

Whitchurch Annual Town Assembly

Wednesday 20th April 2011

Borough Council Report from Cllr. Eric Dunlop

Mr Mayor, Councillors, Ladies & Gentleman,

Please accept my apology for not being with you this evening to present this report in person but pressing business detains me in London.

My duties as a councillor on the borough has placed me upon three committees or panels.

These are **Governance and Scrutiny, Licensing and The Standards Panel.**

My work as a member serving upon these three bodies does not easily transpose to giving a written or even an interesting verbal report.

The business of **The Standards Panel** concern hearings related to complaints made about councillors and officers of the Borough Council and as such remain confidential until a result of the hearing is made public and is published. Therefore not the material to be used for a public report.

The business of the **Licensing Panel** covers the applications received from the licensing trade for extensions to trading times and for the regulation of taxi licensing. Not the best subject for a report to the townsfolk of Whitchurch apart from the proposed extensions celebrating the forthcoming Royal Wedding.

Royal wedding calls 'extra time' for licensed premises

Licensed premises in Basingstoke and Deane will be able to benefit from relaxed opening hours as part of the royal wedding celebrations.

The Government has brought into force an order relaxing licensing hours to celebrate the wedding of His Royal Highness Prince William and Miss Catherine Middleton.

This will mean that licensed premises in the borough will be able to stay open between 11pm on Friday 29 April and 1am on Saturday 30 April and between 11pm on Saturday 30 April and 1am on Sunday 1 May for:

- for the sale or supply of alcohol for consumption on the premises;
- regulated entertainment; and
- late night refreshment where alcohol is also sold or supplied for consumption on the premises.

The order does not apply to businesses that do not have the relevant authorisation on their existing licence or to premises where alcohol is consumed off the premises such as off-

licences and supermarkets.

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council's Licensing Manager Linda Cannon said: "As the licensing authority we have been informed of the order to relax the opening hours to mark the royal wedding. In the time we have we are keen to make sure those licensed premises it applies to in the borough are aware of this so they can make a decision on whether they choose to apply the order."

For more information on the relaxed opening hours see the council's website www.basingstoke.gov.uk

My work on **Governance and Scrutiny** as the name suggests that with other councillors, I scrutinise the decisions made by the Cabinet in the running of the borough. This at least provides me with some material which I hopefully can present to you in an interesting way.

Council warns tough service choices ahead but balances books for next year

The government grant settlement for 2011/2012 for Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, announced yesterday, was less than expected, but there is still no proposal to increase the borough's part of the council tax next year.

But the council leader is warning that tough choices need to be made in future years, with substantially less grant coming from the government.

Residents are being reminded to give their views on which services are their priority as part of the consultation on the council plan running until Christmas Eve.

The government grant for 2011/12 was worse than expected, at **£6.615 million** which is **£347,000 less** than the council had planned for. But the council is confident it can balance its books while still protecting frontline services. This is the result of careful budgeting, contingency planning, savings achieved over recent years and its on-going efficiency drive. It is proposed that there will be **no increase in council tax in 2011/2012** as set out in the medium term financial strategy, which is currently out for consultation with the council plan.

However, in future years, the council faces a difficult funding position. The 2012/13 grant settlement is £6.066 million which is a reduction of 8.3% on the 2011/12 settlement and is £303,000 less than the council's planning assumptions.

By 2013/14 there will have been a cumulative 20% cash reduction in government grant funding to the council.

Council Leader Andrew Finney said: *"Despite the cuts in government grant, the savings the council has already made means it has been able to protect frontline services next year and avoid any reductions in grant funding. We know that residents are struggling to make ends meet themselves and so being able to propose a freeze in their council tax bill for next year will be very welcome to them."*

“But in the years ahead the council will need to take very difficult decisions as we try to balance the budget, keep running the services that matter most to our residents and invest in the borough to ensure long term prosperity and protect jobs.”

Draft priorities for services have been set out in the draft council plan for 2011 to 2014, entitled "Direction – leading the borough to a secure and prosperous future". The consultation on the plan asks about service priorities and where the council's grant funding makes most difference. The council also plans to work with those who help to provide services to communities to look at economies they can make to cope with reduced funding available in future years.

