

Runnymede Borough CouncilCORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE3 November 2005 at 7.30pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors G.B. Woodger (Chairman), A. Alderson, M.J. Brown, J.R. Furey, P.A. Greenwood, H.W.V. Meares, C.J. Norman, Mrs J. Norman, Ms C.M. Simmons, and P.J. Waddell.

Members of the Committee absent: None

Councillors J.M. Edwards and Mrs L.M. Gillham also attended.

340. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Conservative Group had notified the Chief Executive Officer 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 Mrs J. Norman
Councillor R.K Habgood	Councillor M.J. Brown
Councillor J.E. Haas	Councillor H.W.V Meares

341. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 October 2005 were confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the insertion of the words 'including the extra bullet point identified above' at the end of resolution i) in respect of the procurement strategy.

342. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors A. Alderson and C.J. Norman declared personal and prejudicial interests under the Runnymede Code of Conduct for Members in respect of the item concerning the Association for the Improvement of Runnymede as they were both Directors of the organisation. Councillors Alderson and Norman therefore withdrew from the room during the discussion of the matter.

343. COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PROGRESS

The Committee received details of progress made in relation to the Improvement Plan agreed with the Audit Commission following the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Council in December 2003. Only a relatively modest number of perceived weaknesses had been identified and the individual issues and progress thereon had all been reported to Members previously. However, in view of the importance of the matter to the continuing work of the External Auditors, both in the formal 'Direction of Travel' statement to be prepared in the early part of 2006 and the future CPA considerations, a consolidated schedule identifying each topic area, target and timescale was now reviewed.

Members noted that the overall position was very positive with progress made to date in many areas including communications, procurement and risk management. A considerable number of the targets had already been achieved while others were on course for successful completion. No significant slippage was reported. The Committee took the opportunity to make minor drafting changes to the Improvement Plan for clarification purposes.

RESOLVED that -**the current position on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Improvement Plan be noted.**344. THE FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF DISTRICT COUNCILS FROM 2006 - AUDIT COMMISSION CONSULTATION

The Committee gave consideration to the Audit Commission's consultation document and proposed options for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of District Councils from 2006 onwards.

Members noted that the consultation was lacking in detail, as the Audit Commission appeared to have encountered difficulties in settling upon a coherent regime for district councils, given the wide variation in terms of populations, budgets and scale of discretionary services. The new framework was intended to be less intensive both in terms of audit and inspection and the impact on the leadership and managerial capacity of authorities. The guiding principles focused on improvement, the perspective of service users, value for money for taxpayers and targeted and risk based services delivered in partnership with others. The key features were to include Use of Resources assessments comprising of five themes – financial reporting, financial management, financial standing, internal control and value for money. There would also be service assessments based either on performance information or inspection activity with the possibility of separate assessments for benefits, housing, environment and culture on the Single Tier and County Council model. Corporate assessments, meanwhile would measure achievement in relation to the local and national shared priorities or in relation to service delivery (using the same areas as used for Service Assessments or the Council's Improvement Plan) while "Direction of Travel Statements" would assess progress in respect of improvement each year.

The Audit Commission had published a series of options that set out different ways in which the various elements of CPA could be brought together. These were broadly split into two category types. The first three options envisaged the re-categorisation of every authority on a rolling basis by 2009, whereas Options 4 and 5 would entail an annual review of information already being gathered to see if re-inspection was warranted. A full inspection would take place only where there was sufficient evidence of sustained performance that was significantly better than that indicated in the original assessment, and the Council wished to be considered for re-categorisation, or if there was evidence of significant weakening of performance. The Committee concurred with the view of the Local Government Act Member Working Group that it was this latter approach that was most appropriate in respect of both good and excellent rated authorities, consistent with the established principles of proportionate, targeted and relevant inspection.

Members were, however, of the opinion that there was some lack of clarity, particularly around Option 4, which, unlike Option 5, would incorporate Service Assessments. Such assessments clearly needed to be proportionate having regard to the previously judged position of the Local Authority and contemporary data on service and corporate performance. Whilst "excellent" Councils would not be considered in this process, unless they showed significant signs of weakening performance, it was difficult to understand clearly exactly what elements would go to make up the new inspection regime/assessment. Nevertheless, subject to clarification and assurance that Service Assessments would be proportionate, relevant and transparent, Members felt that the more rounded approach set out in Option 4, and in the Committee's response to the individual questions posed in the consultation paper (attached at Appendix 'A'), represented the best means of building upon the rigorous work undertaken in the first round of CPA Inspections.

