



CORPORATE SERVICES

SERVICE PLAN

October 2011 - March 2012

Executive Members:

Councillor Iain McCracken

Councillor Alan Ward

Councillor Paul Bettison, Leader of the Council

Councillor Mrs Dorothy Hayes

Director:

Alison Sanders

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Glossary

ACE	Assistant Chief Executive
BSol	Borough Solicitor
BT	Borough Treasurer
CO: CS	Chief Officer: Customer Services
CO: FS	Chief Officer: Financial Services
CO: HR	Chief Officer: Human Resources
CO: IS	Chief Officer: Information Services
CO: P	Chief Officer: Property
DCS	Director of Corporate Services
HDRS	Head of Democratic & Registration Services
HCEE	Head of Community Engagement & Equalities
S&PO	Strategy & Partnerships Officer

Section 1: Services included in this plan

The Corporate Services Department contains eight separate sections responsible for Finance, Information and Communication Technology, Legal Services, Human Resources, Democratic and Registration Services, Corporate Property, Customer Services and Community Engagement and Equalities.

A wide range of functions and activities are carried out within each of these sections, but falling into three main categories:

- Direct public services (e.g. customer services, revenue collection, electoral registration)
- Core management responsibilities (setting standards and ensuring that the organisation functions legally within a robust financial framework and acts as a good employer and that it promotes equality and community cohesion)
- Support to service departments (providing advice and support to front line departments on a wide range of issues and projects, such as IT and property)

Customer Services

The Council needs to have an effective range of ways for customers and residents to contact the council to obtain or provide information, make a service request or make a payment.

Customer Services is the first point of contact for the public with the Council and includes the access channels of reception, telephony services, email and the web. The service deals with around 80% of enquiries to the Council including general enquiries from the public for information, and service requests about a range of services, including waste and recycling, landscaping and trees, highways, school admissions, the e+ card and licensing. Customer Services also includes:

- Revenue Services, responsible for the billing and collection of Council Tax and Business Rates and Cashier Services.
- Web Services, responsible for the public website and the staff intranet.

Democratic and Registration Services

The Democratic and Registration Service is at the heart of local governance. The Service manages core local government functions and supports elected members in both their traditional and emerging roles in order to meet community needs and priorities. Democratic Services manages the Council's formal democratic processes and provides a range of support, information and development activities for elected Members. The Section also supports the Council's key partnership boards and neighbourhood action groups and manages the education appeals processes. Electoral Registration is responsible for registering electors and conducting elections and referenda. Registration Services is responsible for Civil Registration (Births, Deaths and Marriages) and the conduct of civil ceremonies including citizenship ceremonies and non-statutory celebratory services. Registration Services also provide the Tell Us Once Service and Nationality and Settlement Checking services.

Community Engagement and Equalities

The Community Engagement and Equalities team coordinate the work on engagement and consultation across the Council and manage key initiatives such as Neighbourhood Action Groups, community centres and development work with new communities. The team also leads the coordination of the work on Community Cohesion across the Council and supports the achievement of the Council's equalities targets.

Finance

The Council faces significant financial challenges as described by the medium term financial plan. It is important, therefore, that the Council has robust financial processes. The Finance section provides financial advice, financial monitoring, accounting, budgeting, banking, auditing, payroll, insurance, creditors and debtors. In addition to these financial services, the section also manages procurement. The section is divided into the following specialist areas: Corporate and Advisory Service, Accounting and Budgeting, Payroll, Treasury Management, Risk Management and Insurance, Internal Audit and Corporate Procurement.

Legal Services

Every major function and service of the Council is closely regulated by statute. For the Council to fulfil its functions and deliver its services it is, therefore, essential that it has high quality legal advice available to it. This is especially so in an era of extensive legislative change, restricted resources and an increasing willingness to challenge decisions relating to allocation of resources. Within this framework the main areas are as follows: Corporate Legal Work, Planning and Litigation, Contracts and Conveyancing, Social Services, Education, Employment Law and Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Information Management.

