

**COUNCIL  
21 JANUARY 2004**

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**EXECUTIVE REPORT**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Since the Executive report to the Council meeting on 3 December 2003, the Executive will have met twice on 16 December 2003 and 20 January 2004. The Executive Decisions taken at the 16 December meeting are brought to the attention of the Council in this report. A separate report covering decisions made at the 20 January meeting will be circulated on the following day.
- 1.2 The decisions have been summarised by reference to the relevant portfolio within which they fall.

**2. COUNCIL STRATEGY**

**2.1 Restructuring Bracknell Forest Borough Council**

- 2.1.1 The Executive agreed in principle to the restructuring of Bracknell Forest Borough Council to reduce the number of departments from five to four, thereby generating a reduction in staff costs of approximately £0.5m. Whilst the proposal emerged during the preparation of the draft budget for 2004/05, the new structure should provide a more efficient structure for the authority.
- 2.1.2 The Employment Committee will be asked to agree the final details of the restructuring at a special meeting in March following the period of staff consultation, with a view to the new structure being implemented on 1 May 2005.

**2.2 Budget Proposals 2004/05**

- 2.2.1 The Executive considered five separate reports in relation to the draft budget proposals which are currently the subject of consultation with the community before coming back to the Council for determination on 3 March 2004.
- 2.2.2 In finalising the draft proposals, the Executive took account of:
- 1 The outcome of financial consultations with Schools in relation to school budgets; and,
  - 2 The results of the consultation exercise in relation to the 15 strategic objectives which the Council will be seeking to pursue over the period to May 2007.
- 2.2.3 The Executive noted the views of schools and the Schools Forum, in particular their suggested priorities in relation to the budget pressures. It also agreed that the Borough Council should, and has, notified the DfES that it will comply with the requirement to pass on the required increase in the Schools Budget.
- 2.2.4 With regard to the Strategic Objectives, the Executive welcomed the general support for these arising from the consultation exercise, although it was stressed that

delivery of these aspirations would be dependent on funding and the extent to which other pressures emerge in the next three years. Within this framework it was acknowledged that the 15 objectives and the targets to be met in pursuing them provided clearly defined objectives and priorities which would enable the Council to focus its efforts and guide decisions on resources.

2.2.5 Taken together the revenue budget, housing revenue account and capital programme represents a package which prioritises five key areas and begins a three year investment in services designed to:

- Make Bracknell Forest a better place to live, work and visit by investing an additional;
  - £1.25m on the visual environment,
  - £4.0m on highways, footways and cycleways,
  - £0.15m on local recycling facilities,
  - £5.2m on window replacements in Council housing,
  - £2.7m on central heating system in Council housing,
  - £5.7m on other improvements to the quality of housing in the Borough  
(These developments respond to key new Medium Term Objectives 2, 11 and 12.)
- Make Bracknell Forest a better place to learn, grow and achieve, through spending;
  - £53m over the next three years to upgrade and maintain school buildings, including major refurbishments of Garth Hill and Brakenhale,
  - An additional £2.94m on schools next year – the full amount provided by the Government,
  - £410,000 on a new library in Crowthorne.  
(Medium Term Objectives 4, 7, 9 and 10.)
- Make Bracknell Forest a better place for recreation, sport, arts and culture, including;
  - Investing an additional £0.6m in sports and leisure facilities, including building a new fitness centre at a cost of £390,000,  
(Key new Medium Term Objective 4.)
- Make our services easy to access and use, through;
  - Continued investment in e-Government of £0.6m  
(Medium Term Objective 15.)
- Continuing to ensure economy, efficiency and effectiveness of service provision, by accommodating all new growth within the current base budget

2.2.6 Consultation on these proposals is currently underway. Full details in relation to the draft proposals for the:

- Housing Revenue Account 2004/05
- Capital Programme 2004/05 - 2006/07
- General Fund Revenue Budget 2004/05

can be viewed at [www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk).

### **2.3 Community Cohesion Strategy**

2.3.1 The Executive approved the Council's draft Corporate Community Cohesion Strategy, authorising officers to continue to refine and develop the Strategy and to begin to deliver the Outline Implementation Plan in the draft Strategy. A consultation exercise is now underway.

2.3.2 The publication of the draft strategy represents an important milestone in the process for delivering a key element of the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment Improvement Plan.

### **2.4 Corporate Performance Overview Report**

2.4.1 The Executive received the Chief Executive's latest report on the performance of the Council during the period 1 July-30 September 2003.

2.4.2 It was noted that performance had been generally good across all of the Council's services, with the vast majority of targets being met. At a corporate level:

- There are no major financial issues at this stage.
- Implementation of capital programme schemes is going according to plan, although rescheduling of the major Lily Hill project will result in the majority of expenditure for this project falling into 2004/5, thus reducing the capital spend for 2003/04.
- Good progress is being made towards the achievement of the majority of the Local Public Service Agreement targets
- Staff sickness levels has decreased for all departments except Social Services & Housing and Leisure, although even in these areas the levels are significantly lower than in previous years.
- Staff turnover has increased slightly across the Council with the exception of Corporate Services.

2.4.3 The Executive noted that performance had improved over the last quarter in relation to:

- The average length of stay in bed & breakfast is now 6.5 weeks.
- In education, Key Stage results had continued to improve with those at Key Stage 2 amongst the highest in the country.
- The Section 106 agreement had been concluded in relation to the Staff College
- Additional resources had been allocated to the Best Value Review of Transport, and the review is progressing well, with consultation and comparison work being actioned.
- The determination of planning applications within government targets has increased (with the exception of 'other' applications). 88% of all applications are now determined under delegated authority and new scheme of delegation should result in continued improvement in meeting targets.

2.4.4 The following areas require more attention:

- Benefits - Performance of key indicators for speed of processing claims and notifications of change of circumstances had fallen marginally since the previous

quarter and were still outside our targets, although the percentage of renewal claims processed on time had increased.

- Invoice payments - Payment of invoices within 30 days was still well below the 95% target but the new Director of Corporate Services had developed a detailed action plan to deal with the backlog, with a target to improve monthly performance rates to 90% by January.
- New housing completions - The number of new housing completions during the year is below the projected target partly, at least, due to the national changes in funding of social housing.

### **3 ENVIRONMENT**

#### **3.1 Policy Framework for Amen Corner (Draft for Consultation)**

- 3.1.1 The Executive has begun the process of developing a planning policy for the Amen Corner area. The Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan is currently void of planning policy for this area, other than a non-statutory 'boxed' notation on the proposals map.
- 3.1.2 Subject to the Executive Member approving any minor changes, the Executive has agreed that the draft Amen Corner Planning Framework and draft Local Plan Proposal for Amen Corner should be approved for public consultation for a period of 5 weeks beginning 5 January 2004.

### **4 LOOKING AHEAD**

- 4.1 The next Forward Plan will be published on 1 February 2004 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.