

Runnymede Borough Council

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

5 December 2002 at 7.30 p.m.

Members of the Committee present : Councillors G.B. Woodger (Chairman), J.M. Edwards (Vice-Chairman), D.P. Easton, J.E. Haas, H.W.V. Meares, C.J. Norman, R. Pate, Mrs. E.E. Price, A.P. Tollett, and P.B. Tuley

Members of the Committee absent : None

Councillors A. Alderson and Ms. C.M. Simmons also attended.

456. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Conservative Group had notified the Chief Executive Officer of its wish that Councillor R.K. Habgood be removed from Membership of the Committee and that Councillor A.P. Tollett be appointed in his place for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting. Thereafter Councillor Habgood would be reappointed.

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

457. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 November 2002 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

458. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs. E.E. Price declared a personal and prejudicial interest under the Runnymede Code of Conduct for Members in the reference from the Leisure and Environment Committee owing to a family relationship with a member of staff at Abbeyfit. Councillor Mrs. Price therefore withdrew from the room when the matter was discussed.

Councillor H.W.V. Meares declared a personal and prejudicial interest under the Runnymede Code of Conduct for Members in the reference from the Economic Development Committee on 'Vacant and Unfit Properties – Compulsory Purchase' insofar as it related to specific properties in which he had an interest. Councillor Meares therefore withdrew from the room when the matter was discussed.

459. ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, December 2001, page 667, para 418)

The Committee received the District Auditors Annual Management Letter which reported on various aspects of corporate governance, performance management and financial regularity issues. The District Auditor, Mr Stephen Taylor, his colleague Mark Rolt and the Audit Manager for Runnymede, Mr Hassan Rohimun, introduced their report and answered questions from Members.

The District Audit team reported that the Council had continued to deliver high quality services against an agenda of competing national and local priorities. The Council's financial position remained healthy. Although external financial pressures and the policy of minimising the impact of Council Tax increases would be dependent upon the utilisation of significant balances in the medium term, the projected level of General Fund reserves of £2 million in 2007/08 was considered to be adequate. The Auditors did, however, note that Housing Revenue Account balances were forecast to fall to £379,000 in the same year and emphasised the need to ensure that the reserves were sufficient to meet any potential risks at that time. Systems of internal financial control remained generally sound. However, the District Auditor drew attention to a

problem as a result of which Internal Audit had asked the District Auditor to access personal records to complete an audit. It was noted that a protocol in respect of access to personal records had now been drafted to clarify the law and set out a suitable procedure. The Council was commended on its proactive approach in reviewing arrangements for combating benefit fraud, although it was necessary to ensure that counter fraud arrangements coincided with best practice.

Members were pleased to note that the Council was considered to have adopted strong and successful arrangements in respect of partnership working. An ongoing District Audit review had found that Runnymede's partner organisations firmly endorsed the Council's approach, rating the Authority as very strong in its support, its ability to understand other organisations priorities and the communication of its own priorities. There was now the opportunity to build on this strong baseline with a number of improvements to process, including the development of a monitoring strategy to judge the effectiveness of partnerships in relation to the Council's own objectives and the implementation of robust review procedures. For its part, the Committee concurred with the need for clarity in the partnership arrangements, not least to manage the expectations of the Council's partners, which sometimes rose to unrealistic levels.

The other key messages conveyed by the District Auditor concerned performance management and Best Value. There had been advances in the Council's performance management and monitoring systems and the corporate planning framework was informed by the Council's performance measurement system. Whilst satisfactory arrangements were in place to measure performance within a number of departments there was still scope to improve arrangements for the collection of performance data.

Best Value, meanwhile, was becoming embedded in the Council's performance culture with an emphasis on seeking service improvements and efficiencies. Good progress had been made with the completion of Best Value Reviews, which now included direct Member involvement, and action was being taken to ensure that improvement plans were being achieved. The Best Value Performance Plan complied in all significant respects with legislation and statutory guidance. With regard to preparation for the forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessment, the Council was advised to consider the key areas of self assessment, including strengths and weaknesses, as soon as possible. The Local Strategic Partnership was congratulated for meeting the target date for publication of the draft Community Strategy.

