

**Bracknell Town Council**  
**Value for Money Conclusion 2009/10**

<b>KLOE 1.1</b>	<b>Key criteria</b>	<b>Bracknell Town Council response</b>
<p><b>Financial planning and financial health</b></p> <p><i>Does the organisation plan its finances effectively to deliver its strategic priorities and secure sound financial health?</i></p>	<p>-medium term planning</p>	<p>The Council's committees agree strategic priorities for the coming year and these are reflected in the associated budget and Precept demand. The budget is set with reference to key strategic priorities both for the coming year and subsequent years (demonstrated in the creation of contingency sums / reserves for specific projects / eventualities).</p>
	<p>-balanced and realistic budget set</p>	<p>Primary assumptions are listed against each budget code in the budget development file and discussed by the Budget Monitoring Group in advance of final budget setting.</p> <p>The budget is set by reference to the prior year's expenditure, corporate priorities and income estimates, taking account of trading conditions. The Precept is discussed and agreed by Council taking into account budgeted expenditure, corporate priorities, RPI and economic conditions.</p>
	<p>-reasonable assumptions on savings plans</p>	<p>Where savings are achievable these are factored into the budget e.g. the budget for new and replacement vehicles and playground equipment takes into account the substantial savings to be gained by purchasing direct from the supplier. Direct debit deals are sought with utility suppliers to reduce costs and give consistent charges over a fixed time period.</p>
	<p>-appropriate cash management</p>	<p>The Office Services Manager has delegated responsibility for Treasury Management and cash flow. Each week sufficient funds are transferred from the High Interest Account to the Current and TV Licence accounts to cover current expenditure. These accounts are reconciled weekly. The Council does not rely on borrowing or overdraft facilities. This procedure results in an increase in income (from interest on the High Interest Account) at no cost to the Council. We minimise risk and maximise returns.</p>

	- policy on reserves	The reserves and balances policy is discussed and monitored at each meeting of the Budget Monitoring group. In 2009/10 careful Treasury Management resulted in some income from investments against a prudent zero budget. The 2010/11 investment budget has been set at a level appropriate to the current dip in the investment market.
	- performance is within budget	In 2009/10 performance was well within budget with expenditure of £1,243,139 against a budget of £1,506,641.
	- sound financial standing	At the end of the year 2009/10 the Council had free and designated reserves totalling 43 % of annual turnover i.e. its financial standing is strong.
	- members and corporate management team exercise collective responsibility for financial matters	The Council has in place a comprehensive structure in order to ensure collective responsibility for financial matters. The Budget Monitoring Group made up of members and officers – including the Responsible Financial Officer (the Town Clerk) meets immediately prior to each Finance and General Purposes Committee to review and monitor financial matters. Issues concerning the financial environment are discussed at this group e.g. Investment Strategy and reported for decision to the Finance and General Purposes Committee. All decisions of the Finance and General Purposes Committee are ratified by Full Council. The Budget Monitoring Group and the Finance and General Purposes Committee are chaired by members with significant financial experience and expertise. All financial matters take place within the framework of the Council's Financial Regulations which set out the roles of members and officers.

<b>KLOE 1.2</b>	<b>Key criteria</b>	<b>Bracknell Town Council response</b>
<p><b>Understanding costs and achieving efficiencies</b>  <i>Does the organisation have a sound understanding of its costs and performance and achieve efficiencies in its activities?</i></p>	<p>- working to understand main cost drivers and factors that influence these</p>	<p>The Budget Monitoring Group which meets at least six times per year receives a detailed ‘exception’ report that enables budget items over or under predicted expenditure to date, to be scrutinised. All budget codes are monitored and the factors influencing expenditure / income are recorded. Appropriate actions are taken as required and any virements between budget heads agreed.</p>
	<p>- costing information that supports decision making is of reasonable quality</p>	<p>Costing information is taken from the prior year’s actual expenditure / income and adjusted according to know factors going forward e.g. notified price increases, RPI, NJC salary increases etc.</p>
	<p>- cost and performance information is used in the financial and service planning process to make decisions about service provision and savings</p>	<p>Cost and service performance information is used to inform decision making including the receipt of compliments and complaints from service users. Resource allocation is planned in line with business needs e.g. changes to the staffing establishment.</p>
	<p>- investment appraisals carried out</p>	<p>In the light of the current economic situation agreement was sought from Council on whether the Investment portfolio for 2009/10 should be changed. The Budget Monitoring group keep this matter under review.</p>
	<p>- benchmarks costs and investigates outliers</p>	<p>The Budget Monitoring group reviews expenditure and income against budget and against prior year costs on a bi-monthly basis. Underperformance on income collection is challenged and where possible measures are put in place to correct this e.g. chasing late payers, advertising and promoting the council’s services. High costs areas are reviewed and action taken as appropriate. Charges for services are regularly benchmarked and reviewed.</p>

	- challenging efficiency targets	Realistic targets are set for income and expenditure, taking into account any efficiency targets agreed in relation to specific items e.g. fuel consumption.
	- monitors achievement of targets	Expenditure and income are regularly monitored against budget with exception reporting of items that exceed or underperform the target set.
	- where targets not met reasons are identified and lessons are learnt	Under-performance is challenged and discussed, lessons learnt and service delivery adjusted or amended in order to nearer meet targets set.