The Committee acknowledged that a somewhat greater resource input was likely to be required locally in order to deal with Option 4. The current Key Lines of Enquiry associated with the Housing Service Inspection for Unitary Councils, were large, complex and likely to be resource hungry if rolled-out in a similar fashion to District Councils. The resource implications would not be able to be fully assessed, however, until the form and content of any new CPA regime was known. It would be necessary, in the light of that information, for the Council to form a policy view as to how vigorously it wished to engage in the new process and what outcomes it sought. A brief further round of consultation on the more detailed proposals was expected early in the New Year.

RESOLVED that -

- i) subject to the proposed Service Assessments being proportionate and relevant, Option 4 within the Audit Commission's Consultation Paper of 6 September be confirmed as the Council's preferred way forward; and**
- ii) the detailed comments contained above and in Appendix 'A' form the Council's detailed response to the Audit Commission.**

345. AUDIT COMMISSION DIRECTION OF TRAVEL STATEMENTS 2005/06

The Committee received details of the further assessment of district authorities that the Audit Commission was due to undertake in the near future and the work that had been carried out in preparation for the exercise.

Despite the fact that authorities previously rated as "excellent" in CPA Inspections had been promised inspection free "holidays" for three years, Members noted that the Audit Commission was now proposing more extensive assessments on an annual basis in addition to the reporting on progress relating to the CPA Improvement Plans. These were to take the form of "Direction of Travel Statements" that would be prepared on each District Council by the Commission's Relationship Manager as part of the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter. As a consequence the Letter would henceforth be published towards the end of the financial year, rather than the end of the calendar year.

It was understood that the Statement, which would not for the moment be accompanied by a score or label, was to be a summarised commentary on the Council's overall progress in delivering improvement against its local improvement priorities since the CPA score assessment in April 2004. This would focus both on external outcomes and progress made in building capacity to address internal weaknesses and opportunities for improvement identified as part of the CPA process. The Statement would be based on evidence drawn from the Council's own reports of its progress against its improvement priorities, Use of Resources assessments, Audit and Inspection Reports, Performance Indicators and the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's scores and assessments. The relative weightings to be applied to these were unclear and although the Use of Resources Assessment/Value for Money aspect was expected to figure prominently, there did not appear to be much transparency as to the way in which the Commission would arrive at the Statement.

The Committee noted that although the Council was not expected to produce a Self-Assessment, the Audit Commission had sought, as part of the Use of Resources assessment, a formal Value for Money Self-Assessment and informal inputs to its Key Lines of Enquiry for the Use of Resources Assessment. Although the importance of maintaining the Council's enviable position in respect of external assessment was recognised, Members expressed some concern at the staff resources the exercise had absorbed on an opportunity cost basis. It had inevitably been necessary to delay or defer other tasks to accommodate the work. More welcome was the decision by the Audit Commission to include its positive CPA assessment of the Council as a case study amongst the guidance issued to other authorities in respect of the Value for Money theme.

346. PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS WITH SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee November 2001, page 513, paras 350/351)

The Committee gave consideration to the future of partnership arrangements with Surrey County Council in the light of the latter's recent governance review of its Local Committees.

Members recalled that the County Council had introduced the local committee structure without prior consultation in 2002, primarily to oversee the Local Transportation Service following the termination of the Highways Agency Agreement with many of the Surrey Districts. These arrangements had superseded the successful Partnership Advisory Group, which had offered a valuable opportunity for structured collaboration between the two authorities. Boroughs and Districts were invited to participate in the Local Committees through the nomination of the same number of Councillors as County Members, but were only offered voting rights on transportation matters if other services (including other highway related services such as off-street parking and the associated budgets) were drawn into the new arrangements. The Local Committees were seen to have four roles:

- i) Delegated budget for transportation.
- ii) Devolved management from Members' allocations (although the way in which the individual allocations were expended was down to the individual Members rather than the Committee).
- iii) Performance review across all services.
- iv) Local engagement and advocacy.

Runnymede was one of two Borough Councils which did not currently nominate Councillors to its Local Committee. None of the nine that did, however, had offered to delegate services/budgets to their respective Committees. Only five of the Committees considered generic/other services beyond transportation. It was noted that less than half of the business of the Runnymede Committee was devoted to executive action and almost all of this related to minor traffic improvements and footways.

