

Runnymede Borough CouncilCORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE4 January 2007 at 7.30pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors J.R. Furey (Chairman), J.E. Haas (Vice-Chairman), A. Alderson, Mrs. F.M. Angell, Mrs L.M. Gillham, H.W.V. Meares, P.I. Roberts, Ms C.M Simmons, P.J. Waddell and G.B. Woodger.

Members of the Committee absent: None

442. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Conservative Group had notified the Chief Executive Officer of its wish that the changes listed below be made to the membership of the Committee. The changes were for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting and thereafter the Councillors removed would be re-appointed.

Remove from Membership	Appoint Instead
Councillor N. Thewlis	Councillor H.W.V. Meares
Councillor C.J. Norman	Councillor P.I. Roberts

The Chief Executive Officer had given effect to these wishes in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

443. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30 November 2006 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

444. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs. F.M. Angell declared a personal and prejudicial interest under the Runnymede Code of Conduct for Members in respect of both of the items concerning Surrey County Council's proposed reconfiguration of infant and junior school provision in Addlestone owing to her position as a member of the County Council's Schools Organisation Committee. Councillor Mrs. Angell therefore withdrew from the room while the items were considered.

445. LOCAL AUTHORITY FINANCE SETTLEMENT 2007/08

The Committee received details of the provisional local authority finance settlement for 2007/08.

Members noted that the methodology used to determine the distribution of grant continued to be based on a calculation of each Council's share of the national cash sum that the Government had provided in the settlement. The Council's entitlement to Formula Grant, the actual cash it would receive from the Government in the form of Revenue Support Grant and redistributed Business Rates, was based on a central allocation, paid on a population based formula, and an assessment of relative needs derived from a range of demographic indices, less a deduction for relative resources calculated by assessing the Authority's tax base in relation to its population. Floor damping provided protection for those authorities whose entitlement would otherwise fall below the minimum uplift of 2.7% with the costs met by scaling back the amount of grant paid to those authorities with larger increases.

As had been anticipated, the needs formulae took Runnymede out of the floor, meaning that for the first time in 12 years the Council would not receive any form of grant protection. The sum due would

be adjusted accordingly to redistribute to authorities below the floor. The result of the calculation was an overall provision settlement for the Council of £5,217,200, consistent with the draft figure originally approved by Parliament in February 2006. This represented an increase of 3% which mirrored the assumption in the Financial Forecast.

Members expressed concern at the Government's intention that it would again cap increases in Council Tax of more than 5%. Although this had been factored into the Financial Forecast it imposed considerable and, in Runnymede's case, disproportionate, constraints at a time when local authorities were facing significant cost pressures.

446. REVENUE ESTIMATES 2007/08

Members gave consideration to the draft estimates and fees and charges for the Committee's services in 2007/08. It was emphasised that despite the financial constraints on the Council considerable efforts had been made to avoid reductions in service levels. The Council continued, however, to face significant budgetary challenges and the Government's capping policy restricted the ability to further enhance services to residents.

Concern was once more expressed at the pressure placed on the Council by the requirement to backfund the deficit on the Runnymede share of the Surrey Pension Fund and the increasing rate of employers contributions to the scheme for current staff. Members were of the view that Government action was required to relieve the growing pensions burden on local authorities.

The Committee noted that the activities of private search agents continued to affect Land Charges fee income. The appropriate response would be to maintain existing service standards and try to ensure that fees were as competitive as possible.

**RESOLVED that -**

- i) the draft Revenue Estimates for 2007/08 be approved as submitted; and**
- ii) the proposed fees and charges for 2007/08 be approved to be effective from 1 April 2007.**

447. SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE PROVISION OF SCHOOLS IN ADDLESTONE – CONSULTATION

The Committee received details of proposals from Surrey County Council for the reorganisation of infant and junior schools in the Addlestone area with effect from September 2008.

Members noted that the County Council had issued a consultation document setting out its proposals to deal with what was claimed to be an over provision of school places in the locality, particularly at Darley Dene infants school. These included the closure of Darley Dene and the transfer of its pupils to the new Sayes Court Primary School. The Darley Dene nursery intake would also transfer to Sayes Court while its Special Educational Needs cluster was due to relocate to the Hythe Primary School. In addition to the enlargement of Sayes Court, it was envisaged that Ongar Place Infants would also expand to include juniors and become a one form entry primary school sharing playing fields with Sayes Court. Primary admissions to St. Pauls School would also increase. Conversely, planned admission numbers at Meadowcroft and Step gates Schools in Chertsey would be subject to reductions. The County Council intended to utilise the receipts from the Darley Dene site to enhance facilities at the other schools in the area.