<b>KLOE 1.3</b>	<b>Key criteria</b>	<b>Bracknell Town Council response</b>
<b>Financial reporting</b> <i>Is the organisation's financial reporting timely, reliable and does it meet the needs of internal users, stakeholders and local people?</i>	- budget monitoring is reliable, relevant and understandable	All budget monitoring information which is presented to Council committees bi-monthly is drawn from the RBS Omega software finance package. This package is updated on a daily basis, reconciliations are completed regularly and the prior month is closed down before the reports are presented to committee. Reporting is against well recognised budget headings and is readily understandable.
	- produced regularly and on a timely basis throughout the year	The Budget Monitoring Group receive bi-monthly monitoring reports throughout the year. In year monitoring is timely and accurate (see above) with the end of year figures being presented at the first Budget Working Group of the new year.
	- variances are investigated	Variances are identified on a specialist report and corrective action authorised as appropriate.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- performance is monitored both by financial and related performance information</li> </ul>	<p>All financial information goes first to Budget Monitoring Group for scrutiny. The notes and recommendations of this group go to the Finance and General Purposes Committee immediately following and the minutes of this committee go to Full Council for ratification. Related performance information is reported to the relevant Council Committee or through the Complaints and Compliments process reported to Full Council.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accounts comply with statutory requirements and timetables</li> </ul>	<p>As a Larger Council the Council's Accounts are compiled in accordance with FRSSE. The required timetable is adhered to with the draft Final Accounts to be agreed at Full Council on 22nd June 2010.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the draft accounts approved by the body do not contain material errors</li> </ul>	<p>The Council makes strenuous efforts, including checking with advisers, to ensure that the draft Final Accounts have no material errors</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- provision of working papers and responds promptly to requests for further information</li> </ul>	<p>Full working papers are supplied for the Audit. All queries of the Auditors are responded to immediately.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- published accounts and annual audit letter are available to the public and are on website on timely basis</li> </ul>	<p>The Final Accounts and Annual Audit letter are made available to the public on the Council's website as soon as they are available. The Council also makes papers copies available on request and copies can also be viewed over the counter at Brooke House.</p>

KLOE 2.3	Key criteria	Bracknell Town Council response
<p><b>Good Governance</b> <i>Does the organisation promote and demonstrate the principles and values of good governance?</i></p>	<p>- roles and responsibilities clearly described and published</p>	<p>The role of the Town Council, the Town Clerk, its members, officers and committees is published in the Town Guide as 'Bracknell Town Council in Action'. This is also available to download from the Council's website.</p>
	<p>- constructive working relationships between officers and members</p>	<p>Officers and members work closely together on the business of the Council. The Town Clerk has an annual appraisal which reflects on her work with members. There have been no problems with this working relationship during past years.</p>
	<p>- members and senior officer induction and on-going training opportunities</p>	<p>An induction programme is offered to all new councillors. All staff receive an induction programme and have a formal probationary period. Training opportunities are offered to all staff and councillors through NALC, BALC, SLCC and a range of external providers. Training opportunities are tailored to suit individual needs. The Council has a significant training budget.</p>
	<p>- leadership has a vision of what it wants to achieve for the local community.</p>	<p>The Council has a clear vision of what it is seeking to achieve for the local community. Its vision is <i>'To be the guardian of the Town's parks, play areas and public spaces and to safeguard them from possible future development. To be responsive to the needs of all sections of our community, to build upon our achievements and provide high quality services at optimum cost.'</i></p>
	<p>- vision translates into clear strategic priorities</p>	<p>The Council's vision translates into clear strategic priorities - always striving to improve and enhance the quality of the recreation spaces for which it has responsibility. These priorities are reflected in its budget and projects for the coming year.</p>

	<p>- has arrangements in place to investigate breaches in proper standards of conduct</p>	<p>All members are made aware of the Code of Conduct and regular updates and reminders are given by the Bracknell Forest Borough Solicitor who also acts as Monitoring Officer. Members are reminded on each Agenda of their responsibility to 'Declare Interests' as appropriate. Committee Chairs and the Clerk ensure that potential breaches of conduct are managed. If there was a breach in the standard of conduct this would be reported to the Standards Board. There have been none in past years.</p>
	<p>- clearly communicates and makes accessible complaints procedure</p>	<p>The Council has a formally adopted Complaints Procedure. All complaints are recorded immediately they come into the office and dealt with swiftly. Complainants who are unhappy with officers' initial efforts to resolve their complaint are offered the opportunity to make a formal complaint and are sent a booklet detailing how to do this. All complaints are reported to Full Council.</p>
	<p>- appropriate governance for all significant partnerships which is documented</p>	<p>During 2009 – 2010 the Council were joint signatories with Bracknell Forest Council in a successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid to refurbish the historic park land at South Hill Park. Subsequently as a requirement of this funding the Council has entered into a partnership with Bracknell Forest Council and South Hill Park Arts Centre regarding the future management of South Hill Park. Two Council members sit on the Management Board with officers in attendance. This agreement is fully documented.</p> <p>The Council has a Service Level Agreement with Bracknell Forest Council for the provision of public toilet facilities in Town Centre and at Birch Hill.</p> <p>The Council has no other significant partnerships.</p>