

**COUNCIL
3 DECEMBER 2003**

EXECUTIVE REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Since the Executive report to the Council meeting on 24 September 2003, the Executive has met twice on 21 October and 18 November 2003. The Executive Decisions taken at those meetings 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. COUNCIL STRATEGY

2.1 Strategic Objectives 2003 – 2007

- 2.1.1 Each year the Council considers and publishes its Medium Term Objectives (MTOs) for the next three-five years. This is an important part of the Council's overall strategic and performance management arrangements, ensuring that the organisation focuses on the issues that are important to Members.
- 2.1.2 Following the election of a new Council in May 2003, Executive Members, with support from Corporate Management Team, have undertaken a major review of the Council's key objectives for the period to 2007. In order to provide a greater focus on the delivery and implementation of key objectives, the MTOs have been revised into a new format covering fifteen key strategic areas. These cover all aspects of services within the Borough as follows:
- To lead the regeneration of Bracknell to provide a town fit for the 21st century.
 - To promote sustainable communities through innovative housing strategies and effective maintenance.
 - To provide a safe framework for developing the Community.
 - To improve art, culture, sport and recreation provision within the Borough.
 - To work with partners to improve health provision within the Borough.
 - To work with the Voluntary Sector to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups.
 - To raise achievement in schools.
 - To review the provision of school places in Bracknell.
 - To increase participation in adult learning to improve basic skills for employment.
 - To achieve a better match of Special Education provision to need.
 - To create and maintain a quality environment.
 - To develop and implement transport policies that improves movement and maintenance.
 - To improve outcomes for children.
 - To improve older people's lives.
 - To maintain quality and extend access to all services.

- 2.1.3 These fifteen objectives represent the major ambitions for the Council. Each is supported by a number of specific 'sub-objectives' or tasks that would be undertaken to achieve the overall aim.
- 2.1.4 It was agreed that the draft objectives should be approved as the basis for wide-ranging consultation with partner organisations and the public. This is currently underway, including a two page feature in Town & Country which was delivered to every address in the Borough. The results will be the subject of a report to the Executive on 16 December.

2.2 CPA Improvement Reporting – Self Assessment

- 2.2.1 On 27 September the Council received guidance from the Audit Commission setting out how they intend to undertake a 'qualitative assessment of the Council's approach to securing continuous improvement'. The assessment will be an important element of the CPA refresh in 2003, the results of which are due to be published on 18 December. Whilst the assessment does not have a direct impact on the Council's CPA categorisation, it will be a publicly reported statement of the Council's 'direction of travel' in delivering continuous improvement.
- 2.2.2 The Council's self assessment, approved by the Executive, has been produced having regard to the Audit Commission's guidance by concentrating on the key areas for improvement identified in the Council's CPA Improvement Plan, namely:
- Social Cohesion (including Race Equality)
 - Infrastructure (Risk Management and Procurement)
 - Scrutiny Processes, and
 - Transport
- 2.2.3 The assessment demonstrates substantial progress and a number of achievements over the last nine months and has been accepted informally as a realistic self appraisal by the Commission.

2.3 Every Child Matters

- 2.3.1 The Green Paper, *Every Child Matters*, was released on 8 September 2003. It is published alongside two other documents *Keeping Children Safe* (the Government's detailed response to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report and the Joint Chief Inspector's report, *Safeguarding Children*) and *Youth Justice, the next steps*. There is a period for consultation which closes on 1 December 2003. Following this, the Government has indicated that it will move to legislation 'as soon as parliamentary time permits'.
- 2.3.2 *Every Child Matters* has far reaching implications for the type of services that are delivered on a local level and the way in which they are organised. For this reason it is important to have wide ranging local discussion involving different parts of the Council and partner organisations.
- 2.3.3 Officers from the most directly affected departments have had opportunities to attend a variety of briefing sessions. Information from these sessions is being cascaded to relevant groups within the Council, and a briefing for all Members was held on 3 November.

- 2.3.4 The Executive has agreed a response to the green paper, in consultation with our partners. This is generally supportive of the approach adopted in the Green Paper and, given its importance, is attached as Annex A to this report. The agreed response has also been forwarded to the Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) for its endorsement.

