

Runnymede Borough CouncilREVIEW BOARD10 December 2003 at 7.30 p.m.

Members of the Board present: Councillors J.M. Edwards (Chairman), D.P. Easton (Vice-Chairman), A. Alderson, J. Broadhead, Ms. D.V. Clarke, J.E. Haas, R. Pate, Mrs V.A. Smallman and P.B. Tuley

Members of the Board absent: None

Councillors R.K. Habgood and Mrs E.E. Price also attended.

569. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO BOARD MEMBERSHIP

The Conservative Group had notified the Chief Executive Officer of its wish to replace Councillor P.J. Poole as a Member of the Board by Councillor J.M. Edwards until further notice. The Labour Group had notified the Chief Executive Officer of its wish that Councillor P.A. Greenwood be removed from Membership of the Committee and that Councillor R. Pate be appointed in his place for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting. Thereafter Councillor Greenwood would be reappointed.

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

570. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

As Councillor P.J. Poole had been Chairman of the Committee, the appointment of a replacement was considered. The Board expressed their appreciation of the contribution which Councillor Poole had made as Chairman. Councillor J.M. Edwards and Councillor P.A Greenwood were nominated and seconded for the vacancy.

RESOLVED that -

Councillor J.M. Edwards be appointed Chairman of the Review Board for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

571. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Review Board meeting held on 9 October 2003 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

572. RAIL TRANSPORT IN THE BOROUGH - SCOPING REPORT

The Board received a report seeking to define the scope of their review of rail transport in the borough and setting out proposals for its form, content and direction. At its meeting of 10 April 2003, the Board had considered a proposal from their former Chairman, Councillor Poole, that railway stations in the Borough be reviewed as "gateways" to Runnymede. It was intended that the review should include the impressions that visitors, commuters and local train users received to build up a comprehensive picture. It was recognised that the review would require a range of survey work and co-operation from outside bodies. The proposal had been welcomed by the Board, who also confirmed that the input of the wider community was vital and agreed that the formal review should take place in 2004 when the franchise had been let. South West Trains, Surrey County Council and a number of other agencies had indicated their willingness to take part in the review.

This review would address issues that were clearly in line with improving the quality of life and improved transportation, set out in the Leader's Position Statement and Community Strategy. It could assist in tackling crime and disorder in compliance with the Community Safety Strategy and

help boost trade and tourism in line with the Economic Strategy and Cultural Strategy. It would also complement work being undertaken by the Runnymede Business Partnership Travel Initiative.

The Board agreed that the following should be included in the review, which should be wide-ranging in scope.

- 1) Linkage of public transport. Buses did not always link up with trains sufficiently. There were some examples of good practice (e.g. the bus from Staines station to Thorpe Park). Park and ride schemes should be encouraged. (The London congestion charge was having the effect of increasing bottlenecks around stations in Runnymede). If a representative body existed for taxi drivers in the area, it should be consulted, as people often used taxis when departing other public transport.
- 2) Adequate signage (particularly important for newcomers to the area).
- 3) Provision of toilets (particularly at Egham Station).
- 4) Length of time for which barriers at level crossings stayed down (in part as a result of signalling deficiencies).
- 5) The extensive data which Surrey County Council had compiled on trip generations.
- 6) Unmanned stations (particularly late at night, which deterred travellers, especially lone women).
- 7) Lighting at stations.
- 8) Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) (CCTV linkages between Safer Runnymede and South West Trains were welcomed).
- 9) Endeavouring to keep anti-social elements off trains (mainly groups of badly behaved youths). The success of the Police Operation 'Platform', and use of security guards by South West Trains was noted.
- 10) Information on train times at platforms (this had improved as all stations had electronic notice boards).
- 11) Disabled access. Ticket machines were sometimes not at the right level or were on slopes. Disabled people were not always able to use toilets on trains. These were all issues being looked at by the Runnymede Access Liaison Group.
- 12) Access for cyclists. Sustrans should be included as a consultee.
- 13) Daytime users of trains (i.e. from 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.) should be added to the list of target users.

