

**COUNCIL  
24 SEPTEMBER 2003**

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**EXECUTIVE REPORT**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Since the Executive report to the Council meeting on 23 July 2003, the Executive has met once on 16 September 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 by reference to the relevant portfolio within which they fall.

**2. CORPORATE SERVICES**

**2.1 Corporate Customer Contact Strategy**

- 2.1.1 The decision to endorse the proposed Corporate Customer Contact Strategy is the one this month which is likely to have most impact on the future of all our services. The capital and revenue budgetary implications will now be considered as part of the budget planning process which is now underway
- 2.1.2 Once implemented, the Strategy will enhance the service to our customers and improve management information enabling us to make better informed decisions. Residents will have a larger proportion of their enquiries resolved by the first person within the Council that they talk to or be directed to the right expert immediately. Those callers with more than one enquiry may be dealt with by just the one operator. The single point of contact for all callers will end the need for callers to understand the Council's structure before calling.
- 2.1.3 The management information that will be gathered as a result of the adoption of the Strategy will help us increase the quality of service being provided across the Council and enable managers to know why, how often and by what channel residents contact it. This will improve the ability of officers and members to make informed decisions and steer the Council in a proactive manner
- 2.1.4 Adoption of the strategy will significantly contribute to the achievement of the mandatory electronic service delivery targets and the achievement of Comprehensive Performance Assessment targets by way of joined up access to services. There will also be increased efficiencies as the Council will be able to take advantage of economies of scale and provide improved service with less resources, whilst also releasing scarce "expert" staff from simple enquiries and tasks, thereby allowing them to focus their time on complex or sensitive issues

**2.2 Local Code Of Corporate Governance**

- 2.2.1 The Executive has adopted a Local Code of Corporate Governance which recognises and consolidates the current policies and procedures which the Council has put in place. Corporate Governance has been defined, jointly by CIPFA and SOLACE, as "the system by which local authorities direct and control their functions and relate to their communities". The Local Code enables the Council to

demonstrate how it approaches Corporate Governance matters and will support the assurance statement, which is required for the 2002/03 Statement of Accounts.

## **2.3 Corporate Risk Register**

2.3.1 The Best Value Review of Finance included risk management and insurance within its scope. One of the recommendations contained in the Improvement Plan was that a comprehensive assessment of the Council's business activities be undertaken in order to develop a Corporate Risk Register. Key issues identified at present include:

- Personnel Issues – Loss of a key member of staff, or groups of staff.
- A significant reduction in resources available to the Council, either through reduced funding, higher costs, a major budget overspend or as a result of changes to national or European legislation (such as Social Rent Reform).
- Failure of a major contractor, partnership or joint working to deliver a service.
- Failure to meet performance and standards requirement, including as a result of changes to national or European legislation
- Failure to meet the Local Public Service Agreement targets.
- Loss of systems and data (both ICT and paper based).
- Failure to proceed with the redevelopment of Bracknell town centre.
- A major incident within the Borough
- Impact of demographic or socio-economic changes on the demand for services

2.3.2 It is recognised that these key risks will change over time and the register will be kept under review. In particular, a review of the register will be undertaken on an annual basis to enable the Council to include any necessary actions within its Service Plans and to consider any financial implications during the budget setting process.

## **3. SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE SERVICES**

### **3.1 Audit Of Services To Children In Need In Response To The Practice Recommendations Of The Victoria Climbié Inquiry**

3.1.1 The Executive received a report briefing it on the results of the Lord Laming Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, published in February 2003, and the detailed response made by the Council with regards to a self-assessment audit of services to children in need, as required by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI). In addition the report drew attention to the consideration that will be given corporately to issues of governance, accountability, and resources which have been highlighted as a result of the Lord Laming Inquiry. In the light of the self-assessment, the Executive was pleased that the SSI had rated the Council's Children's Services as "serving most children well" with "promising" prospects for improvement. This is the highest rating achieved yet in an SSI inspection and demonstrates that we remain focussed and on an upwards curve in delivering social services.

3.1.2 Members will be kept informed of developments, particularly in relation to the recently published Green Paper "Every Child Matters".