For more information and to give your view on council priorities see www.basingstoke.gov.uk/go/councilplan.

‘One building is better than two’ council cost cutting plan

Moving office-based staff from two buildings into one is being considered by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council as it continues to look for ways to cut costs without affecting services. The change will also reduce the carbon footprint and improve customer service. The council has two ageing buildings – Deanes and Parklands – on the campus in London Road, Basingstoke, which condition surveys show need increasingly costly maintenance and repair work. At a meeting on Monday (28 February), the council's decision-making Cabinet will consider a proposal to draw up detailed plans to relocate all of the staff to the Deanes building. This would allow the Parklands building to be rented or sold, ideally to another public service organisation giving customers more of a ‘one stop shop’ and cutting overall costs to the taxpayer. A partner could also share facilities, such as a reception or post room, further reducing costs.

The proposal follows a feasibility study that found the cost of updating and improving use of space in the 1970s built Deanes building could be covered in the longer term by cash or rent from Parklands and the reduced maintenance, energy and other costs of running two buildings over the next 20 years.

The proposed changes include improving the customer reception and waiting areas, introducing a better open plan and furniture layout to use office space more flexibly and making the council chamber and meeting rooms more accessible for different uses. A range of energy efficiency improvements, to cut the council's bills by up to £56,000 a year and make a huge reduction in its carbon footprint, would include replacing lighting and window systems and bringing forward the installation of modern power and heat systems.

The Government this month released a report showing how public services can save millions by managing their properties better, using the money to protect frontline services or keep council tax down, as well as cutting running costs and carbon. Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council is well ahead of the game, as it has been reviewing its future accommodation options for more than a year.

Cabinet Member for Education, Efficiency and Partnerships Cllr Karen Cherrett said: “The feasibility study has shown us that the costs of running the existing inefficient buildings for

the next 20 years are virtually the same as the costs of changing the internal lay-out of Deanes, improving energy efficiency and enabling us to move all our people into one place. In the process we will also be able to improve access for customers and ensure privacy for residents who need to visit us for sensitive advice and information.

“It means that we have to spend some money now to make these changes but if we have to spend the same money anyway just to stay as we are it simply does not make sense not to get on with it now and see the benefits of change. We will not proceed with a scheme unless a suitable occupier for Parklands is found to help fund the changes. I’m confident that it could be sold or rented and the council is in negotiations with potential occupiers.

“Once again Basingstoke and Deane is at the forefront of national policy, finding ways to save money without impacting the services that really matter to people. We are confident that this project will save money and in the long term mean lower council tax bills.”

The project is part of the council’s efficiency programme which has already identified “quick win” savings of over **£1 million**. The efficiency programme is also looking at how services can be re-structured to reduce duplication and improve customer focus, and has found over **£1.2m** of on-going savings for implementation. The long term plan will focus on how the council can work smarter with its partners, for example through shared services, sharing the existing campus buildings, focusing on residents’ priorities and running more local services through existing voluntary and community bodies.

Funding to help residents to make a difference

Make a difference to your neighbourhood - that’s the message from Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council as it encourages residents to apply for funding to improve their local areas. The council has a small fund to help improve the quality of the local environment and residents are being asked to put forward their suggestions for areas in need of improvement. Areas that could qualify will have nuisance issues affecting the quality of life of residents and will also need to improve the local environment. These improvements could include renewing paved areas, cutting back overgrown shrubs, new tree and shrub planting or other work to make the area look better.

The projects that can qualify for this funding must be small scale schemes, typically costing up to **£5,000 to £10,000** each.

Last year’s applications resulted in a number of projects taking place all over the borough. These include hedgerow planting to keep ball games away from homes in Overton, Kempshott, the South Ham extension and Brighton Hill. A community garden was also created in Browning Close in Popley and new planting undertaken in Joice’s Yard car park in the town centre and in the parking area at Tasmania Close in Popley.

Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Culture Cllr Cathy Osselton said: “Last year we were able to assist in making improvements to a number of neighbourhoods around the borough to ensure more pleasant surroundings to meet the needs of our residents.