Human Resources

The Council's human resources policies can help service delivery in the most cost effective way. This entails a strong emphasis on high levels of personal and professional performance through forward looking policies, employee appraisal, appropriate financial rewards and development opportunities. The key activities of the section include; advising on organisational development and workforce planning issues, policy development, industrial relations, contractual and employment law advice, occupational health and welfare, corporate health and safety advice and enforcement with a centralised training unit providing management development and a wide range of learning and development activities across the Council.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

ICT is a key enabler of the delivery of a significant number of Council services and it is vital that the Council's use of information and data is in accordance with regulations.

This section is responsible for all aspects of ICT service delivery and provides support to all of the Council's service departments. It works within a corporate framework set by the Council's Information and Communication Technology Strategy. The section has specific teams responsible for providing a service desk, server, desktop and communications operational support, development services, , along with setting strategic direction and project support and acting as a centre of expertise for business process re-design. There are also a number of services provided externally through third party contracts.

Corporate Property

Effective asset management is important to effective service delivery and can support the drive for efficiencies in use of assets.

The Corporate Property section provides a comprehensive property service which manages and maintains a significant investment portfolio of commercial property. The section also advises and manages acquisition and disposal of property in order to support the services provided by the Council. Property services include valuation

and estate management, town centre regeneration, asset management, Town Centre and Market Management.

The Building Surveying section provides comprehensive building advice across the Council, dealing with design, tender documentation, project management and negotiating final accounts. Repairs and maintenance are managed by this section.

The recently added Operations Team is multi-disciplinary and includes facilities management, post, integrated transport unit and couriers.

Section 2: Where we are now

Customer Services

Customer Services provides the key Council customer access channels through reception areas, telephone, e-mail and the web-site. The service has recently participated in a Socitm benchmarking club. A key element of the recently approved Customer Contact Strategy is the development of a Channel Strategy for the Council.

Customer satisfaction surveys show that over 90% of those surveyed found the service provided by Customer Services through the telephone Contact Centre as good or better, against a target of 80%. The current reporting for satisfaction has changed during the year. New figures will be available from quarter 3 Quarterly Service Report.

Our goal is to keep the website as current and accessible as possible, which has been evidenced by the Better Connected study undertaken by Socitm which has again put our site in the top 20 in the country with 43% of residents using the site.

Revenue Services have successfully migrated to a new system in the last year. The service is a member of the CIPFA Benchmarking group for council tax and business rates. Revenue Services are accredited with the quality standard ISO 9001: 2000.

Democratic and Registration Services

Democratic Services has consistently provided effective support to deliver the Council's partnership and neighbourhood agendas. The amount of information provided online has increased and the extensive electronic availability of agendas and minutes has led to a sustained reduction in the circulation of paper copies, supporting environmental and cost reduction initiatives. In addition the year on year increase in the number of meetings supported by the team and in the number of admission appeal hearings has continued.

The Council received Charter Plus status for outstanding work in respect of member development, becoming the first Council in the South East to do so. A full programme of democracy and governance activities was delivered, including a number of sessions with Be Heard and the publication of councillor profiles on the website.

Democratic Services regularly liaises with its users (Members, Officers, external partners and press) to ensure that their needs are met; in particular to ensure that documentation is supplied in a timely fashion and in the required format.

Feedback forms are circulated at committee and council meetings seeking public views on the meeting arrangements and following education appeal hearings.

Democratic Services took part in a number of benchmarking exercises and will be reviewing some aspects of their work as a result.

The Electoral Registration Team successfully delivered the Borough/Parish elections and the Referendum on voting arrangements in May 2011. The annual canvass to compile the 2010/2011 Register of Electors had a 98.8% response rate on publication on 1 December 2010 and the Team is working hard to replicate this figure on 1 December 2011

The Registration Team have introduced two new services: a Change of Name Deed Service and a Settlement Checking Service and will be offering the Tell Us Once Service to the bereaved from November.

The final phase of the postal service review was implemented which resulted in the restructuring of the service achieving further efficiency savings. The postal team has now transferred to the Operations Unit.

Community Engagement and Equalities

The Directorate takes the lead across the Council for Community Cohesion and Engagement and Equality and Diversity matters. The purpose of this is to harness activity from the whole Council to improve the cohesion of the whole community, with a backdrop of increasing diversity within the borough.

