

To: Council
12 January 2022

Executive Report to Council The Leader

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Since the Council meeting on 24 November 2021, the Executive has met once, on the 14 December 2021. The meeting was conducted remotely and as such it was acting in an advisory capacity, making recommendations to the individual executive members who are empowered to make the formal decisions. This approach was in line with the decisions taken by Council on 28 April 2021 to reduce, as far as possible the need for face-to-face meetings whilst the risk of COVID-19 infection remains a threat to the lives of members and officers.
- 1.2 Updated Forward Plans are published every Friday and can be viewed online at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk. Full details on the decisions taken by individual portfolio holders can also be accessed online through the Council's website.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 Council is asked to consider the recommendations set out at paragraph 5.6.6.

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The reasons for recommendations are set out in the supporting information and in the reports considered by the Executive.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Alternative options are discussed in the relevant individual reports considered by the Executive.

5 Supporting Information

Finance & Transformation

5.1 Capital Programme 2022/23 - 2024/25 and Revenue Budget 2022/23

- 5.1.1 The Executive approved for consultation a draft capital programme based on total spending of £9.309m of which:

- £7.037m of expenditure is to be externally funded.
- £1.113m of expenditure is to be funded from S106.
- £1m would be reserved for Invest-to-Save schemes.

- 5.1.2 The Executive also agreed its draft revenue budget proposals for 2022/23 as the basis for consultation. These proposals included the Treasury Management Strategy

and associated documents which the Executive requested that the Governance and Audit Committee review.

- 5.1.3 Both the draft revenue and capital programmes will now be considered by Overview & Scrutiny and their views along with any submitted by residents and local groups will be reported to the Executive and Full Council in February when the final budget proposals for 2022/23 will be agreed.
- 5.1.4 The Executive has also approved an increase in the budget for the existing Time Square Community Hub capital scheme of £0.140m for improvements to the Council Chamber in the current year. The funding will cover the cost of new technology to support the broadcasting of meetings as well as enabling hybrid meetings where people may participate whether in the Chamber or at a remote location. In addition to its use for a range of public meetings of the Council and its Committees, the technology would be suitable for local businesses and other organisations to run hybrid meetings such as conferences, training, seminars etc.

Planning & Transport

5.2 Community Infrastructure Levy Overview and Scrutiny Review

- 5.2.1 The Executive has accepted the following recommendations of the Education, Skills and Growth Overview & Scrutiny Panel arising from its review into the Community Infrastructure Levy.
 - 1 That a review of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) rates be undertaken following the adoption of the Bracknell Forest Borough Council Local Plan.
 - 2 That the Community Infrastructure Levy Policy be updated to claw back unspent allocated CIL funding from Parish/Town Councils after five years unless funding has already been allocated to a large-scale joint project or the money is already committed for revenue or capital projects. Clawed back funding should be reallocated to infrastructure projects defined at borough level.
 - 3 That an 18-month grace period be given for clawing back devolved funding to enable Parish/Town Councils to spend CIL funding already allocated but unspent due to Covid-19 pressures, commencing on 19 July 2021 when all Covid-19 restrictions were lifted.
 - 4 That all Parish/Town Councils receive notification of liability notices and demand notices on a regular basis, at least twice a year, to align with the payment of the Parish Portion and a named lead officer be identified for all CIL enquiries for the Parish/Town Councils.
 - 5 That the Parish and Town Council Liaison Group allows time to discuss CIL funding twice a year to coincide with twice yearly CIL payments to the towns and parishes, to include time to discuss projects identified in the Council's proposed budget as well as identified projects by Parish/Town Councils.
 - 6 That Parish/Town Councils adhere to the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended 2019) by consulting residents about how CIL funding should be spent as part of their regular consultation with local residents and creating an annual report detailing their CIL balances and

proposed spend annually, and ensuring their annual reports are publicly available.

