

**COUNCIL  
23 JUNE 2004**

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**EXECUTIVE REPORT  
(SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT)**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report supplements the information contained in Item 6 by providing a commentary on the items dealt with at the meeting of the Executive on 15 June 2004.

**2. ENVIRONMENT**

**2.1 Amen Corner Local Plan Alteration**

- 2.1.1 Members will be aware from the report on the Executive meeting on 18 May 2004, that approval was given to consult on a Local Plan Alteration relating to land at Amen Corner. Amen Corner is the only location within the Borough without Local Plan coverage. The Borough Council is required to have coverage for the whole of its administrative area. Amen Corner has been left as a void area since the adoption of the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan in January 2002 in line with the local plan inspector's recommendation at the time.

- 2.1.2 The Executive had considered three options:

1. To move forward with the Local Plan Proposal consulted upon in January 2004;
2. To move forward with a Local Plan Alteration (responding to existing policies in the adopted plan) or
3. To deal with this area under the emerging Local Development Framework.

- 2.1.3 Option 2 had been chosen as the preferred option being both in conformity with the Berkshire Structure Plan and providing a defensible settlement boundary.

- 2.1.4 A number of issues have been raised by the latest consultation. The major elements were that various consultees believed:

- That the issue of conformity with the Structure Plan could be overcome, whilst still pursuing major development.
- That the Council should continue with the framework and promote major development.
- That a phased approach should be taken and a smaller scale development proposed in the first instance, including some of the previously developed land and greenfield land within the settlement.

- That Buckhurst Moors should be included within the settlement boundary as it is an existing employment area.

2.1.5 The Executive noted that the consultation responses had confirmed that there remained a local desire to see a more comprehensive approach to the redevelopment of Amen Corner, more in keeping with the original view of the Council. In view of this, the Executive decided that it would be preferable to look again at the issue as part of the work on the Local Development Framework rather than seeking to impose a Local Plan alteration that met neither the aspirations of the Council nor the local community.

## **2.2 Food Law Enforcement Plan 2004/05**

2.2.1 The Executive approved the draft plan for Food Law Enforcement 2004/05 for the purposes of consultation prior to its adoption. The Plan addresses all matters relating to food hygiene, food standards and the sale of animal foodstuff.

2.2.2 Following the consultation period, the Plan will be formally submitted to Council for approval as part of the Council's Policy Framework.

2.2.3 The Plan for Food Law Enforcement is a 5-year plan and has been improved several times since the Executive first approved it in June 2002. As now drafted, it is comprised of a core document and five appendices. This will make it easier to read and less complex to update. The intention is to further improve on the presentation over the next 12 months.

2.2.4 Progress against the Plan is measured monthly and reported to Members in the Quarterly Operations reports.

## **2.3 Central Berkshire Waste PFI Progress Report**

2.3.1 The Executive received a report detailing decisions taken by the Joint Waste Disposal Board in relation to the tendering exercise for the re3 Central Berkshire Waste PFI Project.

2.3.2 The Council is working in Partnership with Reading Borough Council and Wokingham District Council on the re3 Central Berkshire Waste PFI initiative. Having been successful in being awarded £37 million of PFI credits, the procurement process has been proceeding to the Invitation to Negotiate (ITN) stage at which point there have been three bids from two contractors. These bids have been evaluated and were the subject of a report to the Joint Waste Disposal Board on 26 May 2004.

2.3.3 The report recommended that prior to the de-selection of either of the parties and/or selection of one or both parties to progress to Best and Final Offer (BaFO) or preferred bidder status the Councils should undertake further analysis, clarification and negotiations with both bidders.

2.3.4 The Executive endorsed this approach, noting that much of the additional work will be completed by the end of June 2004 and the outcomes will be reported to the next meeting of the Joint Waste Disposal Board.

### 3. EDUCATION

#### 3.1 Disposal of Land at the Brakenhale School

3.1.1 Members may recall that in June last year the Executive instructed the Director of Education to submit an application for the disposal of school land at Brakenhale School to the Secretary of State for Education in accordance with Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. That application was successful and the Executive has now agreed to proceed with the sale of this land on the open market for housing purposes. In addition, the Executive has agreed to proceed with consultation on an outline planning brief for this area of land.

3.1.2 The proceeds from the land sale will be used to reprovide the sports facilities elsewhere on the site and for improving Brakenhale School buildings and facilities.

