

**COUNCIL
25 JUNE 2003**

EXECUTIVE REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Since the Executive report to the Council meeting on 24 April 2003, the Executive has met only once on 17 June 2003. The Executive Decisions taken at that meeting are brought to the attention of the Council in this report.
- 1.2 The decisions have been summarised below either as Policy Framework matters requiring the formal approval of the Council or by reference to the relevant portfolio within which they fall.

2. POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 2.1 On the 17 June, the Executive considered and endorsed three Plans contained in the Council's Policy Framework which require formal approval by Council.

(a) Policy & Performance Plan

The Council's Policy and Performance Plan for 2003/04 underpins the work of the whole Council for the coming year as well as reviewing performance during the past year. The Executive has endorsed the current version of the draft Plan which has of course been subject to consultation with the former select committees in April, so some new Members may be less familiar with it than others. It is a substantial document running to some 200 pages, which include detailed performance indicators, some of which will only become available during late June. The current version can be viewed online (www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk) and a final copy will be circulated in advance of the Council meeting.

(b) Adult Learning Plan 2003/04

We have also endorsed the Adult Learning Plan 2003/04 which is central to and integral to the work of the Bracknell Forest Lifelong Learning Partnership. The funding of the planning, provision, management and quality assurance of Adult and Community Learning in Bracknell Forest is funded by the Learning and Skills Council under a contract secured by the approval of an Adult Learning Plan.

An earlier scoping document setting out proposed learner volumes and delivery costs had been provisionally approved by the Berkshire Learning and Skills Council as a basis for grant. Since then priorities have been clarified and targets and performance indicators agreed. This year's Plan builds upon the success of last year's. The vision and strategic direction of the Council was recognised by the Adult Learning Inspectorate in their Report following inspection in November 2002.

(c) Food Law Enforcement Plan 2003/04

Also on this agenda is the Food Law Enforcement Plan 2003/04. The Executive has considered this too and endorsed it. The Plan addresses all matters relating to food hygiene, food standards and the sale of animal foodstuff. The Plan is a statutory requirement under the Food Standards Act 1999 and is intended to ensure that national priorities and standards are delivered effectively and consistently at a local level.

3 SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE SERVICES

3.1 The Executive considered two important documents relating to our Housing policies.

Homelessness Strategy & Revised Allocations Policy

The Draft Homelessness Strategy has been produced in accordance with the Council's statutory duty under the Homelessness Act 2002. This Strategy makes an important contribution to the Council's approach to tackling Social Inclusion, and to other cross-cutting Strategies, such as Community Safety and Supporting People.

Allied to this is the Council's policy for the allocation of accommodation. The Homelessness Act 2002 introduced requirements, which were significantly different from the previous Bracknell Forest Policy for the Allocation of Accommodation. Although the Executive was concerned that the Act weakens the position of local residents on the Housing Waiting List, it became effective from January 2003, and immediate changes to the Council's published Policy were implemented in January, as a first stage to ensure compliance with the Act. The Points Scheme has now been reviewed in more detail to ensure that the Council has a robust Policy and Scheme in place reflecting the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002 and other legislative requirements, as well as local circumstances and needs.

A revised document, "A Guide to Applying for a Home of your own with Bracknell Forest", has been produced detailing the new policy including the revised Points Scheme. All existing and new applications will be pointed using the new Scheme. All allocations will be made using the new Scheme by 1 October 2003.

4 EDUCATION

4.1 In addition to the Adult Learning Plan referred to above, the Executive dealt with four other matters within the Education portfolio.

(a) Scheme for Financing Schools

We have addressed a number of education matters including the scheme for financing schools. In August 2002, the Department for Education and Skills issued guidance to Local Education Authorities on the extension of provisions in Schemes for Financing Schools. The proposals approved on 17 June are intended to cover the Community Facilities power provided under sections 27 and 28 of the Education Act 2002 and a direction to all LEAs to update schemes in respect of data to be supplied by payroll providers to the Teachers Pension Agency. With regard to the former, should any community facility generate a deficit that cannot be funded from accumulated surplus, this will be funded from within the overall budget for the Education Service.

