

Runnymede Borough CouncilREVIEW BOARD8 February 2006 at 7.30 p.m.

Members of the Board present: Councillors C.J. Norman (Chairman), J. Broadhead (Vice-Chairman), Ms D.V. Clarke, J.B. Dean, Mrs C.E. Gant, Mrs L.M. Gillham, R.J. Ray, and P.B. Tuley.

Member of the Board absent: Councillor J.E. Haas

536. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Review Board meeting held on 8 December 2005 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

On issues arising from the Minutes, information was awaited from Surrey County Council on matters raised by Runnymede regarding Surrey Pension Fund contributions. A Member would be advised of the latest position on roll out of real time information on bus times, further to a dialogue which had been established with Surrey County Council on this matter.

537. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In respect of the item entitled Progress Report on Enforcement of Planning Control, Councillors J. Broadhead and J.B. Dean declared personal interests by reason of being Members of the Planning Committee on 14 December 2005 which had made the decision on the levels of staffing in the Planning Enforcement section. The interests were judged to be only prejudicial if the original decision was debated. As it was not debated, the Councillors remained in the room.

538. RUNNYMEDE STATE REPORT - ANNUAL REVIEW

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, November 2004, page 400, para 315)

Introduction

The Board received the Annual Review of the Runnymede State Report and considered whether to approve the review and the use of it to measure future progress on quality of life indicators.

The Corporate Management Committee had resolved to approve the first Runnymede State Report (RSR) at its meeting on 4 November 2004. This Report had established a baseline position to measure quality of life and sustainability through social, economic and environmental indicators to inform service provision and policy initiatives. The Committee had also noted that the RSR would be subject to ongoing review with individual issues and trends being examined as data was assembled, and that an Annual Report would be submitted to the Corporate Management Committee for independent audit and monitoring on a corporate basis. One of the specific functions of the Review Board was to assist the Council in the development of its budget and policy framework by in – depth analysis of policy issues. (Article 6.03 of the Constitution Specific Functions (a) (i)). Therefore, rather than submit the Annual Review of the RSR to the Corporate Management Committee, Officers had submitted the report to the Review Board to allow it to exercise the function above and make appropriate recommendations to policy Committees, if it saw fit to do so.

The Board noted that the quality of life of those who lived or worked in, or visited the Borough was influenced by global trends to a considerable extent. On climate, changes being experienced in the world's weather system were mirrored locally - within the space of six months in 2003 the Borough had experienced the worst floods since 1947 and the hottest and driest August since records began. On the economy, major companies in the Borough were part of a global economy, with some headquarters buildings servicing and forming part of a worldwide network. Regarding travel, through the daily commute to work, the holiday abroad or worldwide business trips, accessibility had grown both locally and further afield.

The Government required Local Authorities to monitor the quality of life within their areas for a range of indicators, the most significant of which were the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI). In the context of the RSR data was collated, inter alia, on air and noise pollution, levels of traffic congestion, the provision of housing, economic prosperity, flood issues, climate changes, relative deprivation, educational achievement, sustainable energy use and built development, waste generation and water resource management. Although the RSR formed a key input to the Local Development Framework (LDF) appraisal and had originated from LDF requirements, it also had close links with Service Plans, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Improvement Plan and future stages of CPA, and it provided monitoring for the Strategic Plan and the Community Strategy for Runnymede. The RSR was divided into a series of themes, such as transport or air quality, which were described using a number of indicators. Each indicator was assessed according to whether it was on target through arrows showing either good/up or neutral/no change or poor/down.

The items set out in the RSR provided the context for developing and monitoring the "sustainable communities" concept in the Borough. The Government wished to encourage the concept of sustainable communities as a mechanism for measuring enhancements to the quality of life. It required Councils to identify key indicators of local social, economic and environmental trends to enable a baseline position for future progress in achieving sustainability to be established. Service provision and policy development would then be judged against the baseline to identify if positive improvements to the quality of life could be achieved for those who lived, worked or visited the Borough.

Officers proposed that the RSR, the Annual Monitoring Report for the LDF and the monitoring requirements of the Community Strategy for Runnymede would be consolidated into one report to be completed during the course of 2006. This report would have a basedate for the relevant data of 31 March.