- 7 That all Parish/Town Councils agree a local CIL Policy and commission joint training for Parish and Town Councillors regarding the purposes and potential usage of CIL funding.

- 5.2.2 The recommendations reflected the great emphasis this Council places on ensuring that sufficient infrastructure is in place in the right locations at the right time to support investment and growth. This could also be said of the six Parish and Town Councils in the borough. However, the review found they could all work better together to make best use of CIL funding to benefit their residents and that is why the recommendations have been made. It was apparent that there was a need for better information about what projects CIL funding could be used to support at a Parish/Town Council level. Due to the complexity of the topic better information and increased joint working between Bracknell Forest Council and the six Parish/Town Councils would enable more effective use of CIL funding.

Adult Services, Health and Housing

5.3 Housing Assistance Policy

- 5.3.1 The Executive has approved an updated Housing Assistance Policy. The focus of this Policy is one of prevention and is to enable independent living, by supporting those whose independence may be at risk to access housing (including their current home), which meets their needs. The policy will offer wider financial support to older and disabled people to carry out adaptations and essential repairs to enable them to live independently at home for as long as possible.
- 5.3.2 The Policy will be reviewed at 5-yearly intervals, whilst the Executive has also delegated authority to the Executive Director: People in consultation with the Executive Member for Adult Services, Health and Housing to make minor amendments to the policy in the interim to comply with new legislation and guidance, suspend the approval of any discretionary housing assistance offered in the policy, introduce new assistance to help vulnerable, disabled and older residents should funding become available and set the annual level of funding to be made available for discretionary assistance offered under this policy, in the first year of implementation to be set at a maximum of 15% of the annual DFG budget.

5.4 Development of the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024

- 5.4.1 The Executive has approved the publication of the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024 and the funding priorities set out in the strategy which will inform the commissioning of support services for domestic abuse.
- 5.4.2 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires local authorities to prepare a Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy, with the assistance of the domestic abuse Local Partnership Board. Locally, the Domestic Abuse Executive Group fulfils the role of the Local Partnership Board.
- 5.4.3 The Strategy was produced having regard to a local needs assessment, drawing on data from a range of sources and organisations. This was supplemented by a programme of engagement and structured interviews with victims of domestic abuse and interviews with professionals and front-line staff, as well as stakeholder engagement with key organisations and the Domestic Abuse Executive Group,

analysis of case files and records and mapping of support services available in the local area.

5.4.4 The findings have led to four broad priority areas being identified with recommendations and actions under each with appropriate funding, focusing on the issues identified. The priorities are:

- 1 To raise awareness and provide information on available services and support options.
- 2 To improve access and pathways to appropriate safe accommodation options.
- 3 To ensure effective, multi-agency working and specialist support to meet a wide variety of needs.
- 4 To continue to develop our understanding of needs through improved data collection and ensuring survivors have an effective voice.

5.5 Commissioning of Sensory Needs Services

5.5.1 The Executive has approved the strategic procurement plan for procuring a provider (or multiple providers) of the Council's Sensory Needs Services for Bracknell Forest residents. The Care Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities to ensure that people with sensory impairments are supported by professionals with relevant skills and experience. Providing this support will meet the minimum requirements under the Act, and ensure that people with visual, hearing or dual sensory loss are afforded the opportunity to live as independently as possible and access their community safely. This is expected to reduce the risk of social isolation and the impact this can have on other acute services.

5.5.2 Demographically Bracknell Forest has an increasing, ageing population with increasingly complex needs. The number of Bracknell Forest residents predicted to have a vision and or hearing loss is expected to rise by 13% over the next five years.

Council Strategy and Community Cohesion

5.6 Recommendations of the Members' Equalities Working Group

5.6.1 The Executive has recommended to Council that it should adopt the recommendations of the Members' Equalities Working Group, including a Mayor's Charter, which are intended to ensure the highest standards of councillor behaviour and advance equality, diversity and inclusion.

