

**COUNCIL**  
**1 DECEMBER 2004**  
**(7.30 pm – 9.00 pm)**

Present: The Mayor (Councillor Browne), Councillors Adams, Baily, Mrs Ballin, Barnard, Mrs Barnard, Beadsley, Bettison, Birch, Mrs Birch, Brunel-Walker, Dudley, Earwicker, Edger, Finch, Finnie, Grayson, Harrison, Miss Haydon, Mrs Hayes, Jones, Kendall, McLean, Mihell, Mills, North, Osborne, Packham, Piasecki, Sargeant, Thomas, Thompson, Turrell, Wade, and Ward.

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs Beadsley, Leake, McCracken, Mrs Pile, Mrs Ryder, Mrs Shillcock and Worrall.

The Mayor's Chaplain, the Reverend Guy Cole, St Michael's Church, Easthampstead, opened the proceedings with prayers.

46. **Minutes (Item 2)**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 27 October 2004 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Mayor.

47. **Declarations of Interest (Item 3)**

No member of the Council declared any personal or prejudicial interest in any item of business on the agenda for the meeting.

48. **Mayor's Announcements (Item 4)**

Award of Quality Parish Status

The Mayor invited Members to join him in congratulating the Council's colleagues at Sandhurst Town Council, who had recently achieved the award of Quality Parish Status, being only the 63<sup>rd</sup> out of the 9,500 parishes in the Country to do so.

Green Apple Award

The Mayor announced that he had been advised by Councillor Mills that the Council had been awarded the Green Apple Award in recognition of the Council's innovative ways of working with local commerce, industry and other organisations. The Mayor invited Councillor Finch to speak on the Council's award as the Member who received the award on the Council's behalf.

Mayor's Charity

- (i) The Mayor announced that he had recently received a number of generous donations to his Charity. The Crowthorne Natural Health Consultancy had held two charity open days and had donated £980 to the Mayor's Charity from its proceeds.

- (ii) The Mayor announced that a collection was being staged at The Meadows on Saturday 11 December 2004 from 10am to 10pm and invited Members to volunteer to come along and assist in the collection.

#### Green Flag Award

The Mayor announced that the Council had made a successful joint application with Sandhurst Town Council for a Green Flag Award at Shepherd Meadows and Sandhurst Memorial Park. This was the first such joint application in the Country. The Council had also been successful in renewing the award at Popes Meadow for the third year in succession.

#### 49. **Executive Report (Item 5)**

The Leader of the Council presented the Executive Report to the Council. Since the last meeting of the Council, the Executive had met on 16 November 2004, and had reached decisions in respect of the following matters:

- Bracknell Forest Borough Council's Licensing Policy
- Decriminalised Parking Enforcement
- Waste Collection

The Leader highlighted the forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Council and other major issues including the recent announcement of the Council's Star Rating for Social Services and the submission of outline planning permission for the regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre.

The Leader of the Council and Executive Members then responded to questions arising from the report.

**RESOLVED** that

#### Easthampstead Park Conference Centre – Fire Precautions Act 1971

A £100,000 supplementary Capital estimate be approved for the purposes of performing works specified by the Fire Officer in order to meet the current requirements of the Fire Precautions Act 1971 at Easthampstead Park Conference Centre.

#### Decriminalised Parking Enforcement

£100,000 of Section 106 monies be used in 2005/06 for start-up expenses.

#### Licensing Policy – Results of Consultation

- (i) The proposed changes to the Council's Licensing Policy, that resulted from the consultation, be approved; and
- (ii) The Licensing Policy, as amended, be adopted.

50. **Calculation of Council Tax Base – 2005/06 and Local Council Tax Discounts 2005/06 (Item 6)**

The Council considered a report from the Director of Corporate Services and Resources on the calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2005/06, and in accordance with its statutory requirements under Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

**RESOLVED** that

- (i) in accordance with the Local Government Act 2003, and in the circumstances provided for in subsequent regulations,
  - (a) the Council Tax discount granted in 2005/06 to taxpayers of properties which were nobody's sole or main residence (commonly referred to as "second homes") be maintained at the current level of 10%.
  - (b) no local variation be made in 2005/06 to the current 50% discount for "long-term" empty properties; and
  - (c) no locally defined discounts be created in 2005/06.
- (ii) pursuant to the Borough Finance Officer's report, and in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as amended, the amount calculated by the Bracknell Forest Borough Council as its Council Tax Base for 2005/06, be £41,600.

51. **Membership of the Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Panel**

**RESOLVED** that

- (i) Councillor Alan Browne be appointed to replace Councillor Tony Packham on the Council's Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Panel for the remainder of the municipal year; and
- (ii) Councillor Alan Kendall be appointed as a substitute Member for the remainder of the municipal year.

52. **Questions Submitted Under Council Procedure Rule 10 (Item 8)**

Question by Councillor Beadsley to the Leader of the Council.

- (i) *"At which political party conferences did Bracknell Forest Borough Council have an exhibition stand and what did it cost?"*

Councillor Bettison, in response, stated that the exhibition stand had been erected to coincide with this year's Labour Party Conference, at a cost to the Council of £7,582.00. Councillor Bettison then responded to a supplementary question from Councillor Beadsley in this regard.