Members noted, however, that a recent review of the operation of the Committees had led to proposals for change, with the emphasis placed on a tighter, streamlined focus with fewer formal meetings concentrating on a small number of priority issues agreed with the Borough/District partners. There was a desire for fewer and shorter reports and for performance reports to focus more on locally specific issues or major service items, which could often be taken at informal briefing meetings. The shift to area based transportation groups had also led to proposals for improved delegation to the Local Transportation Manager in order to avoid items coming to the Committee unnecessarily. It remained unclear what level of input/discretion and delegation Local Committee members would have under the new arrangements in relation to transportation matters. There was a continued wish for Borough/District Council participation, but no suggestion that their voting rights should be extended beyond transportation matters or of additional delegation to the Committees.

There were a number of options open to the Council, ranging from continued reliance upon the existing formal Partnership arrangements in respect of specific service areas, Task Groups and the Local Strategic Partnership, combined with the regular Officer level liaison, to the co-option of County Councillors on to appropriate Runnymede committees. The Committee, however, concurred with the recommendation of the Local Government Act Member Working Group that, in the light of the new proposals, the Council should now agree in principle to participation in Local Committee type arrangements. It was stressed that any such involvement should be dependent upon the negotiation of a different and more meaningful emphasis in the form and content of the Local Committee's deliberations. There was a strong desire that the new arrangements should focus on a small number of issues and clearly defined outcomes in order to make a real difference to service delivery and/or residents generally. To this end it was considered important that the new Committee established some kind of structured linkage with County Council Executive Members. Suggested work areas included:

- co-ordinating work on the two defined areas of some deprivation,
- provision for youth,
- asset rationalisation,
- use of surplus premises and Civic Office provision,
- local highways/transportation issues,
- Community and Social Services.

The Committee agreed that discussions should be opened with the County Council to seek to settle satisfactory detailed arrangements. Members were pleased to note that the County Council also appeared to be keen to arrive at an effective, formal partnership arrangement which met the needs of both organisations and achieved local benefit. Resolution of the issue would settle one of the outstanding matters in Runnymede's CPA Improvement Plan.

RECOMMEND that -

- i) subject to settling satisfactory detailed arrangements, and to agreement on the content of meetings, the Council agrees to participate in the Local Committee of the County Council;**
- ii) the Chairman of this Committee, in consultation with the other Party Leaders, seeks to agree satisfactory arrangements for participation, including content, structure, topic emphasis, timing and opportunities for non-member participation; and**
- iii) subject to (i) and (ii) above, the agreed political balance of the six Borough Council representatives be 4 Conservative, 1 Runnymede Independents and 1 Labour with nomination by the Party Groups.**

347. ASSOCIATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF RUNNYMEDE - FUNDING
(Ref: Minutes of Leisure and Environment Committee, March 2003, page 1194, para. 727)

The Committee gave consideration to a request from the Association for the Improvement of Runnymede (AIR) for additional funding of £5,000 in order to cover its operating costs for the remainder of the financial year. AIR, a registered Environmental Body, existed to obtain funding for local community initiatives from the landfill tax credit scheme and had been instrumental in attracting nearly £350,000 to projects in the Borough over the previous four years. Delays in the completion of schemes in the current financial year had, however, reduced the income that AIR derived from the administrative charge associated with each project. The charge had already been increased to the maximum permissible level of 10% but the additional income that this would generate was unlikely to be realised until the next financial year. Despite the customary grant from the Council of £5,000 to support administrative costs, there was a possibility that the organisation might run out of cash by the end of November.

Members recognised the vital role played by AIR in the development of community initiatives. Although many landfill operators had now established their own Distributive Environmental Bodies to handle requests for funding, it was felt that the existence of a local, independent organisation within the Borough would continue to attract additional funds to the area through the support and encouragement it was able to provide to local organisations. The Committee was therefore of the view that a draw down facility of up to £5,000 should be made available to AIR in order to help protect the valuable service it provided. The additional expenditure could, if called upon, be met by virements from discretionary rate relief and grant aid budgets.

RESOLVED that -

- i) the Director of Finance be authorised to make available a draw down facility of up to £5,000 to AIR in 2005/06 in order to provide additional support to the organisation's administrative costs; and**
- ii) the additional expenditure be met by a virement of £4,200 from the budget for discretionary rate relief and £800 from the general provision for leisure grant aid.**

348. SCHEME OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES – MODIFICATION

The Committee gave consideration to proposals for a series of minor modifications to the scheme of Members' allowances.

