

**COUNCIL
19 JANUARY 2005**

EXECUTIVE REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Since the Executive report to the Council meeting on 1 December 2004, the Executive has met twice, on 14 December 2004 as scheduled and on 21 December to consider the draft budget proposals for 2005/06.
- 1.2 This report summarises the decisions taken at the first of those meetings as I'm sure Members are aware of the budget proposals which are currently the subject of consultation having been discussed already by the Public Scrutiny Commission. They can of course be viewed online at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk

2. SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE SERVICES & HOUSING

2.1 Annual Review Of Social Services Performance 2003-2004

- 2.1.1 Members will be aware of the outcome of the annual review of social services performance 2003-2004 was:

◆ Children's Services

Serving most people well. Capacity for improvement promising.

◆ Adults Services

Serving some people well. Capacity for improvement uncertain.

- 2.1.2 Representatives of the Commission for Social Care Improvement attended the meeting of the Executive to answer questions on their findings. The Annual Review report highlighted a number of positive developments along with some important areas where attention needed to be focussed. Within this framework, the essential point about the overall judgement is that the ratings for service delivery have not changed from last year, i.e. the quality of services to residents remains the same. The judgement about prospects for improvement in adults services is disappointing, but is also at variance with all other recent external assessments of the Council.

3. PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION

3.1 Bracknell Forest Borough Local Development Scheme

- 3.1.1 Members will recall that decisions made regarding the Local Development Scheme, the three year work programme for preparation of the documents that will form the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Development Framework have had to be made without the benefit of clear Government guidance. The proposed programme has now been reviewed in the light of emerging guidance and comments from the Government Office for the South East. These comments have reiterated concerns regarding the resources available within the Planning Inspectorate to deal with the

proposed work programme and have resulted in a review of the structure of documents to be included in the Local Development Scheme and which will form part of the Local Development Framework.

3.1.2 The Scheme approved in September proposed the following:

Development Plan Documents:

- Core Strategy
- Housing Policies
- Movement Policies
- Employment Policies
- Site Allocations

A Statement of Community Involvement.

Supplementary Planning Documents:

- Parking Standards
- Designing for Accessibility in Berkshire.

3.1.3 The revised Scheme approved by the Executive now includes:

Development Plan Documents:

- Core Strategy - will set out the long term spatial vision for the local authority area and the strategic policies and proposals required to deliver that vision.
- Site Allocations – will identify specific sites for development including broad details of uses and timings for implementation (for example, sites to meet the housing allocation and number of dwellings).
- Development Management – will contain the development control policies for the Borough.
- Amen Corner Area Action Plan- will establish a detailed planning framework to guide future development.

A Statement of Community Involvement

3.1.4 An additional **Supplementary Planning Document** is also proposed which will be a review to the existing 'Limiting the Impact of Development' SPG which provides guidance on the Borough Council's approach to developer contributions. This will follow a new Circular expected to be published on Planning Obligations during 2005.

3.1.5 The Core Strategy and Site Allocations will be the first Development Plan Documents to be prepared, with adoption anticipated by the end of 2007. Work on the Development Management DPD will start late 2006 and the Amen Corner Area Action Plan in mid 2007 with adoption anticipated in 2010.

3.1.6 The proposed changes will result in fewer Development Plan Documents being prepared since the content of the previously proposed Employment, Housing and Movement DPD's will be incorporated into either the Core Strategy or Development Management Documents. Overall it is anticipated that this approach will have resource benefits, and may also result in a more user friendly set of policy documents. The revised approach will give greater relevance to the Core Strategy and the Site Allocations DPD's as these together will now deal with the major issues in the Borough such as overall scale of growth and subsequent delivery.

3.1.7 As well as approving these proposals, the Executive has authorised:

- (a) The Executive Member for Planning and Transportation to make any necessary minor amendments to the Local Development Scheme and in respect of minerals and waste policies; and,
- (b) The Director of Environment and Leisure to enter into a Service Level Agreement with the Planning Inspectorate.

4 COUNCIL STRATEGY/CORPORATE SERVICES & RESOURCES

4.1 Implementing Electronic Government Return (IEG4)

4.1.1 The annual IEG4 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 its National Strategy for local e-Government.

4.1.2 The strategy defines a set of 14 e-Government priority service areas. The proposed outcomes for each priority service and transformation area are defined in terms of:

“Required” e-Government outcomes – these refer to specific online facilities that must be in place in every area of the country for citizens, organisations, councillors and local authority staff to use by the end of December 2005.

“Good” e-Government outcomes – the precise approach to achieving these outcomes may be locally determined, but all local authorities are expected to commit to these being in place by April 2006.

“Excellent” e-Government outcomes – high performing local authorities that have already achieved, or largely achieved, the defined “required” and “good” e-government outcomes, will be asked to agree a baseline and targets for promoting awareness and take-up of e-services.

4.1.3 The Council is required to report progress against a Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI 157) target of 100% of services capable of electronic delivery by 31 December 2005. The recording of the BVPI 157 Performance Indicator is being done this year through the IDeA's new ESD Toolkit website. The toolkit uses an ODPM-approved list of Council services, called the Local Government Category List (LGCL). The LGCL includes approximately twice the number of services this year compared to last year's list, which has led to a drop in the BVPI 157 percentage from 67% (October 2003) to 60% this year. If last year's performance on BVPI 157 had been calculated using the new method, last year's score would have been in the region of 40%. The ODPM have acknowledged that historic BVPI 157 figures will be higher than those reported by authorities last year.