3 CORPORATE SERVICES

3.1 Implementing Electronic Government Return (leg3)

- 3.1.1 The Executive has approved the Implementing Electronic Government Return (IEG3) for submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The IEG3 return is an essential part of the Government's national monitoring process for assessing electronic local service delivery capability against the 2005 target and for supporting the aims of the National Strategy for local e-government.
- 3.1.2 The key focus of activity since the production of IEG2 (October 2002) has centred around a major project to transfer key corporate systems from the legacy mainframe computer to modern server based computers. This project has included the implementation of a new corporate financial information management system, the development of a centralised address database and the procurement of new social services, housing, revenues, benefits, personnel and payroll systems. This work has laid the foundation for the delivery of better services in the future by modernising computer systems and changing business processes.
- 3.1.3 In addition, the Council has formalised and agreed an approach to modernising customer service with the adoption of a Customer Contact Strategy. The IT team has completed work on the future restructuring and introduction of a content management system and redesign of the web site *Bracknell Forest Online*. The *My Bracknell-Forest* web portal was launched allowing secure personalised internet access for all residents. The web portal has been instrumental in ensuring sustained progress towards the Best Value Electronic Government target of 100% of services capable of electronic delivery by 31 December 2005. As at September 2003, excellent progress has been made towards this target by enabling 67% of services electronically. However, the Council recognises that the target as currently defined provides a framework for delivery of e-Government but this must be realistically linked to local customer demand for electronic service delivery. The Council will continue to consult with the community and key stakeholders to ensure that future on-line services provide real and tangible benefits.

4 EDUCATION

4.1 South Bracknell Review

- 4.1.1 The Executive has agreed to initiate a consultation with a view to reducing the number of surplus places in primary schools in South Bracknell. Despite significant housing development, the number of surplus places is increasing and a review is necessary to ensure that the viability of schools in the area is maintained in the longer term.

4.1.2 A number of options have been considered by the Council. The consultation indicates that the Council's preferred option is Option 4 which would remove 503 places and reduce the overall surplus to 12.6% by 2008. This option comprises a number of measures:

- a) Amalgamating Fox Hill Primary and Wildridings Primary on the Wildridings site.
- b) Amalgamating The Pines Infant and Juniors to a 210 place school.
- c) Reducing Birch Hill to a 449 place school.

4.1.3 The other options identified for inclusion in the consultation are:

- Option 5, which removes 480 places and reduces the overall surplus to 13.2% by 2008 by:
 - a) Amalgamating Fox Hill Primary and Wildridings Primary on the Wildridings site.
 - b) Reducing Birch Hill to a 449 place school.
 - c) Reducing Crown Wood to a 210 place school.
- Option 6, which removes 527 places and reduces the overall surplus to 14.1 % by 2008 by:
 - a) Closing Wooden Hill.
 - b) Reducing Crown Wood to a 210 place school.

4.1.4 A series of public meetings are being held before the closing date for the consultation exercise in December. The Executive will then consider all points made before determining the way forward.

4.2 Garth Hill/Wick Hill Masterplan

4.2.1 The Executive has approved a masterplan for the redevelopment of the existing school and college site at Garth Hill/Wick Hill, Bullbrook, as a non statutory planning framework which will inform the preparation of the Local Development Framework for the site. 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 305 new dwellings;
- improved pitches on the Bull Lane playing field, new all-weather sports pitch and open space serving the new residential area.

4.2.2 Ultimately, the proposals can only go ahead if sufficient funding can be generated from the sale of the land and from government funding. However, to facilitate the redevelopment, the Executive has authorised the Director of Education to proceed with an application for the disposal of school land to the Secretary of State for Education in accordance with Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA) concerning the disposal of land at Garth Hill College for housing purposes to raise funding to support the building of the new Garth Hill College building.

- 4.2.3 The Garth Hill/Wick Hill Masterplan has evolved from a desire to redevelop the Bracknell and Wokingham College site at Wick Hill to provide a ground-breaking, first class 16-19 education facility. The College has been recognised as having an excellent rating in technology and this recognition entitles the college to funding to upgrade its facilities. This funding is only available for a limited period.