Members concurred with a recommendation from the Independent Remuneration Panel that the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Regulatory Committee, which had been established after the introduction of the present scheme in order to deal with all licensing functions other than those subject to the Licensing Act 2003, should be entitled to special responsibility allowances. Having regard for the current responsibilities and workloads, it was agreed that these should be set at £1,034 and £517 respectively. This would give the Chairman of the Regulatory Committee the same allowance as the Vice-Chairman of the Licensing Committee, and the Vice-Chairman of Regulatory Committee half that amount, effective from the beginning of the current financial year. There was no

budgetary provision for this so a supplementary revenue estimate would be required for the payments in 2005/06.

Members also felt that the Independent Remuneration Panel should be asked to examine whether the special responsibility allowances currently payable to ordinary members of the Licensing Committee in recognition of its workload in the initial phase of implementation of the Licensing Act should be removed with effect from 1 April 2006. This would reflect not only the move beyond the implementation stage of the legislation but also the transfer of some of the Committee's original duties to the Regulatory Committee. In view of the financial pressures on the Council, Members additionally asked the Panel to consider whether no further inflationary increases should be applied to the allowances until the introduction of the new scheme, due to come into effect on 1 April 2007.

RECOMMEND that –

- i) the scheme of Members' allowances be amended to provide for special responsibility allowances of £1,034 and £517 respectively to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Regulatory Committee, with effect from 1 April 2005; and the amended scheme be advertised in accordance with the Regulations;**
- ii) a supplementary revenue estimate of £1,551 be approved for the purpose; and**
- iii) the Independent Remuneration Panel be asked to examine the Scheme of Members' Allowances and report on potential amendment, in particular by;**
 - a) removing the provision for inflation in the current scheme year and afterwards (i.e. with practical effect from 1 January 2006 to 31 March 2007); and**
 - b) removing the special responsibility allowance payable to ordinary Members of the Licensing Committee with effect from the next scheme year (i.e. from 1 April 2006).**

(An amendment that 'the introduction of special responsibility allowances for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Regulatory Committee be deferred pending the submission of a detailed report on the responsibilities of the Committee and the number of occasions on which it has met in the past two years' was LOST.

Upon a requisition that the names of those voting in respect of items i) and ii) of the original motion be recorded, there voted as follows;

In favour of the original motion (8):-	Councillors A. Alderson, J.R. Furey, H.W.V. Meares, C.J. Norman, Mrs J. Norman, Ms C.M Simmons, P.J. Waddell and G.B. Woodger.
Against the original motion (1):-	Councillor P.A. Greenwood
Abstained (1):-	Councillor M.J. Brown

The original motion was therefore CARRIED).

349. 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	Approval of the purchase of two servers in order to install software for an e-planning solution and a Planning Delivery Grant assessment at a cost of £7,600, to be funded from Planning Delivery Grant	602

350. CIVIC OFFICES REPROVISION SUB-COMMITTEE - MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Civic Offices Reprovision Sub-Committee held on 22 September 2005, attached at Appendix 'B', were received and noted.

351. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT MEMBER WORKING GROUP - MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Local Government Act Member Working Group held on 11 October 2005, attached at Appendix 'C', were received and noted.

352. KERBSIDE RECYCLING CONTRACT

(Ref: Minutes of Leisure & Environment Committee September 2002, page 544, para. 316 and page 546, para. 321)

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 paragraphs 7, 9 and 11 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

Members were informed of the recent communications with the Council's recycling contractor and considered various matters regarding the future provision of the service.

RESOLVED that –

- i) Officers be instructed to negotiate with Cheshire Recycling to continue to provide the service in accordance with Cheshire's contractual obligations and without the increase in the contractual price currently being demanded;**
- ii) in the event that i) above is not achievable and without prejudice to the Council's rights under the contract, then the Officers be instructed to negotiate with Cheshire Recycling to continue the interim provision of the service sufficient to enable a managed handover and a supplementary estimate be approved in the sum reported at the meeting to facilitate the continued provision of the service for the interim handover period;**
- iii) the Director of Technical Services be authorised, in consultation with the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the Leisure and Environment Committee, to take any necessary action relating to the provision of the service; and**
- iv) the Director of Administration and Leisure be authorised, in consultation with the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the Leisure and Environment Committee, to take any necessary action relating to contractual matters to protect the Council's interests.**

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 9.37pm)