The Committee recognised that demographics and other changes in service demand would, from time to time, require rationalisation of public provision. It was also acknowledged that 'all through' primary schools of the type proposed at Ongar Place and Sayes Court provided a number of advantages, including consistency of curriculum planning, greater flexibility with resources and lower overheads. They also overcame the need for children to change schools after Key Stage 1.

Considerable concern was, however, expressed at the assumptions underpinning the proposals, not least the robustness of the unsophisticated projection model for pupil numbers. It was emphasised that the Addlestone area was facing substantial growth in housing and population in the near future

with a consequential increase in demand for school places. This was likely to be consolidated in the medium term by Structure Plan targets, the emerging South East Plan and an anticipated shift to social housing tenure as a result of affordable housing policies. The County Council had not demonstrated how it would cater for such growth, nor had it appeared to take into account the trend towards delays in starting families, which potentially masked latent demand. The proposal to close Darley Dene, and thereby remove infrastructure in a location where it was known that there would shortly be major housing development, was potentially inconsistent with the County Council's own Structure Plan commitments with regard to the provision of infrastructure for new developments and its responsibility for the promotion of sustainable development that minimised the need to travel. Darley Dene was in a central location well served by public transport and parents and children would have to travel further to schools of their choice, undermining efforts to increase the number of children walking to school. Closure would add to peak hour traffic congestion on local roads.

Further doubts arose from the uncertain scale of the receipt from a land disposal and the consequential ability of Surrey County Council to finance and enhance facilities at other local schools as intended. The decline in first preferences at Darley Dene appeared to be more symptomatic of the long standing uncertainty surrounding the future of the school than any slippage in educational standards. Members emphasised that it was necessary for a very strong case to be presented before any decision to reduce schooling capacity could be supported, particularly since there could be no guarantees as to the possibility of future reprovision. Not only were there constraints on the land supply in Addlestone town centre but proposals to direct development related contributions to community based infrastructure to the centre with effect from 2009 meant that the likely scale of local redistribution was uncertain.

In the circumstances, the Committee was of the view that there was insufficient justification for closure of Darley Dene and the County Council's modelling provided an unsatisfactory basis on which to move forward with radical proposals, which potentially compromised the needs of the Addlestone community. It was, therefore agreed that formal objections should be raised in response to the consultation.

**RESOLVED that –**

**the Council raise formal objections to the proposals contained in Surrey County Council's review of schools' provision in the Addlestone area and particularly the proposed closure of the Darley Dene Infant School on the basis of the points raised above and in paragraph 3 of the Agenda report.**

448. WEB TRAFFIC STATISTICS

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, 2 November 2006, page 374, para 324).

The Committee noted details of the traffic to the Council's website, including the number and type of page views and figures for both new and repeat visitors during October and November 2006. As monitoring had only recently commenced there was no historical data for the purposes of trend analysis. Anomalies in the statistics had, however, already been identified and these would be investigated and corrected.

449. COUNCIL TAX DISCRETIONARY DISCOUNT

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, December 2004, page 488, para 376).

The Committee gave consideration to a request from a resident in Addlestone for a 50% reduction in Council Tax on an empty property.

Members noted that the property formed one of 5 flats within a converted house. The owner, who lived in one of the flats himself, maintained that the whole property was his home, disputing the assessment that it should be regarded as subdivided. It was claimed that the Council's policy decision to reduce the discount for empty properties from 50% to nil with effect from 1 April 2005 would have a detrimental financial effect on the owner since he did not intend to re-let any of the units as the current tenancies expired. The backdated cost of a discount would amount to £714 for the period 2005/06 – 2006/07 together with 50% of a Band B charge in future years.

The Valuation Officer had, however, confirmed that the flats constituted self-contained units having been converted for use as separate living accommodation. It was therefore necessary for each flat

to be assessed independently. Having regard for the circumstances of the case, the Committee was thus of the view that there was no compelling reason to depart from the established policy, which was intended to help bring empty properties back into occupation. No reduction would therefore be approved in this instance.