4.1.4 The key focus of activity since the production of IEG3 (October 2003) has centred around:

- the introduction of a new corporate customer services centre, with enhanced telephone and ICT systems
- completion of a major public consultation exercise on the “look and feel” of the Council's web site, which was re-launched on the 15th November 2004. The site has improved navigation, search and content management facilities along with a range of new online services

- the construction of a hi-tech data centre and the successful transfer of over 120 computer systems into the new location
- the upgrade and development of key systems to enable electronic service delivery e.g. online planning, leisure bookings and smartcards

4.1.5 Looking ahead, the key e-Government priorities for 2005/06 are:

- to complete the successful implementation of the Government's Priority Service Outcomes for e-Government – linked to the Council's medium term objectives;
- the procurement and first phase implementation of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategy;
- the enhancement of ICT security infrastructure to support wider access to partner organisations e.g. NHS and the Government Gateway.
- The introduction of new revenues, benefits, e-procurement, libraries and other key office business systems

4.2 **Response To Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Review: Grants To The Voluntary And Community Sector**

4.2.1 The Executive considered a report from the Public Scrutiny Commission on a review undertaken by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Working Group on the Council's procedures for handling grants to the community and voluntary sector. The working group had investigated the processes and mechanisms used across the Council for the application, award and monitoring arrangements for discretionary grants to the community and voluntary sector. The aims of the review were:

- To develop greater understanding and awareness of the Council's systems for voluntary and community grants;
- Examine the range and scale of the councils grants aid and ensure that the application process is suited to achieving the purpose for which grants are provided and supports the voluntary sector;
- Make recommendations to the Executive relating to improving outcomes for residents in matters relating to voluntary sector grant aid.

4.2.2 The Executive welcomed the review which it recognised was intended to make the Community Grant Aid process more consistent and transparent. A series of detailed responses to each of the recommendations of the Working Group were endorsed by the Executive which largely accepted the recommendations.

4.3 **Corporate Performance Overview Report**

4.3.1 The Executive received the Chief Executive's latest Performance Overview Report detailing the performance of the Council over the second quarter of 2004/05 (July-September 2004).

4.3.2 A number of key developments have taken place over the past quarter:

- **Town Centre** – considerable progress was made leading to the submission of the outline planning application by the Bracknell Regeneration Partnership in November.

- **Local Public Service Agreement 1** – The likely level of Performance Reward Grant that the Council might receive at the end of the agreement is expected to be nearly £1.2m, which would represent a £300,000 surplus when compared with the Council's initial investment.
- **Integration of Services to Children and Young People** - Work has continued on linking the current national and local initiatives, into the five outcomes identified in the Green Paper.
- **'All of Us' strategy (Community Cohesion)** - Considerable progress has been made in mainstreaming the strategy. The progress was recognised in a positive desktop inspection by the Audit Commission during the summer quarter.
- **Corporate Performance Assessment** - The Council's self assessment was prepared and submitted to the Audit Commission along with a substantial amount of supporting evidence in preparation for the on-site inspection from 11-15 October. As we now know the Council has been judged as "excellent" for our corporate ability (the way the council is managed), which represents a substantial achievement. The final report is overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the Council's excellent capacity to improve, our committed staff, good management and effective members. Service scores have generally stayed the same for most areas, although there have been a few minor drops. In some ways this might be expected as the Council consolidates the massive service improvements made last year (when it was the 7th highest service improver nationally). Members will be aware that the overall CPA assessment remains "Good", due to the rule that Councils have to achieve two stars for their social services and education services before they can attain an "excellent" rating for their overall CPA.

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

- Benefits – improvements in performance have continued with the Work & Pensions Performance Standard (for new claims and changes in circumstance) being achieved during the quarter for the first time since its inception.
- Despite staffing difficulties this quarter, the Development Control service has exceeded the targets set for determining planning applications, again for the first time since the targets were set. This now puts this service into the top quartile for performance nationally although sustaining the major improvements achieved in the current year will require a sustained focus.
- Average stay in bed & breakfast accommodation for families has remained at zero.
- The proportion of local authority homes which are classed as non-decent has decreased as a result of the targeted capital improvement programme.
- Tenant satisfaction with the repairs' service has exceeded target.
- The number of domestic violence refuge places has increased.
- Income levels in Environment & Leisure has increased.
- Good progress has been made against the inspection programme for food safety and health & safety inspections.
- The number of new adult learners has increased.
- Statements for Special Educational needs has seen continued improvement in performance.
- Debt outstanding as a percentage of gross debt has decreased.

4.3.4 In conclusion, the Council continues to make sound progress towards the achievement of its objectives. Although there is no room for complacency, we remain well placed to move forward and continually improve the services that we provide.

4.4 **Edge Managed Services – Award of Contract**

4.4.1 A Framework Agreement for the supply of smartcards and related services commencing on 1 January 2005 has been awarded.

4.4.2 The Framework Agreement has been structured in such a way as to ensure that the Council secures service continuity and support for the existing deployment of over 30,000 **edge** cards, and their use in Libraries, Leisure Centres, secondary School Meals, Proof-of-Age schemes, and the shoppers discount scheme. It also retains the option to develop further applications and extensions to the **edge** scheme as and when the Council chooses to do so. Awarding this Framework Agreement only commits the Council to the maintenance of the existing service.

4.4.3 By adopting a partnership approach with the Council of Thames Valley Region neighbours, and the Framework Agreement, the Council is pursuing best practice in procurement and value for money.

5. **LOOKING AHEAD**

5.1 The next Forward Plan will be published on 1 February 2005 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.