The Board agreed that the following should not be included in the review:-

- 1) Longcross Halt Station in view of development proposals in that area.
- 2) Health and Safety, as this was a matter for the Railway Inspectorate.

The Board agreed that the full scope of the project should be as set out in Appendix 'A'.

The question of funding for the project was discussed and it was noted that a number of potential sources had been identified including the Aviator Park developer, Network Rail and the Strategic Rail Authority. It was likely that the franchise would continue to be held by South West Trains who might be prepared to undertake matched funding. Revenue funding from within Council resources was available for survey work. Two meetings of the Board should probably be sufficient to deal with all the issues. The Board decided that a scrutiny format should be undertaken for the review (as had previously been undertaken in relation to flooding).

The Board agreed that a survey be undertaken of Runnymede residents (whether they were rail users or not), asking questions such as why they used the railway or why they did not and what changes they would like to see. It was also requested that a further report be submitted to a future Board meeting including further background (taking on board the comments of Members), outlining the partners who the Council would work with, the organisations who would be prepared to appear and answer questions at meetings, the issues proposed to be covered at the meetings and the outcome of the residents opinion survey on railways.

573. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY - AREAS FOR INVESTIGATION BY THE WORKING GROUP

At the last meeting of the Board, a Member had suggested that the Board might look at the Council's Communications Strategy, which was to receive detailed consideration by a cross party Member Working Group who would report to the Corporate Management Committee. The Board considered a copy of the Strategy and the consultant's recommended timescale. Officers welcomed any comments which the Board might wish to offer on areas which might particularly repay the Working Group's consideration. The Board observed that the consultants were recommending engaging more consultants and setting up a Public Relations department. The Council had, however, done very well in satisfaction surveys. The Board decided that they did not wish to impinge upon the Working Group's task, but they would await the outcome of the Working Group's deliberations with interest.

574. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

The Board noted a report updating them on legislative and other developments in the field of anti-social behaviour. The Review Board had decided to examine the effectiveness of multi-agency working to combat anti-social behaviour as part of its work programme for the current year and early cycles in 2004/05. The report contained background for such an examination.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 brought further refinements to the existing anti-social behaviour legislation. "Anti-Social Behaviour" was a general term to cover the range of undesirable activities contained within the Act. In the context of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders it meant conduct by a person aged over 10 years in a manner likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to people outside his or her own household. The Act had received Royal Assent on 20 November 2003 and would be brought into force in stages starting in January 2004. An Anti-Social Behaviour reporting system would also be launched in the New Year and it was agreed that the details should be circulated to all Board members when they were available. The various measures would have resource implications for the Council. The police were seeking to extend the role of other agencies in the field of community safety.

Local authorities were given powers to serve notice requiring the height of a domestic hedge to be reduced if it exceeded two metres and was adversely affecting a neighbour's reasonable enjoyment of their property. There were rights of appeal to the Secretary of State which would extend to both sides. This would lead to an increase in the Council's legal and planning enforcement-type work. "Hedge" in this context included trees and shrubs. The Government believed that there were about 10,000 of these "high hedge" cases outstanding, across the country.

The Board particularly welcomed the mechanisms introduced to encourage parents to take responsibility for their children's behaviour. The police and the Council were working together to combat anti-social behaviour, by pooling intelligence and sharing information.

575. PROGRESS ON NET REVENUE REDUCTION TARGETS

The Review Board noted that they would be receiving periodic reports on progress being made by Service Committees in meeting net revenue reduction targets. The Board had considered this issue at their last meeting and had noted that for 2004/05, £650,000 of savings had been found which amounted to £350,000 less than the £1 million target. £155,000 of additional savings were also needed to compensate for new initiatives required by the Government. These targets meant that difficult decisions would have to be made.

The Board had considered at their last meeting how further net reductions could be achieved and discussed various potential courses of action to make up the shortfall. The Board had recommended to the Corporate Management Committee that a Task Group be set up under the direction of the Leader of the Council to look at ways of achieving savings and in particular to consider whether

some existing services could be combined or if discretionary and statutory spending could be reduced. The Board had also recommended that the provision of the new Civic Offices be reviewed and that it should be considered whether any savings could be made on that project.

