

Runnymede Borough Council

LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

22 January 2009 at 7.30 pm

Members of the
Committee present: Councillors C J Norman (Chairman) M J Brown and Miss M N Heath (Vice-Chairmen), C J Chapman, A J Davis, Mrs M T Harnden, M T Kusneraitis, A M Moore, J W C Perschke and L C Pouyanne.

Members of the
Committee absent: None.

Councillor J R Furey also attended.

444. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 November 2008, were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

445. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A M Moore declared a personal interest in the item 'Leisure Centres Management Structure – update' as he was employed by Royal Holloway University of London, which was mentioned in the report.

446. REVENUE ESTIMATES 2009/10

(Ref: Minutes of the Leisure and Environment Committee, January 2008, page 684, para 482)

The Committee received the Revenue Estimates for 2009/10 in respect of Leisure Services, Engineering, Environmental Protection and Safer Runnymede.

Members were advised that the move to the new Civic Centre and new ways of working had impacted quite significantly on some of the budgets. Increases in capital charges associated with the new building and equipment had resulted in the recharges for office accommodation, IT and Safer Runnymede being changed in some service areas.

In respect of Leisure, the probable outturn for each service was broadly similar to the original estimate apart from at the Leisure Centres owing to lower than anticipated all weather pitch income at Egham Leisure Centre and lower than hoped for memberships at Addlestone Leisure Centre.

However, Officers were pleased to report that the joint management arrangements at the leisure centres were estimated to generate savings in excess of their target and the play and youth budget had generated a £16,000 reduction in its net operating expenditure during the year.

Members were advised that the revised savings targets for the Council had presented a number of new challenges, not least for the Cemeteries service, which had been set an additional income target of £40,000 by 2012. The charges for cemeteries had been increased by an average of 15% accordingly. In doing so it was noted that achieving this target was reliant on factors outside the Council's control.

Officers had added another column to the fees and charges tables to show the pre and post December 2008 charges which had changed, following from the cut in VAT announced by the Government in November.

In respect of Environmental Services, Members noted that the total costs of the bring sites for Recycling had increased by £29,000. This was due to an increase in recycling which had led to a higher level of collections being made and increased costs charged by the contractors accordingly.

Officers confirmed that these costs were partially offset by increased income from recycling credits. However, proceeds from sales of materials had reduced so the situation would be monitored closely.

The cost of the kerbside collection contract had also increased. The terms of the contract required it to be inflated annually by the Retail Price Index (4.8%) which was 1.8% more than allowed in the financial forecast. In addition, contractual payments made to compensate for large increases in the price of fuel had resulted in an additional £34,000 being placed on the costs of the contract in the current year.

Members noted that the cost of fuel had impacted on all those budgets where vehicles were involved, however, the increased costs were expected to be £10,000 lower than the provision placed in the Financial Forecast.

Officers advised that owing to the later than planned implementation of a reduced number of refuse rounds and consequently longer settling in period additional costs of £35,000 were incurred during the year. This delay had a knock on effect for Green Waste collection income which was likely to be approximately £24,000 lower than anticipated. However, Officers were confident that subscriptions to the scheme would increase in the coming months, and currently stood at 5,025 households. In order to encourage take up it was agreed to freeze the fees and charges for this service for 2009/10 which would mean that an additional 700 households would need to join the scheme to keep it in line with the Forecast provision. In order for this to be achieved it was acknowledged that Officers would need to boost publicity and promotion of the scheme, and utilise the time of the Monitoring and Enforcement Officer.

With regard to Safer Runnymede, Officers confirmed that the switchover to future-proof digital and broadband technology, together with new maintenance agreements had increased the budget. However, these necessary improvements increased the scope of attracting new business.

The Committee noted the levels of expenditure in each service area, commenting that a balance would need to be struck between Leisure and Environment spend. Members requested a breakdown of the salaries and wages and grounds maintenance costs in the Parks and Open Spaces budget and instructed Officers to consider reducing the extent of the Grounds Maintenance contract when it was due for renewal.