### **3.2 Delivering Decent Homes - Options Appraisal**

3.2.1 The Government's "Sustainable Communities : building for the future", published in February 2003, introduced sweeping changes to the way that housing will be

planned, funded and delivered regionally, from 2004. It also re-affirms the Government's intention that all public sector housing is required to meet and maintain 'Decent Homes' standards from 2010. Decent Homes standards relate to fitness for occupation, reasonable state of repair, reasonable modern facilities, and reasonable degree of thermal comfort. These standards are set out in separate Government Guidance.

- 3.2.2 The document places a requirement on local authorities to carry out a rigorous appraisal of their ability to meet and maintain Decent Homes Standards by 2010. The appraisal must be conducted in line with detailed Government Guidance, and it must be formally signed-off by the Government Office for the South East by July 2005 at the latest. It confirms the Government's expectations that local authorities will separate their roles as strategic housing authorities, from those as a landlord.
- 3.2.3 Simultaneously, significant changes have been introduced to the capital funding regime, which restrict local authorities' ability to retain and apply capital receipts. This has a major impact on the Council's ability to fund new affordable housing, and its ability to fund repairs and improvements to Council housing. This report recommends carrying out an Options Appraisal, in order to ensure that the Council will be able to carry out its strategic housing authority responsibilities, as well as ensure that Decent Homes standards are achieved and maintained in the Council's own housing stock.
- 3.2.4 In the light of this, the Executive has agreed that an appraisal should be undertaken of the options available for meeting the Decent Homes standards in the Council's own stock, and with respect to the Council's statutory duties as strategic housing authority. An outline project plan and indicative costings were also noted and a decision made to release up to £100,000 from the Housing Revenue Account in 2003/4, to allow preparatory work to take place in 2003/4. The longer term financial implications will be considered as part of the budget preparation for the coming year and beyond.

### **3.3 Review of Tenants and Leaseholders Compact**

- 3.3.1 The Council is required to have a compact with its tenants and leaseholders underpinning our relationship with them, and to review it regularly. A Guidance Note on using Tenant Participation Compacts to resolve disputes between Council Landlords and Tenants was issued by the DTLR in May 2002. The Bracknell Forest Compact needed to be revised to include information on disputes in order to comply with this guidance. The latest review has been completed in consultation with the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Panel. The Executive received and approved the revised compact
- 3.3.2 The Tenant Satisfaction survey which is due to be carried out in October 2003 will contain questions about how satisfied tenants are with the opportunities for participation (this is a Best Value Performance Indicator) and also whether they have heard of the Compact. It is therefore important to raise the profile of the Compact and the opportunities it gives for tenants to become involved and give their views.

### **3.4 Housing - Replacement IT System**

- 3.4.1 Members will be aware that the Director of Social Services & Housing is in the process of procuring a replacement IT system for housing services. Following the tendering process, a need has arisen to provide additional capital funding before any tender could be accepted. The Executive has duly recommended that additional

capital resources of £221,000 should be made available in 2004/05 to allow the contract for supply and implementation of a Replacement Housing IT System to be awarded.

#### **4 PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION**

##### **4.1 Procurement Of Joint Waste Management Facilities And Services (Private Finance Initiative) – Approval Of Output Specification Inter Authority Arrangements And Land Use**

4.1.1 The Executive received a report on progress towards the joint procurement of waste management facilities and services under the government's Private Finance Initiative with Reading Borough Council and Wokingham District Council and which also sought approval of the Output Specification against which a short list of contractors was to be invited to negotiate.

4.1.2 The Executive noted the timetable for the remaining phases of the waste management procurement and approved the Output Specification for inclusion in the Invitation to Negotiate. It also agreed to adopt the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding as highlighted on behalf of the Council and, subject to the determination of the terms being to the satisfaction of the Director of Environment, agreed to grant a leasehold interest in the Council's "Longshot Lane Site" to the successful contractor for the term of the PFI contract.

##### **4.2 Supplementary Planning Guidance On Affordable Housing**

4.2.1 Members will recall that the Council has been conducting a consultation on Supplementary Planning Guidance in relation to Affordable Housing. The results of the consultation were reported to the Executive and, having carefully considered the issues raised, the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance has been approved for Development Control purposes. As a consequence, the Borough Council will expect 23% affordable housing plus 15% key worker housing to be applicable to new planning applications for 25 or more dwellings or sites in excess of one hectare from Friday 26 September 2003.