5 PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION

5.1 Eastern Gateway Planning Brief

- 5.1.1 Following completion of the public consultation exercise, the Executive has considered a number of proposed changes to the Eastern Gateway Planning Brief covering London Road and the Eastern Business Area (The "Eastern Gateway"), comprising land in Bullbrook, Priestwood & Garth and Wildridings & Central wards. The Brief is intended to provide an appropriate planning framework to act as a catalyst for regeneration and enhancement of the area.

- 5.1.2 The area contains some of the Borough's key development sites, including the Met Office HQ, Eastern Employment Area and Bracknell & Wokingham College sites. The Borough Council had previously agreed to prepare a development brief for the Met Office site, but considered that the opportunity existed to deal with this key site along with the surrounding area in a more comprehensive and integrated manner. This would help to unlock the potential of sites within the area, and in particular the identified key sites, leading to a more effective planning and design solution and the reinvigoration of the area as a whole.

- 5.1.3 The Executive duly approved the Brief as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

5.2 Bracknell Town Centre - Partnership Funding For Renewable Energy

- 5.2.1 The Executive approved a proposal to work in collaboration with other European partner projects to secure and use European Union funding for renewable energy as part of the town centre regeneration. The partnership approach is necessary to meet the needs of EU project rules controlling grant of funding for renewable energy as part of urban regeneration projects.

- 5.2.2 The Bracknell town centre masterplan promotes the delivery of a renewable energy "flagship". The council was successful in June 2003 in attracting funding from central government (through the Energy Saving Trust) to pay for a technical and financial study into the feasibility of using renewable energy in the town centre regeneration. This study is underway and is also examining the scope for creating an Energy Services Company (ESCo). The ESCo would supply energy to users in the town centre and would provide investment opportunities for the council, landowners and the local community, with the potential for a longer term income stream.

- 5.2.3 The European Union is inviting bids under a new funding programme, Concerto. This initiative promotes renewable energy and energy efficiency in large scale regeneration projects. Each bid must be submitted by a group of at least three EU countries. The value of each bid will be some £6-10m. This might provide some £2-3m for the Bracknell project to fund capital works, research and marketing. The closing date for applications is 17 December 2003. This relates well to the timing of outputs from the current feasibility study.

- 5.2.4 The Council has been working with Thames Valley Energy, the local renewable energy agency, to assemble a bid and the most likely partner projects are major renewal/regeneration proposals in Zaragoza, Spain (<http://www.valdespartera.org>) and Lyon, France (<http://www.lyon-confluence.fr>).

6 SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE SERVICES & HOUSING

6.1 Adult Services Day Opportunities Review

- 6.1.1 The Executive has agreed new strategies for Adult Services' Day Opportunities Services from April 2004, following extensive reviews of these services. These are based on the principles of person-centred approaches to support, promoting independence and targeting those most in need.
- 6.1.2 To take this forward, a sub-group of the Learning Disability Partnership Board is being established involving all stakeholders and particularly service users to implement the changes in Day Opportunities for people with learning disabilities. The changes will be based on the consultation process "My Voice, My Choice".
- 6.1.3 Day Opportunities for Older People and People with a Physical Disability will be centralised in the Downside Resource Centre and, as a result, Johnstone Court Day Centre is to close. The new service will provide services from the Downside resource centre as well as seeking to maximise access to existing community facilities. To support the changes, a package of measures is being put in place to support people who currently attend day services to ensure that they can continue to be supported and enable them to be part of community life.
- 6.1.4 These changes stem from the Joint Review of Bracknell Forest Social Services undertaken by the SSI/Audit Commission in 2000 which identified that the Council's day care provision was not meeting the needs of the whole community and was in need of significant modernisation. In 2002, two major reviews of the day services provided to older people and people with learning disabilities were launched. Underlying the two reviews was an aim to promote social inclusion and match service provision to the needs of individual service users. Implementation of the proposals will allow the Council to provide more appropriate support to a greater number of people than is currently the case.