Officers confirmed that the budget for parks and open spaces covered a large number of office based and off-site staff but informed Members that this was an area that was being looked at to identify possible savings, particularly with regard to overtime in the manned parks.

The Committee acknowledged the efficiency of Leisure Services, and the value for money they gave.

Members considered that Runnymede's spend in cemeteries was relatively high and sought an explanation of that also.

Officers considered that the hire charges for the football pitches in the parks was competitive when compared with other local authorities, although it was agreed to re-examine the charging structure as it applied to adult and junior clubs.

Members were disappointed that the use of the Partnership Team had been discontinued due to funding issues at the NHS regarding levels of remuneration and asked Officers to approach the PCT with a view to re-instating it if possible.

Members questioned the cost of technical support provided to the abandoned vehicles service. However, Officers confirmed that the cost represented percentages of staff time rather than whole posts and there would also be practical difficulties if it were to be contracted out.

Members welcomed the developments with Air Quality and it was confirmed that a new post of Air Quality Officer would be appointed in the near future.

With regard to fees and charges the Committee approved a revised charging structure for Trade

Waste to give greater transparency and consistency for customers and to streamline the back office functions. There would now be a bin hire charge, a collection charge and a disposal charge which would be payable by monthly direct debit, and discounts would no longer be offered.

Members also approved the introduction of a new charge for the collection of clinical waste. It was agreed, if possible, that instead of charging the customers it would be sensible to recover some of the costs incurred from the GP surgeries and/or NHS Trust, based on the number of referrals from each practice. An annual charge of £175 was set, plus a £30 charge per collection of a 'sharps' box. It was hoped that this would generate additional income of approximately £5,800 in 2009/10.

RESOLVED that –

- i) the probable outturn for 2008/09 and draft Revenue Estimates for 2009/10 as amended, be approved as submitted;**
- ii) the revised fee charging structure for trade waste and the introduction of a new charge for the collection of clinical waste be approved; and**
- iii) the proposed schedules of charges for 2009/10, as amended, be approved, to be effective from either the first week of April or 1 April 2009 as appropriate.**

447. OUT OF HOURS NOISE RESPONSE SERVICE

(Ref: Minutes of Review Board, October 2007, page 431, para 295, Leisure and Environment Committee, November 2007, page 513, para 360 and January 2008, page 684, para 482, Corporate Management Committee, November 2008, page 546, para 341 and Council, December 2008.)

The Committee received, for information, details of how it was proposed to cover the out of hours noise response service since its deletion in the latest round of revenue reductions.

Members were advised that the service did not provide good value for money; the relatively small number of visits meant that each one cost approximately £1,000.

Members welcomed the initiative and thanked those staff who were prepared to be included on a 'call out list', so, if available when contacted, could attend potential out of hours complaints regarding noise.

448. LEISURE SAVINGS

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, November 2008, page 546, para 341 and Council, December 2008.)

The Committee received details on how Leisure Services might achieve further revenue reductions in pursuance of the £141,000 savings target for Leisure Services, approved by Corporate Management Committee in December for the period 2009/10 to 2012/13, as part of the overall target of £712,000 to achieve medium term stability.

Members were reminded that since 2005 Leisure Services had delivered some significant revenue reductions. These included:

- a £55,000 reduction in the operational costs of the play schemes
- a £20,000 reduction in the special parks budget and
- a £21,000 saving on the halls budget.

In the coming months Officers would be examining how to deliver savings by generating additional income and/or reducing budgets.

It was confirmed that a report would be brought to a future meeting regarding the manned parks and a proposed reduction in authorised overtime in order to save £15,000.

The Committee noted the following actions:

- a saving of £45,000 for Egham Leisure Centre through the transfer of the all weather 5 -a-side football pitches to external management, although Members were advised that based on the current figures it was unlikely that the full saving would be achieved
- above inflation rises in discretionary income charges, increased by 9% in 2009
- an increase in Cemetery charges above inflation leading to an overall increase of 30% in the next three years
- a review of Allotment charges with the aim of increasing income by £5,000 in 2010/11
- trimming of small budget headings to save £5,000 at the Leisure Centres; and
- the rationalisation of the marketing function at the Leisure Centres through the deletion of the Marketing post to deliver a saving of £13,000.