The Board's recommendation had been considered by the Corporate Management Committee at its meeting on 6 November 2003. That Committee recognised the useful nature of the Review Board's comments and recommendations but emphasised that it had been agreed that Service Committees would be responsible for progressing the revenue reduction initiatives and the identification of any items necessary to achieve the target figures. It had also noted that the construction of the new Addlestone Community Centre, which represented the first stage in the Civic Offices re-provision project, was now in hand. Once the works were under way a report would be prepared outlining the implications of the Civic Offices re-provision in order to enable full consideration of the issues arising by the Corporate Management and Economic Development Committees and Council. It was likely that this would be presented in the January/February cycle of meetings. The Corporate Management Committee did, however, resolve to request the Review Board to review the progress being made by the Service Committees as part of the revenue reduction exercise and so therefore the Review Board would receive periodic reports on this matter.

The Board noted the current position and recognised that net revenue savings had been found and were being found across the whole range of the Council's services and appreciated the commitment of Officers and Members to this process. However, the Board took the view that the total amount of the savings so far identified did not mean that the Council was on track to achieve its savings targets. If the Council failed to meet those targets it would have to utilise more of its reserves or receipts. The anticipated loss in investment income for this year was also a significant sum. The Board noted when the Council had approved the Financial Forecast, it had been agreed that the cost of new initiatives should be offset by further revenue savings. The Board did not think that this measure was always being applied by Service Committees. In some cases, extra spending had been authorised, but matching savings had not been offered up. The Board agreed that reducing spending by a fixed level across the board was not a realistic measure.

The Board accordingly

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL that -

if Service Committees approve proposals beyond their Committee budget projections, they should be required, in the first instance, to identify compensating savings from within their own resources.

(Councillor R. Pate requested to be recorded as having voted against this Recommendation in accordance with Standing Order 25.3).

576. COUNCIL'S TEN PRIORITY INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE - SECOND QUARTER OF 2003/04

The Board noted that the overall progress on the Council's ten priority indicators of performance had been good, for the second quarter of 2003/04. The Corporate Management Committee on 4 December 2003 had recognised that improvements had been made in call handling and payment of invoices. Minor planning applications had not been processed on target, but this should improve with greater staffing resources, a new method of registering and an established computer system. The Corporate Management Committee had emphasised that quick planning decisions did not necessarily mean good planning decisions.

577. BUDGET MONITORING STATEMENT

The Board noted the budget monitoring and summary forecast statement plus a projected outturn for the General Fund. Worsening investment income was a key feature.

578. CAPITAL PROJECTS

The Board noted a periodic report on capital schemes whose value exceeded £100,000. The following projects had been delayed for the reasons specified below:-

<u>Scheme</u>	<u>Reason</u>
Dangerfields, Station Road, Addlestone	Negotiations were continuing on a satisfactory purchase price.
151, Station Road, Addlestone	Terms were yet to be agreed.
Pooley Green Town Park	A response was awaited from the Environment Agency.
Chertsey Allotment Project	Government consent had not been secured as quickly as envisaged.
Action Addlestone	A further public consultation exercise had been required by the Surrey County Council Local Committee.

Officers agreed to recirculate the list of projects with a brief narrative describing the progress on each scheme.

579. ENFORCEMENT OF PLANNING CONTROL - PROGRESS REPORT

The Board noted the progress report on enforcement of planning control as at 28 November 2003. Costs had been obtained by the Council following the late withdrawal of the appellants from a public inquiry regarding enforcement action taken against a building at Capital House, Woodham Park Road.

580. REVIEW BOARD WORK PROGRAMME - REMAINING ITEMS

The Board noted the remaining items on their work programme as agreed at their September 2003 meeting. The Board agreed to receive a report at their next meeting on items that they had considered over the last two years and whether they were completed or ongoing. The Board also agreed to aim to look at fewer items in greater depth. Training for Members was being arranged for the New Year utilising a trainer experienced in the review and scrutiny procedures of another "alternative arrangements" authority. This might assist in identifying avenues for the Board's future work.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 10.40 p.m.)