ii) By Councillor Fawcett to the Executive Member for Public & Environmental Services

“In the light of Councillor Mills’ expressed concern about the inadequacy of the bus services from Bracknell to Heatherwood and Wexham Park, would he please indicate what steps he has taken with officers and within the executive to improve the situation?”

Councillor Mills responded by informing the Council of work that had been jointly commissioned by the Council and the Primary Care Trust.

The 53 bus service had been set up to provide a connection to Wexham Park Hospital and the 191 and 192 services to Heatherwood Hospital. Patronage on the Heatherwood connection has been reasonable but the service only ran because of a subsidy for the Borough Council. The 53 service to Wexham Park had recently been retendered, trying to tailor the service a little more to meet the needs of the people who do use it. The service had never been particularly popular and required significant subsidy from the Council to continue its provision.

With the Primary Care Trust the Council had been reviewing access to healthcare facilities used by the residents of the Borough. This study was now nearing completion. One option that the hospital authorities were keen to consider was a shuttle bus between Heatherwood and Wexham Park. Such a service could provide both staff and patient transport and an internal courier service. It was hoped that a more effective public transport arrangement could be provided through better services to Ascot and Heatherwood linking into a shuttle bus between the hospital. This would make a substantial difference for patients.

(iii) By Councillor Adams to the Executive Member for Public & Environmental Services

“How will Bracknell Forest Borough council achieve the Government target of 18% recycled household waste by April 2003?”

Councillor Mills responded that the Government’s BVPI targets for recycling and composting for Bracknell Forest Borough Council were set at 18% by the end of the financial year 2003/4 and 27% for 2005/6. The Council had decided to set itself a more stretching target for the current financial year, 2002/3, and to try and achieve 18 % one year early, by 1 April 2003.

The Council had already performed above the national average in respect of the recycling of household waste and had already achieved 15.8% recycling by the end of 2001/02. In the third quarter of the year to December 2002 the Council had recycled 18.4%, having already recycled in 9 months of this financial year more tonnes than in the whole of 2000/01. Whilst the Council might not quite meet its own target by 1 April, Councillor Mills had no doubt that it would meet and probably exceed the Government’s target of 18% by the end of 2003/04.

Councillor Mills described the many local initiatives targeted at increasing recycling. These initiatives, together with the improvement of facilities at Longshot Lane and the regular improvement of the many “bring” recycling sites, meant that recycling in the Borough had actually increased by 75% since 1998/99.

A residents survey showed that 70% of residents wanted plastic bottle collection to encourage them to use their kerbside green boxes. Trials with the collection of plastics in North Ascot confirmed that participation in kerbside recycling did increase by over 50%. The collection of plastics would therefore be extended throughout the Borough between the end of February and May.

As to the future, the Council together with Reading and Wokingham had been congratulated by the Secretary of State on its innovative plans for long-term waste management in the area based on recycling and composting and would be receiving £37million of revenue funding through the PFI scheme. As such the Council would be recycling 40% of household waste by 2010 and this was expected to rise to 50% over the life of the 25-year contract (to be awarded in the Autumn of 2004).

Councillor Mills then responded to a supplementary question.

(iv) By Councillor Jones to the Executive Member for Planning & Transportation

“The CPA Improvement Plan calls for a quality partnership, with our local transport provider, to be instituted by March 2003. Could the portfolio holder for Planning and Transportation inform the Council on the progress that has been made towards meeting this target?”

Councillor Mrs Ballin advised that the CPA Improvement Plan was a statutory requirement of the CPA process, and has to be prepared to a prescribed format. The improvement plan was currently only in draft form as it had yet to be approved by both The Executive and the Audit Commission following which it would be adopted by the Council on 26 March. Councillor Mrs Ballin was pleased to highlight the progress that had been made and as Councillor Mills had already explained the

Council was actively improving local bus services, this at a time when other local authorities were in fact reducing their direct involvement.

There had been detailed discussions with bus operators to create an Umbrella Bus Quality Partnership. The draft of this partnership document had already been agreed and awaited formal signing. The signing of the partnership had been delayed due to internal changes in the First Group. Although the Umbrella Quality Bus Partnership was not yet signed Councillor Mrs Ballin gave assurances that the Council was already working with the bus operators as though it were.