It was agreed that although Officers were well aware of the savings that had to be made it would be a useful exercise to go further and imagine that all their budgets were cut by 20% or 25% and set out how that could be achieved and what the effect would be in terms of service reduction. Members considered this might produce more tangible information to be communicated to residents.

Members acknowledged that services for the minority groups of residents were already being cut in favour of preserving those services for majority groups.

The Committee noted that overall the Council had gone some way to making £2.4 million worth of savings with minimal noticeable effect for residents but that more drastic and visible measures might have to be taken in the future if pressure from the Government to be 'efficient' continued.

449. LEISURE CENTRES – MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE UPDATE

(Ref: Minutes of the Leisure and Environment Committee, January 2008, page 687, para 485 and November 2008, page 454, para 320)

The Committee received an update on how the joint management structure, implemented in April 2008, had been working.

Members were pleased to learn that savings on the staffing budget of £50,000 had been made already and that staff at both sites were now working to the same common goals and objectives. It was reported that the opportunity for staff to move between the sites had provided more variety and opportunities for their development and a number of staff had taken advantage of this.

Officers confirmed that specific savings had been made following the resignation of the Marketing Manager and the subsequent deletion of the post following three unsuccessful attempts to fill it. The duties were re-allocated and split between the Gym, Customer Services and Programme Managers whose grades were reviewed, after which an additional saving of £13,000 was made against a target of £5,000.

Members were pleased that progress had been made to develop the existing partnership with Royal Holloway (University of London) Sports Centre.

The Committee noted that membership had peaked in October 2008; achieving 1955 between both sites. This was broken down to 1425 at Egham Leisure Centre and 530 at Addlestone Leisure Centre. The combined current membership figure was 1903, made up of 1392 and 511 respectively and Officers would update these figures at the next meeting.

Members learned that a number of options and ideas for improved facilities had been identified. However, they required further investment which was currently limited.

One of the new projects being considered was the provision of a full sized artificial football pitch at Addlestone Leisure Centre. Officers confirmed that a 3rd Generation pitch might cost in the region of £½ million, and a new hybrid sand based pitch would be up to £400,000. This had been progressed and positive discussions had taken place with Jubilee High School who were looking at accessing match funding through the Tulk Fund. The Surrey Football Association had also expressed support for a football foundation bid to match any funding available through the Tulk Fund. Some Members were concerned that such a project might be outsourced at a later

date given plans elsewhere, but were assured that the dual use nature of the facility would make this unlikely.

450. BASINGSTOKE CANAL – MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT AND SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

The Committee considered two draft documents which had been produced by the Basingstoke Canal Authority to cover the joint management, operation and financial arrangements in respect of the Basingstoke Canal in partnership with the local authorities through which it entered or bordered.

Members noted that the following areas had been agreed or would be explored by the Basingstoke Canal Joint Management Committee on which the Council was represented.

- The agreement to cover the arrangements for the joint management and operation of the canal
- A formal funding agreement be established on a rolling three year basis linked to a service level agreement
- The option of establishing a charitable trust; and
- Organisation of a condition survey and asset management plan.

The Committee noted that only 1.25 miles of the canal's 32 miles in length ran in the Borough, from its starting point where it met the Wey Navigation in New Haw. As such, it was agreed that this Council's contribution should be lower than the other riparian authorities.

The formula for funding was considered a little awry as each authority's contribution was based on the population within five miles of the canal and the bank mileage in each borough. It was noted that the population figures did not take into account the fact that a significant number of the people who lived within a five mile radius of the Runnymede stretch of the canal did not live in the borough.