(b) School Terms

We have deferred any changes to the current three term school year. An Independent Commission reporting to the Local Government Association has recommended that term and holiday dates should be standardised across the country and be broadly consistent from year to year. A framework for dates each year would be set nationally.

The Borough Council consulted interested parties on the proposals in January and February 2003 to ascertain local views on the principles of moving to a standard school year pattern. Officers of the Council have also kept abreast of regional and national developments. As a result of the consultation, we have decided not to change the present arrangements in 2004/04 but to monitor the situation nationally and looks to the adoption of a standard school year pattern for 2005/6 if there is a consensus for such a change. Indications are that such a consensus is emerging but it would not have been sensible for us to go it alone locally at this time.

(c) Brakenhale School – Disposal of Land

As you are aware, we have been undertaking a consultation on proposals to dispose of a parcel of land at Brakenhale School for housing purposes. The process for disposal of school land is detailed in Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and this stipulates that any proceeds should be used for the improvement of sports facilities and the refurbishment/replacement of schools. A significant capital receipt could be generated by the sale of the parcel of land identified on the School site, but access to this land can only be gained by demolition of some of the buildings of the Open Learning Centre and removal of an all weather sport surface. It will therefore be necessary to re-provide these facilities elsewhere on the site.

Having regard to the results of the consultation, we have authorised the Director of Education to submit an application for consent to dispose of school playing fields under Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

(d) Garth Hill/Wick Hill Masterplan

Proposals for the Garth Hill/Wick Hill site have progressed with our approval for the publication of the draft masterplan for the redevelopment of the existing school and college site at Garth. The masterplan sets out a framework to provide state of the art educational facilities for the Borough, along with residential development and improved recreational open space. Specifically, redevelopment of this site will deliver:

- a new post 16-19 college that will serve the needs of the wider area;
- a new Garth Hill College (school) facility;
- approximately 320 new dwellings;
- improved pitches on the Bull Lane playing field, a new all-weather sports pitch and open space serving the new residential area.

5 PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION

5.1 The two items considered in the Planning & Transportation portfolio related to an existing requirement in the Local Plan and the need to start the review of the Plan itself.

(a) Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan

Work is underway on the review of the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan. We have approved an Issues Paper and the initial Spatial Strategy for consultation purposes.

The Issues Paper/Spatial Strategy does not set out proposed policies or development sites. The purpose at this stage is simply to prompt input to the plan review at the earliest possible opportunity. It is now over one year since the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan was adopted covering the period to 2006 but with only three years to run, it requires review to ensure that the Borough has an up-to-date development plan. Consultation on an Issues Paper will enable the review of the Local Plan to focus on those matters that stakeholders consider to be important to the future of the Borough. Government guidance is promoting the preparation of Spatial Strategies as a means of locating future development.

(b) Land At Ringmead, Great Hollands

We have also approved terms for the disposal of a strip of land between Ringmead, Great Hollands and Peacock Farm to enable the construction of a footpath, cycleway and bus link between the two estates. Precise details of the area of land will be determined by the Assistant Director of Environment (Resources)

The proposal relates to the development of Peacock Farm, in that the Local Plan seeks to ensure that there are footpath and cycleway links to Great Hollands neighbourhood and a bus link to and from Great Hollands. Whilst these could be provided by other routes the most direct link is across the strip of land which is in the Borough Council's ownership.

6 CORPORATE SERVICES

Approval Of Tender List

We have authorised the Acting Director of Corporate Services to compile the final tender list for the Council's advertising services contract as the decision needs to be made between meetings of the Executive.

The existing recruitment advertising contract expires on 30 June 2003, but an extension for 6 months has been agreed with the current provider. The extension is necessary because the opportunity has been taken to try to collate all the Council's advertising activities under one contract in order to achieve economy of scale savings and improved value for money. The recruitment advertising services have been managed under one contract for a number of years but the remainder of the Council's advertising activities are split over a large number of different suppliers.

7 LOOKING AHEAD

- 7.1 The next Forward Plan will be published on 1 July 2003 and will be available for public inspection at Easthampstead House in the usual way and is also regularly updated online at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk, where you can also find full details on decisions taken by individual portfolio holders.