5.6.2 The Members' Equalities Working Group was established in January 2021 to lead and champion member's contribution to advancing equalities and celebrating diversity within the community and within councillor's work in the Council. It commissioned a Members' and Member-Officer pulse survey to understand their perceptions of how well member's work together and to understand better the relationship between members and officers.

5.6.3 Although the survey generally demonstrated positive working relationships between members, and particularly between members and officers, there were examples of inappropriate and negative behaviour that were sometimes perceived as bullying and harassment amongst members and between members and officers. This was exhibited by a very small minority of individuals. Some of this behaviour could be described as simply 'the nature of politics' or being 'robust', however, it could also 'cross the line', be considered 'unprofessional and inappropriate' and move into

perceived 'bullying' between members. It could also sometimes spill over into inappropriate behaviour from members to officers. There was a perception that such behaviour was 'not always or sufficiently addressed', either through self-regulation, informally or formally by the council or members.

5.6.4 In response to the survey results, three 'Inclusive Conversations' workshops were held to help identify steps to create a political working environment with the very highest standards of behaviour. These together with the survey results have enabled the Working Group to develop recommendations including a Mayor's Charter, setting out the minimum standards of behaviour expected from all councillors at all times. In addition to the Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles), selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership, Bracknell Forest councillors will:

- encourage and foster constructive democratic debate and tolerance of other points of view
- promote and defend the dignity of others, treating all with courtesy and respect
- not engage in bullying, harassment, or victimisation, nor unlawfully discriminate against another member or group
- challenge unacceptable behaviour whenever it occurs.

5.6.5 Any behaviour that falls short of this will be dealt with under the Council's Standards and Code of Conduct processes, or be referred to the police, if it breaks the criminal law.

5.6.6 Council is therefore RECOMMENDED to adopt the recommendations of the Members' Equalities Working Group at Annex A including the Mayor's Charter set out in Annex B.

5.7 Council Plan Overview Report

5.7.1 The Executive noted the performance of the council over the period from July-September 2021 highlighted in the Overview Report.

5.7.2 At the end of the quarter, 96 actions (90%) were rated as "green" (6 complete, 90 in progress) and 9 actions (9%) were "amber" (9 in progress). 1 action (1%) was red and in progress.

5.7.3 Progress against key performance indicators across the Council was also positive, with 21 (72%) "green", 4 (14%) were "amber" and 4 (14%) were "red". 25 further indicators had no set target or data was currently unavailable.

5.7.4 Overall, teams have delivered services to a high standard during the period, especially in response to Covid-19. Key points to note included:

- The "Bracknell Forest Giants" event which achieved national press coverage, saw increased spend and footfall in Bracknell town centre, and received great user feedback.
- The full allocation of £3.6m Additional Restrictions Grant from central government had been paid out to local businesses, attracting an additional £800k to help those small businesses most in need over the remainder of this financial year.

- The council was nominated in three categories, winning one and being commended in another, for the South East Energy Efficiency Awards reflecting the work of the Sustainable Energy Officer, Hazel Hill.
- Three film/TV productions had been filmed in the borough's green spaces.
- Progress on the A322 Sports Centre Roundabout improvement scheme had been slightly delayed, but design and planning work was well underway for a full refurbishment of the A322 Birch Hill junction traffic signals.
- The bounce back of the economy had created some issues with supply chain, labour and energy across the whole country, but local mitigation measures were being developed to address this emerging pressure, including in relation to sourcing IT equipment which had become a global problem.

6 Advice Received from Statutory and Other Officers

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The Borough Solicitor's comments have been addressed in the reports to the Executive.

Executive Director: Resources

- 6.2 The Executive Director: Resources' comments have been addressed in the reports to the Executive.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Equalities issues, where appropriate, have been addressed in the reports to the Executive.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Any strategic risks have been identified in the reports to the Executive.

Background Papers

Executive Agenda – 14 December 2021

Contact for further information

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