**RESOLVED that –**

**the request for a Council Tax discount in respect of the empty property in High Tree Close, Addlestone be refused.**

450. EQUALITY POLICY AND ACTION PLAN

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, September 2005, page 347, para. 222)

The Committee received details of progress towards implementation of the Corporate Equality Policy and its associated action plan and took the opportunity to approve modest revisions to both documents.

Members recalled that the policy encompassed the full range of the Council's equalities obligations, drawing together the various policy statements and strategies, including the race equality scheme and general duties not to discriminate in terms of gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, belief or age. Minor changes were now necessary in order to ensure consistency and take account of recent legislation including new disability and gender equality duties.

The Committee welcomed the balanced and proportionate progress made to date in the implementation of the Council's statutory obligations. It was noted that the Council had now received external accreditation to the second of five levels of the Equality Standard for Local Government. This acknowledged that the Council possessed an equality scheme and had begun to engage in impact assessments and consultation. Impact assessments had already been undertaken in respect of a number of the Council's priority functions although it was acknowledged that more work was required to identify adverse impact and translate the outcome of the assessments into action points in service plans. In the longer term the process would be integrated into the normal policy framework but even with the guidance of an internal Equalities Officer Group the initial reviews were time intensive and absorbed a considerable amount of Officer time. Consultation was being undertaken with organisations representing minority groups wherever possible and contacts strengthened with faith groups and Royal Holloway University. Where it was considered that a particular policy might have a negative impact on a minority group Officers would endeavour to identify those individuals and groups which might be adversely affected and engage in more specific consultation with them.

Progress was also being made in respect of service monitoring. Ethnicity data was now collected from people requesting housing allocations and those on the housing waiting list, whilst the draft protocol for using the residents' panel and the Council's general satisfaction survey asked respondents to state their ethnic origin and declare whether they had a disability. It was hoped that this would give a better profile of respondents and assist in identifying improvements in the perception of service provision by different ethnic groups or people with disabilities. User statistics were not yet being collected and analysed consistently across the authority. The data would be useful for undertaking meaningful impact assessments but required resources for analysis, a need that was currently being scoped. Staffing statistics in respect of recruitment, training, grievance, discipline and promotion were also being monitored for gender, disability and ethnicity trends while mechanisms were in place for the reporting of racial incidents, harassment and hate crime. Almost all Officers and a quarter of Members had now participated in equalities awareness training and the policy, action plan and relevant guidance were widely disseminated.

**RECOMMEND that –**

**the revisions to the Equalities Policy set out at Appendix 'A' be approved.**

451. URGENT ACTION - STANDING ORDER 42

Members noted that the following action had been taken after consultation with the Chairman of the Committee under Standing Order 42.

<u>Officer</u>	<u>Action Taken</u>	<u>Central Index No.</u>
Director of Technical Services	Authorisation to waive off street car parking charges on Saturdays in December, the lost income of approximately £8,000 being absorbed within the anticipated surplus on the car parks budget.	627
Chief Executive Officer	Authorisation of the purchase of laptop computers and associated equipment for two Councillors at a cost of £1,834, drawn from existing budgetary provision.	628

452. SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL COMMITTEE - MINUTES

The draft Minutes of the meeting of the Surrey County Council Local Committee held on 22 September 2006, attached at Appendix 'B', were received and noted.

453. SAFETY COMMITTEE - MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Safety Committee held on 29 November 2006, attached at Appendix 'C', were received and noted.

454. POTENTIAL CLOSURE OF DARLEY DENE INFANTS SCHOOL, ADDLESTONE – PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

By resolution of the Committee the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

Having given consideration to Surrey County Council's proposals for the reconfiguration of infant and junior school provision in the Addlestone area earlier in the meeting, the Committee now received details of the Borough Council's interest in the Darley Dene school site, together with an outline of the potential courses of action open to the Council in the event of the closure of the school and the sale of the land for other purposes. It was noted that detailed consideration of the position could await the outcome of the consultation exercise and a decision on the shape of schooling provision in Addlestone.

**RESOLVED that –**

- i) the legal and financial implications of the interest be noted;**
- ii) detailed consideration of the Council's position regarding the interest be deferred until Surrey County Council's position on the schools' review in the Addlestone area is clear; and**
- iii) Officers be requested to report further.**

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 9.10 pm)