The RSR showed where positive improvements had been made over the year including lower crime levels, increased use of previously developed land (for new development), increased waste recycling, a higher proportion of decent homes, good health, good water quality, high employment and high average wage levels. However, the RSR also highlighted some challenges where sustainability had been less successful. Amongst the issues that would need to be addressed which emerged from the RSR were the level of fuel poverty, the impact of flooding, climate change/air pollution, traffic congestion levels and impact on wildlife sites. Collaboration with partners would be needed to attempt to alleviate some of these issues.

The RSR would be updated annually but individual issues would be examined throughout the year as data was assembled. The most recent data would appear in the on line version. The Board noted that the RSR would be published annually in July and queried whether it was really necessary to issue it so often in view of the resource implications needed to produce it. It was noted that an Annual quality of life Monitoring Report was required for the LDF so there was not really an opportunity to publish quality of life data less frequently. The adoption of the RSR enabled the Council to satisfy the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the EU Directive 2001/42/EC in respect of Sustainability Appraisals and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Comments And Observations Made By The Board on the Review of The RSR

The Board noted that on page 7 of the Report, under the heading of social inclusiveness, a recent survey conducted by Runnymede on energy use, sent to all residents in the borough, found that 24% of the respondents were in fuel poverty and would struggle financially to heat their homes. This was the cause of some concern.

The Board noted that the indicator for the number of affordable houses completed per year was down. This was because of the continued increases in house prices which were currently eight and a half times higher than the average local salary. Spatial constraints such as Green Belt and the level of demand elevated property prices. However, Runnymede's 83% performance on a challenging affordable homes target was very good - Runnymede had achieved 152 affordable

homes between 2001 and 2004 compared to an average of 78 for Surrey. The other factor which would have an influence on the number of affordable homes which could be provided was the question of residential development within five kilometres of the boundary of Chobham Common, which was part of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (known by the acronym SPA). Runnymede was affected by the SPA. Any additional residential development within the proximity of the SPA would potentially result in increased recreational activity (particularly walkers with dogs increasing the risk of harming nesting birdlife) and could not be allowed under European legislation unless measures were taken to mitigate the effects. If an area of open space for recreation and dog walking were to be provided additional development might then be allowed to proceed, but details of the level of this mitigation would need to be agreed with English Nature and Officers were currently in discussion with them on the matter.

The Board was pleased that the indicators for crime, health and vibrant communities all showed positive results for the borough.

The Board had a number of amendments to maps within the RSR. Map 1.5 on cycle facilities in Runnymede needed to be amended to reflect the closure or imminent closure of the cycle shop in Egham. Maps 2.3 and 2.4 on Chemical River Quality and Biological Quality should focus on Runnymede rather than the whole of Surrey. At Map 3.1 the number of people employed in the borough by ward should show the main settlements in the borough. On Map 4.1 Flood zones in Runnymede, flood zones 2 and 3 should be defined on the Map and in the RSR Glossary and more clearly delineated on the Map.

The Board agreed that more information was required in the section on air quality on what the Council was doing to mitigate and alleviate poor air. This should cover the whole of the borough and not just feature motorways and the Air Quality Management Areas. Pollution from the airport should be included in this revised version if it was possible to obtain such data.

In the section on climate change it was noted that Runnymede's domestic energy consumption carbon dioxide emissions had reduced by 2.17% but were still above average for Surrey and the UK. The figures for Surrey and the UK needed to be added as a comparison.

Runnymede had experienced a 1% decline in the number of VAT registered businesses in the period 2003/04. This was not necessarily detrimental as some of them were relocating to expand.

On green garden waste collection the Board noted that approximately half of the households in the borough had this facility. The problem with increasing the rollout of this measure was the cost involved. Negotiations were taking place with Surrey County Council to help fund the extension of the coverage as it was below target. Members of the Council had been receiving complaints that some residents were still able to use their wheeled bin for green waste, while others now had to pay for green waste collection from their house. Although the position was not as simple as this and those who had to pay for green waste collection from their house could alternatively compost it or take it to green waste sites, the Board noted that the question of green waste collection would remain a bone of contention until it had been implemented across the whole borough. The Board therefore hoped that this would happen as soon as was possible.