Question by Councillor Piasecki to the Executive Member for Education.

*“Since the extension of cashless catering to the remaining secondary schools:*

- (a) how many additional children are taking up their entitlement of free school meals?*
- (b) what actions have been taken to ensure families take up this entitlement?*
- (c) what plans do we have to use the facility of cashless catering to improve healthy eating in schools?*
- (d) What is the value of administrative savings in schools generated by cashless catering?*
- (e) How does this saving compare to the cost of introducing cashless catering?*
- (f) How many parents are using the controlled e-purse facilities to monitor their children’s expenditure?*
- (g) What percentage of topping-up of the e-purse is now done by cheque in advance, as opposed to cash on a daily basis?”*

Councillor Ward, in response, stated that, in respect of (a) above, the Council would not be able to check these figures until after the school census (PLASC) date in January, when the Council could compare take-up with the same point as last year.

In response to (b) above, Councillor Ward stated that the Education Department routinely reminded all schools to ensure families took up this entitlement. He added that it was in schools’ interests to encourage parents to take this up for their children as schools received some elements of their funding on the basis of numbers of free school meals. Councillor Ward went on to state that most schools reminded parents of their entitlement each year, regardless of the use of the edge card and that the Council could encourage parents to link this to the use of the edge card now that the system was operational in four of the Borough’s secondary schools. Councillor Ward also stated that the use of the edge card ensured that other pupils were not aware of who the free school meals pupils were and, thus, would remove some of the stigma associated with free school meals.

In response to (c) above, Councillor Ward stated that the Council was encouraging schools to work together with their caterers to do more in this area. He added that the Education Department promoted healthy eating through the Healthy Schools initiative. The edge card/Infineer system implemented in schools had the ability to give points to pupils for healthy eating. He added that schools would need to work with their own caterer to use this to promote healthy items for school lunch and that some were already doing this. Councillor Ward stated that Initial Catering were in two of the schools involved and were keen to develop this facility. He stated that the Council was encouraging schools to work together with their caterer to do more in this area.

In response to (d) above, Councillor Ward stated that there were no administrative savings for schools currently identified with the use of the edge card. He added, however, that there were some savings in the collection of cash and improved throughput of pupils by the caterer and, because of this, Initial Catering were

providing schools with a cash contribution to the costs of the system. Councillor Ward went on to advise Council that should the edge card be used for other areas in the school at a later date (e.g. security systems, photocopying etc.), then there may be administrative savings at that stage.

In response to (e) above, Councillor Ward stated that, at this stage, there were no net savings overall to the schools on the introduction of the edge card for school meals. He added, however, that the use of the cashless system could improve the outcomes of any future tender for a new school meals contract and extension of the use of the card to other areas of school business could lead to improved efficiencies and savings at a later stage.

In response to (f) above, Councillor Ward stated that the controlled e-purse was being used by parents in all four schools and that the control purse was only available when funds were loaded onto the card through the school office.

In response to (g) above, Councillor Ward stated that schools were encouraging parents to use cheques, where possible, but most schools would accept cash or cheque through the school office to load onto the card. He added that pupils could also use the reval machines to load cash onto their own card and that all of this could be done in advance. He stated that the Council did not have this percentage readily available and was reluctant to ask schools for this information in the early stages of the scheme. Councillor Ward concluded by stating that the Council could, however, ascertain this in future when it evaluated the scheme.

Question by Councillor Jones to the Executive Member for Planning and Transportation

*“When did the Executive Member for Planning and Transportation first become aware of the issues that have culminated in the refusal of her Conservative colleagues in Wokingham to adopt the Berkshire Structure Plan?”*

In response, Councillor Mrs Mary Ballin stated that she understood that Wokingham had decided to abstain from supporting the Structure Plan, with a view to further negotiations to review the share-out of housing numbers with the other Berkshire authorities. She added that, to date, she had not heard that the Berkshire Leaders would be willing to discuss this.

Councillor Ballin stated that there had been no suggestion of a further meeting of the Joint Strategic Planning Committee and that this would not be appropriate. She added that the decision to accept the Government’s housing allocation for Berkshire and the method of distribution was a decision of the Berkshire Leaders and not the Joint Strategic Planning Committee. She concluded by advising Council that Wokingham was in different political hands at the time, and had of course made reducing their figure a major political platform.

**53. Motion Submitted under Council Procedure Rule 11**

Motion 1/2004, as set out in the agenda for the meeting, was moved by Councillor Beadsley and seconded by Councillor Piasecki.

Councillor Bettison, seconded by Councillor North, then moved an amendment as set out below. The amendment was put to the vote and declared carried. The substantive motion was then put to the vote and it was

**RESOLVED** that the Council notes the views of Councillors Beadsley and Piasecki and shares concern about the possible introduction of parking charges at the Look Out and Coral Reef Water World within the Executive's budget proposals for next year but, mindful that it has not yet received the (overdue) news from central government of its financial settlement for 2005/06, accepts that any decision on this or any other budget matter would be both premature and irresponsible at this stage.

**MAYOR**