6.2 Annual Review Of Social Services Performance 2002-2003

- 6.2.1 Every year the performance of councils with social services responsibilities is scrutinised by the Social Services Inspectorate leading to an annual statement of performance in the form of a letter. This statement identifies strengths and areas for development and is used to inform the final 'star rating' performance award for the local authority from the Department of Health.
- 6.2.2 The Executive received and noted this for our department in October. Subsequently, the Council has been notified that the service's "star rating" has been increased to two. This represents a massive achievement over the last three years of which Members and staff can be justly proud.

7 LOOKING AHEAD

- 7.1 The next Forward Plan will be published on 1 December 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.

EVERY CHILD MATTERS
CONSULTATION RESPONSE

**Bracknell Forest Borough Council and
Bracknell Forest Children & Young People's Local Strategic Partnership**

We welcome the publication of *Every Child Matters* and the clear focus that it brings on issues important to the well-being of children and young people both nationally and in Bracknell Forest. At local level, we have already created a Children & Young People's Local Strategic Partnership which has identified very similar outcomes to those expressed in the document. Within that Partnership we have begun to work on many of the issues set out in the Green Paper and have begun to experience the benefits of a co-operative and collaborative approach. This is manifested in the work that we have overseen around issues such as IRT and the preventative strategy, the multi-agency framework for assessment, the development of a BEST Project, the teenage pregnancy strategy, the Children's Fund and the development of CAMHS.

Our response to the key themes set out in *Every Child Matters* is as follows:

1 Targeted Services based within universal provision

We agree with the intention to support vulnerable children and young people through the provision of excellent universal services for all children and young people. We believe that this is the best way to protect children and young people who may be in need or who may otherwise be vulnerable. We are keen to explore further opportunities that may be presented through locating services closer to children, young people and their families, building on the experiences that we already have in Bracknell Forest.

We recognise that there will always be a need to consider those most in need who may from time to time need specialist services and intervention.

In order to ensure effective service delivery we would urge further consideration of those issues that cause a tension between the 'school standards' agenda and the 'inclusion' agenda. We would not wish to see the drive for higher standards weakened in any way as we are committed to all children and young people achieving their potential but we would wish to see more rapid progress towards the removal of those barriers that stand in the way of greater inclusion. Schools (and other significant agencies with whom young people interact) will be crucial to the success of local delivery and they must be brought on board as 'part of' children and young people's services rather than 'served' by them.

We welcome the identification of Health Services as being one of the key providers of universal services for children and young people but are disappointed that the major issue of the prioritisation given to these services is not developed within the Green Paper. We believe that children and young people's health issues should be fundamental to the priorities of the NHS. We are particularly concerned about the changing role of health visitors who, to us, appear to be moving away from providing universal preventative services.

The opportunities to involve children and young people in developing appropriate services should not be missed, nor should the opportunity to develop children and young people's capacity to become more self reliant through education. The document fails to acknowledge the distinct differences between childhood and adolescence in terms of the level of engagement which the child or young person is able to have in developing personal choice, making decisions and taking responsibility for their actions. It needs to recognise that the cycle of decreasing dependency from childhood to adolescence is crucial to the design of responsive service provision. Increasing active engagement in service planning, monitoring and review is vital in ensuring that appropriate delivery is maintained throughout the 0-19 age range.

2 Integrated working

We welcome the emphasis that is placed within the Green Paper on the development of integrated working. The multi-disciplinary team Youth Offending Team that has been created in Bracknell Forest has been particularly successful in bringing together individuals from different professional backgrounds into a team with a common purpose. A similar approach is being developed through the Behaviour Education Support Team (BEST) project locally and within local Connexions delivery mechanisms. We can see this approach, based on a common assessment process and the identification of a 'lead professional', providing more coherent support to vulnerable children and young people. As is indicated above, we would want to see those services located 'near' to children and young people and their families – schools, children's centres, primary health care settings and youth and community centres. This would require the full participation of all of the key deliverers of services to children and young people, especially the key statutory agencies – Education, Social Services and Health.