##### **4.3 The Amalgamation Of Reading, West Berkshire And East Berkshire Coroners' Districts**

4.3.1 The Executive has agreed to work with the Home Office and the other unitary authorities in Berkshire with a view to amalgamating the Coroners' districts of Reading, East Berkshire and West Berkshire from 1 April 2004, and establishing a joint arrangement between the authorities, subject to each local authority in Berkshire passing similar resolutions. The appointment of a full-time Coroner for Berkshire is in line with the approach in the recently published Fundamental Review of the Coroner's Service.

#### **5 EDUCATION**

##### **5.1 School Organisation Plan 2003-2008**

5.1.1 The School Standards and Framework Act, 1998, sets out arrangements for decisions on school organisation to be taken at a local level. The School Organisation Plan is a contextual document. It draws conclusions about the need to

add or to remove school places within the local authority area and covers a five-year period. The Plan is subject to widespread consultation and facilitates a local understanding of the need for school places and the need to establish future demand.

- 5.1.2 The draft School Organisation Plan for 2003 – 2008 was published on 19 June for statutory consultation. The Executive considered the comments received and, having done so, agreed that the Plan should be submitted to the School Organisation Committee for final approval and, subject to their unanimous agreement, be published in October 2003.

## 5.2 **Education Transport – Exception To Contract Regulations**

- 5.2.1 The Executive has formally endorsed a fax tendering procedure for the provision of Education Transport, as an alternative to the requirement for formal tenders in accordance with Council's contract regulations. This effectively regularised existing working practices to provide statutory Education Transport which of necessity cannot at present comply with the tender receipt requirements of Contract Regulations as a normal tender process takes several weeks. A more dynamic process is needed.

## 6 **Corporate Performance Overview Report**

- 6.1 Members have received copies of the Quarterly Operations Reports for each service covering the period April-June 2003 and these have been considered by the appropriate scrutiny panel. As part of the performance review process, the Executive will now also receive a high level overview of key issues emerging from the reports. This marks an important step forward in the Council's performance management arrangements.

- 6.2 The first quarter of this year has been one of generally good performance across all of the Council's services. Progress in both Education and Leisure Services has been worthy of particular note, with all major targets being broadly met. At a corporate level:

- Sound progress is being made towards the achievement of our Local Public Service Agreement targets.
- There are no major financial issues at this stage, with management action being taken in Social Services and Housing to address a forecast overspend of £0.25m to ensure that expenditure at year end will be within budget.
- Implementation of capital programme schemes is going according to plan, although expenditure at this time of the year is typically low.
- Staff sickness and turnover are at reasonable levels and are significantly lower than in previous years. Although the turnover within both Leisure Services and Social Services and Housing is higher than the Council would prefer, steps are being taken by the respective Directors to address the situation.
- The agreement of a new structure for the Chief Executive's Office has provided an opportunity to address a number of major priorities and will begin to pay dividends in the coming quarters.

- 6.3 At a departmental level some of the more notable achievements from across the Council's services are as follows:
- 67.3% of all three year olds being in education (ie all who wanted a place).
  - Attendance at primary schools reaching our target rate of 95% and attendance at secondary schools being only 0.2% below our target rate of 92.5%.
  - All children on the Child Protection Register with a key worker.
  - Improved attendance at Coral Reef.
  - Increased opening hours at both Bracknell and Sandhurst libraries.
  - High levels of user satisfaction from Leisure Services customer surveys.
  - Major Planning Briefs approved for the key sites at Garth Hill and the Eastern Gateway.
  - Good progress in developing the Council's scrutiny and procurement functions.
- 6.4 There are, however, a small number of areas where there are emerging concerns. These were highlighted in the report along with the management actions being taken to address them. Executive portfolio holders will continue to monitor the effectiveness of these actions over the coming months.
- 6.5 Overall, however, the Executive noted that the Council is making sound progress towards the achievement of its objectives, largely as a result of the hard work and dedication of its staff. Although there is no room for complacency, there is confidence that the Council is in a position to move forward together and continually improve the services that we provide.

## **7 LOOKING AHEAD**

- 7.1 The next Forward Plan will be published on 1 October 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](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk), where you can also find full details on decisions taken by individual portfolio holders.