The small Community Engagement and Equalities team work closely with members of the Bracknell Forest Partnership's Community Cohesion and Engagement Working Group, to maximise limited resources by coordinating and increasing the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of community cohesion, engagement and equalities work in the borough. In 2010 the Council attained the Achieving level of the Local Government Equality Framework and was recognised for its improved performance and strong commitment to equality issues. The team also manages the Council's community centres and supports the Community Associations that run them.

Our performance on Community Cohesion measured by the Place Survey 2008, showed that 82% of local people believe that people from different backgrounds get on well together. This result was significantly higher than the all-England average of 76% placing Bracknell Forest in the top quartile nationally. The 2006 result for this target was 81%, which demonstrates that performance has been maintained against a backdrop of a significant increase in diversity within the borough and the economic downturn.

The Institute of Community Cohesion (ICoCo) was commissioned in October 2010 to provide the Council and our partners with a wider picture of changing faith, ethnicity, community and cohesion in the Borough. This confirmed that Bracknell Forest has high levels of community cohesion and good community relations, while the mix of faiths, nationalities and ethnicities is changing and there is a relatively high level of population turnover in Bracknell Forest.

The 2008 Place Survey results were less strong for community engagement; the number of people who feel they can influence decisions is 1% below the national average of 29% and worse than local result of 30% from 2006. 9% of people have been involved in civic participation in last year below national average of 14% and bottom quartile.

The Council came second highest amongst 149 upper tier local authorities in England in a National Survey of Third Sector Organisations conducted by Ipsos Mori on behalf of the Cabinet Office for creating an environment for a thriving third sector in 2009. The survey asked Bracknell Forest's third sector organisations how positive an influence local statutory bodies had over their success.

The team is currently carrying out a full consultation on the future of the Council's neighbourhood engagement structures.

Financial

The government's spending plans provide a challenging backdrop against which the Council must develop balanced budgets over the medium term. The team has recently been very focussed on preparing the Council's budget strategy.

Sound financial processes are in place, evidenced by robust budget setting, effective budgetary control and an unqualified audit opinion on the statement of accounts. The team recently successfully completed a major upgrade to the Council's financial system.

Finance is a regular participant in benchmarking clubs, most recently procurement, creditors and treasury management and these help to inform future organisational changes.

Users of the finance service are largely internal and their expectations are established through informal discussion and feedback. Specifically:

- the annual schools survey provides positive feedback on a range of services (e.g. payroll and insurance);
- client questionnaires following the completion of an internal audit generally show a satisfactory response, and
- the district auditor has provided complimentary feedback about the quality of work through his Annual Audit Letter and through presentations to the Governance and Audit Committee.

The procurement function is being continually improved and a recent review by IESE has provided the momentum to move towards a more effective category management approach which is now underway.

Legal Services

The Section provides extensive support and guidance on major procurements. Planning and Adult Social Care each generate considerable volumes of legal work. Data Protection, Freedom of Information and legal advice on Data Security has been a growth area and that trend is expected to continue. There is a developing need for specialist employment law advice. Legal work to facilitate the Town Centre re-development remains the top priority of the section. The recent Localism Act and other legislation will require a significant amount of work to evaluate and disseminate. Most major land disposals are handled in-house and the Council's conveyancing lawyer has been especially busy throughout the past two years.

The large majority of the work of the Legal section is client-department demand led. Almost without exception the feedback which the section receives about its services is positive. Each year the Borough Solicitor or an Assistant Borough Solicitor attends meetings of the client departments Departmental Management Teams to receive their views on legal services and their thoughts on future demand for Legal Services.

Human Resources

The large scale project to introduce a new pay and rewards structure through the implementation of a revised job evaluation scheme is ongoing. All the job measurement has been completed and the work on a new pay structure is underway. Major resources are still required to progress the project and there are continuing discussions with the unions.

The function has participated for the first time in the CIPFA Benchmarking club the results of which were very positive and showed it overall to be cost effective which is valued by managers who access the service; there are areas for improvement which will be addressed in the coming year.

There has been a need to reassess the Council's staffing structures now needed to balance the budget in a very challenging financial environment; the function is at the forefront of managing the Organisational Change Protocol to implement the changes.

A significant part of the HR and Learning & Development assessment of service department requirements is through regular interaction with those departments via the HR Heads of Service mechanism, the Corporate Development forum and the quarterly Chief Officer liaison process.