3 Supporting Children and Families

We welcome all aspects of this part of *Every Child Matters*. We believe that strong families are the basis for good outcomes for children and young people and would want to be in a position of developing, resources permitting, the services that we are able to deliver locally.

We believe that some parents need to be reminded of their responsibilities when appropriate and we would therefore support those measures that are designed to put in place a degree of compulsory action.

We welcome the emphasis on and proposals for developing the capacity of alternative family based care, but have concerns that this will always be a limited resource.

4 Early Intervention

We welcome the continued emphasis that is placed on early intervention. We have been fortunate in Bracknell Forest to receive funding to provide an early years place for all of our three-year-olds, but there are other parts of the preventative agenda for which we have received limited additional resource, yet we still have pockets of relative deprivation.

We believe that the key to this rests with the success with which we are able to develop appropriate information sharing mechanisms between agencies. We have made some progress and have used the flexibility's that are set out in the Green Paper. We would hope for more national guidance on some of these matters as the 'trailblazers' begin to evaluate their work. This is particularly important with regard to information systems and on data protection issues. We would expect the Government to take a strong lead on developing the latter removing current data sharing constraints and changing the law as necessary. Sharing information held by health services remains a considerable challenge.

It has been acknowledged that there are issues over the capacity of the voluntary sector locally to meet the demands that the Green Paper implies in order to provide the range and choice envisaged.

5 Accountability and Governance

We recognise the desirability of there being a designated lead officer locally who is accountable for children's services. We believe that the role should extend beyond that set out in the Green Paper i.e. education and children's social services.

The post holder must have the ability to influence the working of those other services in the local area that have an impact on children if the aspirations of the Green Paper are to be turned into a reality. We support, therefore, the longer term intention to bring key services for children together under the Director of Children's Services as part of wide ranging Children's Trusts. We agree that these should be part of the local authority and reporting to locally elected Councillors. We would hope that there will be sufficient time to learn from the experiences of the 'pathfinder trusts' and that there is an opportunity to evaluate the models that emerge. We would want the flexibility to develop a Children's Trust that suits local circumstances.

Given the issue of size and numbers of unitary authorities in Berkshire, the provision of health services would be a specific challenge for formal constitution under a Director of Children in each authority area. In particular, specialist children's services, which are currently shared, would not benefit from devolution into three separate Children's Trusts in the east of Berkshire.

The other dimension for consideration is the integration across the acute setting. We learn from recent childcare tragedies the issues in relation to communication across acute and local services. We will need to ensure that we establish a system that improves and strengthens these links. There is a potential for further fragmentation if we do not get this right.

We require more time to consider the merits or demerits of formally bringing services for children and young people together. We believe that the pace of change and the way in which this is done should be a matter for local decision making. We agree with the principle of specified and clear national standards for the provision of services to vulnerable children. Within the context of these standards we would hope to have flexibility on service delivery to reflect local circumstances.

We suggest that there should be a statutory duty placed on all local authorities to convene a Children & Young People's Local Strategic Partnership. The establishment of such a body is an opportunity to rationalise the number of other partnerships that exist.

We support the proposal to create statutory Local Safeguarding Children's Boards and would want to see a strong link between them and the local CYPLSP and the possibility of there being one body including all of these functions.

A strong local Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership would be the local commissioning body to oversee the proposals for and development of a local Children's Trust in due course.

We support the proposal to legislate to create a lead council Member for children.

We welcome the integration of national policy for children and young people under the Minister for Children, Young People and Families. We believe that this will bring together a number of different policy initiatives into a more coherent whole. We would question why the particular issues that relate to young offenders and children's health is still separate. We are also in favour of the appointment of a Children's Commissioner.

6 Workforce Issues

In order to be secure in our ability to deliver the above we support the attention that the Green Paper gives to Workforce Issues.

We welcome moves to enhance the skills and effectiveness of those working with children. We would want to see a 'common core' of knowledge, skill acquisition and competencies' that all staff working with children develop.

We support the strategies set out in the Green Paper to improve recruitment and retention. We have frequently been hampered from making the progress that we would wish through our inability to recruit suitably qualified staff. We recognise that these issues are particularly acute in London and the South East.