“These initiatives may be small in cost but they can make a big difference to people’s everyday lives by improving the appearance of areas and helping to remove or reduce nuisance problems such as playing ball games near to homes.”

Council blitz on untaxed vehicles

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council has new powers to remove any vehicles not displaying a valid tax disc on the public highway or parked in council-owned car parks.

Previously the council had to notify the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) of untaxed vehicles and wait for action to be taken. But the new powers mean that vehicles can now be removed straight away and impounded.

In order to get a vehicle returned the owner will need to pay a fee of £200 plus storage charges and also provide a valid tax disc. All untaxed vehicles are reported to the DVLA so that they are able to pursue the owner for backdated car tax.

If the vehicle remains unclaimed after 14 days it can be scrapped or sold by auction .

Cabinet member for Communities, Sport and Leisure Cllr Clive Sanders said: “Unlicensed vehicles are a nuisance and potentially a danger. They can blight communities and attract vehicle crime and anti-social behaviour Very often they are also unregistered or uninsured.

“It is a legal requirement to keep your car taxed and insured when it is on the road and anyone not doing so in the Borough may suffer the consequences.”

And finally two items of general interest: -

Under 18s protected from sunbed dangers

Facilities that use sunbeds in the borough are being warned they could face a fine of up to £20,000 if under 18s use their products.

The Sunbed (regulation) Act 2010 is now in force and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council is urging companies not to fall foul of the new rules.

The new Act has been brought in to combat the rising numbers of young people being diagnosed with skin cancer from over-exposure to UV rays by preventing under 18 year olds from being allowed to use tanning salons and sunbeds at premises including beauty salons, leisure centres, gyms and hotels and from being allowed to be in an area that is reserved for sunbed users.

Sunbed operators in the borough have already been visited by the council’s environmental health officers who have offered support and advice on the new Act. They will now be inspecting businesses and premises to make sure they are complying with the new regulations.

The council’s Head of Environmental Care Claire Harper, said: “We want to make companies aware that these new regulations are in place and support them to adhere to them.”

Community power for low energy bulb collections

Communities across the borough are being encouraged to help their local areas switch on to low energy light bulb recycling by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council.

The new initiative, supported by the council aims to encourage community centres, parish groups or even just green-thinking individuals to take responsibility for collecting used low-energy light bulbs in their local area, before taking them to a central point for collection and responsible recycling.

The scheme was created by a partnership between Recolight, the specialist waste electrical and electronic equipment compliance scheme for the lighting industry, and CoBRA , Community Bulb Recycling Alliance.

The Government are phasing out the sale of traditional incandescent light bulbs meaning that low-energy light bulbs are now being sold in increasingly large quantities. Low-energy light bulbs have to be recycled correctly as they contain a tiny amount of mercury. Although it isn't harmful to residents' health, mercury can damage the environment in larger quantities. Cabinet Member for the Environment Cllr Elaine Still said: "I am delighted that so many residents are already using low energy light bulbs. However, recycling these bulbs is just as important as properly recycling a fridge or TV. The specially designed collection containers in convenient community locations will make their recycling much easier for residents."

CoBRA creator Mark David Hatwood said: "We hope that the low-energy light bulb collection scheme can prove to be as successful as the battery scheme which collected over 35 tonnes of batteries in just two years in one county alone. Anyone interested can sign up as a volunteer online at www.Recolight.CobraScheme.com and they will be sent a collection container and a transportation box. We'll also sort out all the health and safety requirements for them."

Commenting on the scheme, Recolight CEO Nigel Harvey, said: "It is essential that we raise awareness of the importance of recycling low-energy light bulbs and make it easier for people to do so. Nine out of ten people have at least one low-energy light bulb in their home and the CoBRA scheme is an important community initiative which we hope will play an important part in enabling us to recycle as many low-energy light bulbs as possible. "

For more information or to be a volunteer in your area contact CoBRA by email cobra@recolight.co.uk or call 0845 6017749

Cllr. Eric Dunlop

18th April 2011