The Learning & Development function works closely with the corporate body on new approaches to providing relevant services e.g. a middle management competency framework agreed by CMT in late 2010 has been put in place to help meet the organisation's requirements for improving manager's skills and knowledge in key areas.

The Health and Safety function has established a network of internal meetings with departments (and schools) to liaise directly on matters affecting them and to also be used as a problem solving forum.

ICT Services

ICT Services has completed a number of large projects in the past 12 months, most notably the migration from Novell GroupWise to Microsoft Exchange/Outlook. This marks another key milestone in the move to a Microsoft based infrastructure. A major piece of work has commenced to update/upgrade the borough's web-site. As part of this project and related to the Borough's Customer Contact Strategy, the web team has become part of the Customer Services function. This is a vital and evermore important customer access channel and will form a major part of the Customer Contact Strategy.

ICT Service users are internal and their expectations are met by discussion and service review and feedback. The results of a customer satisfaction survey undertaken by Socitm for the authority showed the service is well thought of and highly rated it had the highest customer satisfaction score for a unitary authority. This full survey of all users is undertaken every two years. All customers are given the opportunity to feed back on the service received from the ICT helpdesk as a matter of course.

The authority will be looking to get maximum value from its current IT investment.

Property Services

The property section manages the Council's property portfolio which provides an income of circa. £2m. It also provides professional property advice and services to other departments and is heavily involved in the town centre regeneration project and the Council's Accommodation Strategy. The team also provide a Building Surveying Service to other departments and this team holds I.S.O. 9001 accreditation.

The function has participated for the first time in the CIPFA benchmarking club, and the overall results were positive with broad satisfaction shown by service users. There are areas for improvement which will be addressed in the coming year.

Corporate Property leads a Cross Department Asset Management Group in order to ensure property assets are used efficiently and where applicable disposed of to the Council's advantage. Considerable emphasis is placed on the Council's investment portfolio producing significant income to fund other services.

Also much work is done to provide advice to other departments to ensure property is used and managed efficiently.

The Town Centre Manager arranges events for the town centre to improve vitality in the lead up to regeneration.

The Operations Unit encompasses Transport, Postal services and the Facilities team which undertakes all facilities management at the Council's town centre offices and the Central Depot.

The Integrated Transport Unit, part of the Operations Unit, has carried out annual parental satisfaction surveys since 2008. These have shown a consistently high level of satisfaction with the service averaging 92% either very satisfied or satisfied over three years. 93% of survey respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with their driver and 85% with their escort.

Section 3: Service Delivery

All Departmental Indicators

Ind. Ref	Short Description	Freq	Previous Figure	Current Figure	Current Target	Current Status	Perf. Trend
Customer Services							
L051	Percentage of Council tax collected in year at 31 March 2011	Q	29.30	57.10	57.20		
L052	Cumulative percentage of Council Tax collected for the previous year at 31 March	A	99.00		99.00		
L053	Percentage of business rates collected in year at 31 March	Q	37.10	64.10	64.00		
L054	Cumulative percentage of business rates collected for the previous year at 31 March	A	98.50		99.00		
L055	Satisfaction level expressed in survey of telephone contact with Customer Services	Q			90.00		
L056	Percentage of calls answered within target	Q	74.2	67.6	80.00		
Democratic and Registration Services							
L057	Percentage of agendas published 5 clear days prior to a meeting	Q	100.00	96.00	100.00		
L058	Percentage of minutes published within 5 clear days of a meeting	Q	73.00	85.00	65.00		
L060	Percentage response to the annual canvass	A	98.80		98.00		
Community Engagement and Equalities							
NI 001	Percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area (Biennially (every two years))	A					
NI 004	Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality (Biennially (every two years))	A					
NI 006	Participation in regular volunteering (Biennially (every two years))	A					
NI 023	Perceptions that people in the area treat one another with respect and consideration	A					
Finance							
BV 008	Percentage of invoices paid within 30 days	Q	92.4	91.2	95.0		
L064	Debt outstanding as percentage of gross debt (Quarterly)	Q	12.00	10.00	15.00		
L065	Return on investments exceeds 7-day LA cash benchmark rate	Q	0.82	0.84	0.90		
Legal Services							
L084	Number of section 106s completed	Q		10			
L085	Amount of money recovered in debt collection	Q		47,116.86			
L086.1	Percentage of Freedom of Information requests refused because information is publically available	Q		3			
L086.2	Percentage of Freedom of Information requests refused because the time limit would be exceeded	Q		8			
L086.3	Number of Freedom of Information requests received	Q		207			
L087	Percentage of time recorded as chargeable time	A					
L088	Number of leases completed	Q		13			
Human Resources							
BV 012	Average number of working days lost to sickness	A	7.01		6.90		