Councillor Mrs Ballin then responded to a supplementary question.

(v) By Councillor Piasecki to the Executive Member for Planning & Transportation

“The CPA Improvement Plan calls for a development of Travel Plans within the Council and amongst businesses in the Borough. Could the portfolio holder for Planning & Transportation inform the Council which businesses are currently actively involved with the Council in achieving the objective?”

Councillor Mrs Ballin responded that the Council had been working directly with local businesses on transport issues for a number of years. In April 2001 the Bracknell Business Travel Forum had been created. Whilst initially set up by the Council, the Chairman of the group was now a senior executive with Dell and the group included other senior representatives from 24 local businesses, SEEDA, specialist consultants and the Bracknell Chamber of Commerce. Councillor Mrs Ballin, together with officers also attended the bi-monthly meetings. The development of Travel Plans was a specific issue and last year all businesses with over 100 employees and all businesses on the Bracknell Business Travel Forum had been provided with the document ‘Keeping Bracknell Business Moving: Guide to Developing Travel Plans for Businesses in the Borough of Bracknell Forest’, which had been produced by the Council’s officers. A questionnaire had accompanied this document when it was distributed in order to identify the number of Business Travel Plans that have been implemented in the Borough, and other key information. Completed questionnaires were due to be returned in the near future.

Some local businesses had established their own Travel Plan, including TRL, the Met Office, Waitrose and HFC, without any assistance from the Council. Those businesses who had sought the Council’s assistance included Dell, 3M, Cable and Wireless and BWM.

All schools in the Borough had also been approached by officers, to encourage the development of individual School Travel Plans. To date eleven schools had expressed an interest and officers were working with them to get the best results.

With regard to the Council’s own Travel Plan, a Travel Plan Co-ordinator had been appointed who would commence employment on 3 March 2003. One of her many responsibilities would be to develop and co-ordinate the implementation of and monitor the success of the Council’s Travel Plan, and those of the business community. Funding of this post was from Section 106 monies.

(vi) By Councillor McCormack to the Leader of the Council

“In accordance with current legislation, what opportunities do residents have to make their views known on the Council’s proposed spending plans for 2003/04?”

In answering this question, Councillor Bettison explained the current legislative requirements with regard to budget consultations. The only specific legal requirement was to consult representatives of non-domestic ratepayers regarding expenditure for the next financial year. This, of course, the Council did and the Leader, together with most Executive Members, had attended a constructive meeting with representatives of Business Ratepayers on 21 January.

The Local Government Act 2000 stipulated that local authorities must have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State on budget consultation. The Executive had followed the guidance in adopting an inclusive approach to budget preparation, including presenting its draft proposals to all Members through the January cycle of Select Committees. Councillor Bettison commented on comparisons between the Council’s consultation process and that of other authorities in the area.

The Secretary of State’s guidance, stated that it was up to each local authority to determine the details of the process. There is no mention of residents anywhere in the guidance. However, the administration in Bracknell Forest took the issue of wider public involvement in the budget setting process seriously. In accordance with the Council’s normal processes, the full budget proposals had been published in mid December as part of the agenda for the Executive meeting two months before final decisions were to be made. Following the meeting, the proposals had been made available at Easthampstead House and also published on the Council’s website. Throughout the period since then, the budget proposals had been available to any interested party, and 333 “hits” had been made on this page on the website. Any written representations had been invited to the Director of Corporate Services.

In addition, the Executive Member for Education with the Director had consulted headteachers twice through meetings and governing bodies through the Chairmen’s briefing. They had also consulted schools generally through the Schools Forum. Other key groups had also been enabled to air their views through the Council’s Community Champions, who had a key role to play in this respect.

Councillor Bettison then responded to a supplementary question.

79. **Motions Submitted under [Council Procedure Rule 11](#)**

Motion 1/2003, as set out in the agenda for the meeting, was submitted by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Adams. On being put to the vote the motion was declared lost.

MAYOR