### 4. COUNCIL STRATEGY

#### 4.1 Corporate Performance Overview Report

4.1.1 The Executive received the Chief Executive's latest Performance Overview Report detailing the performance of the Council over the quarter January – March 2004. As with all the previous three quarters, this quarter has seen good performance across all of the Council's services, with all major targets being broadly met. The Executive's attention was drawn, in particular, to:

- **Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) - the Bracknell Forest Partnership (BFP).** After securing agreement from the original LSP Core Group, a new Partnership Board has been formed. This comprises a three-way split of representatives from the business, community and voluntary sectors, with an observer from the Government Office for the South East. A half-day event is to be held on 28 June at the Grange Hotel to start the process of reviewing the Bracknell Forest Community Plan by looking at the current community priorities and seeing if there are any gaps or changes needed. The keynote speaker will be Paul Martin, Director of the Government Office for the South East, who will focus on the economic and social pressures in the Southeast Region to provide important context for the update of the Community Plan.
- **Local Public Service Agreement second generation (LPSA 2G)** – Work is continuing on the first phase of this second LPSA, with the development of ideas for the priority areas for setting targets.
- **Integration of Services to Children and Young People** – a project team, including the PCT, has been formed to take forward this piece of work over the next two years, building on the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters.'
- **National SmartCard** - The £4.1 million National Smartcard Project, managed by the Council, came to an end on March 31. One of 23 national projects, funded by the ODPM in order to aid local authorities e-enable priority services by the end of 2005 it has completed on time and budget and its outputs have been well received by the ODPM, particularly so in the light of the new mandatory requirements for all local authorities to implement smartcard schemes by 2006.

- **Financial issues** – It is anticipated that by the end of the financial year approximately 74% will have been spent leaving £7m to be carried forward into 2004/05. This is a similar level to previous years and is consistent with the revenue budget interest projections for 2004/05. The outturn on the revenue expenditure will be finalised in the coming weeks – although this is not expected to identify significant changes from the figures previously presented to Members.

4.1.2 At a departmental level some areas of notable performance over the last quarter include:

- In the Audit Commission annual survey of schools' satisfaction, 30 out of 76 services ranked in the top ten LEAs, with BFBC having the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest overall rating in England
- The percentage of Special Educational Needs statements prepared (including exceptions) continues to improve quarter on quarter and year on year.
- This quarter has seen the completion of 40 new units of accommodation for local people with varying housing needs
- The Benefits team have improved their speed of processing.
- The average time to relet voided properties has hit its target of 27 days.
- As at 31 March 04 there were no families in B&B accommodation for more than 6 weeks in line with new Government targets, although the average time including single person households remains relatively high at 11 weeks.
- Determination of planning applications has continued to improve and has exceeded targets in one area
- There has been a great improvement in the number of statutory premises inspections, this is despite previous shortfalls due to staff vacancies. (One area of Trading Standards is still seeing poor performance in inspections however all posts are now filled)
- Payment of invoices continues to improve and is at 82% for this quarter
- Payroll ran the first 'live' in-house payroll successfully in March, following a seven month implementation and in the first month improved on the performance of the previous external contractors by 25%
- % of council tax collected represents almost the best result ever achieved by the Council!

4.1.3 Inevitably, in an organisation as large and diverse as the Council there are also areas of concern. CMT has identified the following as being of particular significance:

- **Benefits and Development Control** – As indicated above, performance in both areas has significantly improved in this last quarter which is encouraging. However, CMT will continue to monitor progress closely.

- **Permanent exclusions from school** - This academic year has seen a rise in the number of permanently excluded pupils from school (from 21 to 32). Officers are discussing this with schools. More positively, school attendance has continued to improve.
- **Community Safety** - Staff vacancies in this area are now being filled with the involvement of the Police. This means that the Council is now in a better position to support the CDRP structure more effectively.
- **Decommissioning of the Mainframe – replacement of Council Tax and Benefits System** - The 'go-live' date for the replacement of the Council Tax and Benefits system has slipped. This delay is due entirely to the supplier. The contract explicitly specifies that if such a delay occurs the supplier will be responsible for funding any additional costs incurred by the Council.
- **Local Public Service Agreement** - Out of the 12 targets, 5 will or already have met their targets, 4 are unlikely to meet their targets by the end of the agreement period, although they may achieve 60% of the target and therefore be entitled to receive some funding reward. The remaining 3 are higher risk targets. However of the total 7 potential risk targets, 3 have the potential to achieve greater performance with reinvestment of monies. An assessment is being made of whether there would be benefit in reinvesting any unspent monies.

4.1.4 Other less significant areas of concern at this stage of the year include:

- % of children Looked After in family placement or placed for adoption has decreased slightly from 77% to 75%.
- Average speed of assessment following referral of clients has decreased in both categories measured i.e. within 14 days and within 28 days. However the assessments within 14 days (76%) is still well above the target set of 70%.
- Youth attendances has not met its target (target 46,872, year performance 36,903) - Edgbarrow and Sandhurst have both been more than 50% down because they had no full time member of staff for most of the year; Whitegrove is now a part time centre (previously full time); Great Hollands is delivered by a voluntary group who have had a 25% reduction in their attendances; Priestwood has suffered from subsidence and the Info@active Bus was off the road for 10 weeks due to its unreliability. While this is disappointing and staff resources are now in place to improve attendances, Members should note that the Youth Service is still exceeding targets set by Government relating to the number of young people it is in contact with.

4.1.5 In conclusion, the Council continues to make sound progress towards the achievement of its objectives and the vast majority of targets for 2003/04 have been delivered. This reflects the CPA assessment of 'Good' and the fact that the Council was identified as the 7<sup>th</sup> highest service improver nationally in the period to December 2003. The Executive noted that the Chief Executive believes we remain well placed to move forward and continually improve the services that we provide.