BV 014	Percentage of early retirements as a percentage of total employees	A	0.28		0.20		
L066	Top five percent earners - women	A	31.82		32.00		
L067	Top five percent earners - minority ethnic communities	A	4.56		4.50		
L068	Top five percent earners - with disability	A	6.06		6.00		
L069	Percentage of ill-health retirements	A	0.08		0.05		
L070	Percentage of employees with a disability	A	1.85		2.00		
L071	Percentage of black and ethnic minority employees	A	4.00		4.00		
L072	Gender pay gap	A	19.79		18.00		
L073	Average number of off the job training days per employee	A	3.4		3.5		
L074	Average amount spent on training per employee	A	375.00		375.00		
L130	Percentage staff turnover	A	11.92		11.50		
L131	Percentage of staff leaving within one year of starting	A	24.30		20.00		
Information and Communications Technology (ICT)							
L078	ICT User satisfaction - service user survey	A		5.25	5.19		
L079	Resolution of reported ICT incidents	Q	84	92	80		
L080	ICT Project management - 5 metrics	A	78.00	81.00	80.00		
L082	ICT service availability - percentage of time service is available for use	Q		99.90	97		
L083	Flexible working - number of ICT provisions for remote access	A		37.29	20.00		
Corporate Property							
BV 156	Percentage of buildings open to the public which are suitable for and accessible to disabled people	A	83.00		85.00		
L059	Percentage of post sent second class	Q		98.00	95.00		
L075	Number of commercial property voids	A			8.00		
L076	Planned maintenance spend	Q	11.90	40.50	37.00		
L077	Staff Cleaning Surveys result carried out every six months	A					

Note: Key indicators are identified by shading

Traffic Lights

Compares current performance to target



On or above target



Within 5% of target



More than 5% from target

Performance Trend

Identifies direction of travel compared to same point in previous year



Performance has improved



Performance sustained



Performance has declined

Section 4: Medium Term Objectives and Key Actions

MTO 1: Regenerate Bracknell Town Centre				
Work with the Bracknell Regeneration Partnership and other landowners to deliver comprehensive regeneration, including work to:				
Ref	Key Action Description	By when	Lead Officer	Links to related strategies/plans
1.7	implement an Accommodation Strategy to rationalise the number of buildings used by the Council	31/03/12	DCS, CO: IS, P, CS, HDRS	Accommodation Strategy
MTO 11: Work with our communities and partners to be efficient, open, transparent and easy to access and to deliver value for money:				
Ref	Key Action Description	By when	Lead Officer	Links to related strategies/plans
11.1	ensure services use resources efficiently and ICT and other technologies to drive down costs	31/03/12	CO: IS	ICT Strategy Customer Contact Strategy
11.2	implement a programme of economies to reduce expenditure	31/03/12	CO: HR, BT, CO: IS	Service Efficiency Strategy
11.3	ensure staff and elected members have the opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge they need	31/03/12	HDRS, CO: HR	Member Development Strategy, Pay & Workforce Development Strategy
11.4	publish information about the Council to promote openness and cost-effectiveness and accountability	31/03/12	BSol	
11.5	ensure residents have fair access to the services they need	31/03/12	HCEE, HDRS	Equalities Scheme
11.6	develop appropriate and cost effective ways of accessing council services	31/03/12	CO: CS, CO: P, HDRS	Customer Contact Strategy, Asset Management Plan
11.7	develop a single equality scheme in line with legislative requirements	31/03/12	HCEE	Single Equality Scheme
11.8	work with partners and engage with local communities in shaping services	31/01/12	HCEE, CO: CS	Customer Contact Strategy, Community Engagement Strategy