Members regretted that owing to ongoing financial pressures there was no likelihood of full contributions being made by the Council. In respect of the other options which had been discussed, Officers were instructed to encourage the Basingstoke Canal Authority to join the Association for the Improvement of Runnymede (AIR) so that a bid to landfill tax operators to carry out improvement works to the tow path on the Runnymede stretch of the canal could be progressed.

Members identified a particular area along the canal where graffiti needed to be removed and Officers agreed to arrange for this to be done shortly.

Members were advised that the Service Level Agreement highlighted the services which the Council would be provided with by the Basingstoke Canal Authority. It also identified the Council's obligation in respect of a three year funding grant based on the formula as described.

It was agreed that although in principle approval could be given to the formalised arrangements, unless the documents made allowances for the lower than full level of funding the Council would be unable to sign up to the service level agreement.

RESOLVED that –

- i) the Joint Management Committee be advised of this Council's in principle approval of the formalised arrangements as set out in the draft Memorandum of Agreement and Service Level Agreement as reported for the operation and management of the Basingstoke Canal, subject to:**
 - a) both documents highlighting that this Council is unable to meet the full funding requested under the revised formula and that a maximum of £8,000 will be paid in contributions; and**

b) Officers continue to identify opportunities to access external funding and 'in kind' contributions for improvement works to the canal in consultation with the Director of the Basingstoke Canal Authority.

451. FREE SWIMMING PROGRAMME

The Committee was informed of a Government initiative over two years to encourage swimming for the over 60 and under 16 age groups.

Runnymede had been allocated funding of £23,648 for the over 60's, £41,472 for the under 16's and £24,600 for special projects.

The Committee was advised that because Runnymede did not have a public swimming pool of its own, the age group related funding could not be kept or used for accessing private swimming pools and would need to be shared with neighbouring authorities that were eligible. Discussions had taken place with Spelthorne, Elmbridge and Woking. This arrangement had been approved by the Department for Media Culture and Sport (DCMS) and agreed with those boroughs. The final allocation would be dependent on any deduction for the costs associated with the provision of transport for the over 60's, if allowed by DCMS.

Members were informed that the DCMS had been advised that the Council would be interested in using a proportion of the over 60's funding to cover the transportation costs to neighbouring borough's pools. The other boroughs had not raised any objections to this proposal and the cost of using transport provided by Community Services was being investigated. One option could be to have pick ups from selected day centres, sheltered housing units or other venues on a weekly basis.

Officers agreed to consider whether Age Concern might also be involved in the transport arrangements if feasible.

With regard to funding from the third pot (£24,600) Members were advised this could be used for specific activities related to project development costs such as feasibility studies or capital improvements. Officers suggested that a feasibility study could be undertaken for the replacement of the outdoor facility at Jubilee High School and Addlestone Leisure Centre, subject to the school being interested in pursuing this option and receiving confirmation from the DCMS that using the funding in this way would be allowable.

It was agreed that if no such projects were identified the funding would be passed on to the other boroughs as a contribution towards improving their existing facilities.

Members were pleased that no financial costs would be incurred by taking up the free swimming funding as without a pool being operated in the borough there were no additional associated revenue costs.

It was noted that Officers would be asking neighbouring boroughs to provide information on the number of Runnymede residents accessing free swimming, although the ease with which this information could be provided would vary from borough to borough, however, some details would need to be produced for monitoring purposes.

The next step would be to discuss with the Communications Manager how to effectively publicise the free swimming programme in the lead in period to April 2009. Officers confirmed that there was a possibility that generic publicity material could be used across the boroughs but this would need to be investigated.

RESOLVED that –

- i) the Council passes on the funding provided through the free swimming programme for the over 60's and under 16's to the boroughs of Spelthorne, Elmbridge and Woking as set out in the report;**

- ii) **the Pot Three project development funding be used to develop Runnymede projects, subject to something suitable being identified; and**
- iii) **if no such project is identified, the funding be split evenly between the boroughs of Spelthorne, Elmbridge and Woking.**

452. EGHAM LEISURE CENTRE FOOTBALL PITCHES – EXTERNAL MANAGEMENT

This item was withdrawn and Members noted that a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.51 pm)