It was noted that Indicator 2.1 on flooding and climate change showed that 27% of properties within the borough were at risk from a flooding event once every hundred years. This represented a high proportion of households.

On Indicator 7.4 relating to percentage of households at set distances (ie accessible by public transport, cycling and walking) from Key Services it was agreed that Public Library should be added to the list of Key Services.

On Waste Management Indicators 15.1 and 15.2 the borough had achieved an 18% recycling rate for domestic waste compared to 13.6% in Surrey and 11% in England. The Board agreed that this should be pointed out in the main text of the RSR. These indicators showed that Runnymede was using land filling less and recycling and composting more, which were encouraging developments.

On Indicator 14.3 on reduced consumption of resources, the indicator was 3.5 “planets” per person in relation to the ecological footprint for the South East. The Board would be informed of the meaning of the words “planets” and “ecological footprint” in this context and these terms would also be defined in the Glossary.

The Board was content for its comments to be incorporated into the Report, and also to place its other observations and comments on record without making Recommendations on any issues to other Council Committees.

RESOLVED that -

- i) the review of the Runnymede State Report and the use of it to measure future progress on the quality of life indicators be approved; and**
- ii) the Board's comments be incorporated into the Report.**

539. PROGRESS REPORT ON ENFORCEMENT OF PLANNING CONTROL

The Board noted the progress report on Enforcement of Planning Control as at 16 January 2006. The Board thanked Officers for amending the format of the report to reflect comments made at previous meetings.

The Council's Planning Committee at its meeting on 14 December 2005 had decided to reduce staffing levels in the Planning Enforcement Section. The Planning Committee had noted that the Planning Enforcement team consisted of three staff, led by a Senior Enforcement Officer. The two Enforcement Officers had requested part-time working based on a job-share, each Officer working half a week (18.5 hours). This provided an opportunity to either recruit a new full-time member of staff to fill the reduced hours, or to disestablish a post and realise a saving of £25,000 which was part of the Council's previously approved Revenue Savings Target for the current financial year. The Committee had taken into account that Planning Enforcement in Runnymede was a high profile public service where there were high expectations of investigation and action, set against a background of weak legislation and enforcement powers, and extensive rights of appeal. As a result of this profile, Runnymede had a higher staff contingent in this area than many comparably sized authorities. However, the number of complaints received and the amount of action taken was the highest in the County.

The Committee had considered the implications of a reduction of staffing levels in the Planning Enforcement Section and had noted that the ability to investigate complaints and instigate action would be reduced. Complaints of inaction would increase and priorities would have to be reviewed so that breaches impacting on fewer people would be given lower priority and take longer to investigate. The current out-of-hours (evenings and weekends) call-out service provided by Enforcement staff which dealt with issues such as felling of preserved trees or gypsy incursions would be discontinued. The Committee balanced those implications against the Council's challenging financial forecast and the need to realise savings identified in the 2005/06 budget, and with some reservations, approved the disestablishment of a post of Enforcement Officer at Scale D to realise the savings identified in the 2005/06 budget.

The Committee had also resolved that Officers submit a further report to the Committee on enforcement priorities to manage public expectations in the future. Officers were anticipating submitting this report to the Planning Committee before the end of the financial year.

The Board was reminded that the items in the report before them represented sites where enforcement action had been taken further to Committee resolutions and where there were still cases outstanding. There were many other complaints from the public about alleged breaches of planning controls which took up Officer time which were not registered in the report.

On particular cases within the report the Board noted that the Annexe, Hatch Farm had now complied by reducing the height of their brick wall. The Public Inquiry date for various breaches at land adjacent to Stroude Road and Clockhouse Lane West was being rearranged. For cases at both Rosefield, Hurst Lane, and The Lane, Stroude Road, site visits were awaited from the Inspector. Runnymede was regularly having to wait over a year for a Planning Inspector from the Planning

Inspectorate to make site visits. An informal hearing would shortly be taking place in respect of the forecourt car sales at Thorpe Car Sales, 262-264 Chertsey Lane. Regarding 41, Jubilee Crescent, the appeal against the Enforcement Notice in respect of the condition of the land had been dismissed by the Planning Inspector.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.20 pm.)