The District Auditor concluded that the Council had, overall, continued to move in the right direction in terms of performance, process and financial controls, but emphasised the need to maintain momentum in the year ahead.

460. INTERNAL AUDIT

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee July 2002, page 316, para. 156)

The Committee received details of the 2003/04 internal audit plan, together with those internal control issues arising from the first part of the current years audit coverage. Consideration was also given to the need for a Committee with specific audit responsibility.

Members noted that the current year's audit plan had been revised as a result of long term sickness in the Internal Audit section and the departure of another member of staff. In order to achieve the planned audit coverage it had been necessary to engage consultancy support and roll seven audits forward to the following year. Meanwhile, the 2003/04 programme had been prepared in accordance with the current four year strategic plan and was based on the same strategic risk assessment methodology as had been applied in previous years.

The Committee recalled that the Best Value Review of Internal Audit required consideration to be given to the need for audit reports to be presented to Members through an Audit Committee. Internal audit issues were currently reported to the relevant Chief Officer and the Borough Treasurer and copied to District Audit. However, in the light of the increasing prominence given to corporate governance arrangements, not least by the Audit Commission in its scoring of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of local authorities, Members agreed that in future audit reports would also be issued to the Chief Executive Officer and Monitoring Officer. In addition, a periodic report on audit coverage, recommendations and progress in implementing those recommendations would be made to the Standards Committee. Reports to Committee in the past had focused on audit coverage. If reports were also made on matters arising from

internal audit reports, reports on the overall control environment, reviewing compliance and assessing of risk exposures, this would cover the terms of reference normally reserved for a separate Audit Committee. The detailed terms of reference of the Standards Committee would be amended when the Constitution was reviewed in March so that the arrangements could be in place for the commencement of the new Municipal Year.

Finally, Members were pleased to note that the difficulties over access by Internal Audit to personnel documents now appeared to have been resolved, as referred to in the minute above on the Annual Audit letter.

RECOMMEND that –

the terms of reference of the Standards Committee be expanded to include the audit responsibilities identified above with effect from the start of the 2003/04 Municipal Year.

461. AIMS AND TARGETS – INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT

Members received a report on performance thus far against the adopted Aims and Targets for the Committee's service areas during the period from 1 April to 30 September 2002. Officers were congratulated on the generally pleasing progress to date and asked to include in future reports a summary of the remedial action that was planned for those relatively few matters where difficulty was being experienced in attaining the targets.

462. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTERLY UPDATE ON PROGRESS

The Committee received details of progress against the Council's Best Value Performance Indicator targets for the period from 1 April to 30 September 2002. As with the Aims and Targets, future reports would contain a summary of remedial action proposed to improve performance where appropriate.

463. LOCAL GOVERNMENT/EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2004 – CONSULTATION PAPER

The Committee gave consideration to a Government consultation paper which proposed that the local authority elections scheduled for Thursday 6 May 2004 be held on Thursday 10 June, the same day as the European Parliamentary election, and sought observations on the option of weekend voting.

The Government, seeking to overcome voter apathy, was of the view that holding elections on different days in quick succession had a negative effect on turnout. The suggestion to combine the two elections arose because the Government considered it would be more convenient for voters to have to visit the polling station only once, there would be a reduction in costs incurred by local authorities and political parties and efforts to increase voter awareness could be concentrated on a single day.

The Committee, however, felt that a combined election would present a number of practical difficulties, not least the potential for confusion amongst the public arising from the different electoral systems used for the respective polls. The Party List system favoured for European elections called for a different style of ballot paper to the one employed in traditional 'First Past the Post' local authority elections. Voters were likely to have difficulties dealing with both papers simultaneously. This problem did not occur when local elections were combined with UK Parliamentary elections since they shared a common voting procedure. A number of Members also highlighted as a critical concern a danger that the local elections and issues would be obscured in a joint poll. A combined election in June would also delay the transaction of local authority business, including the Annual Meeting, Committee timetable and appointments to Outside Bodies. A deferral of the Committee cycle would mean meetings having to be held during the school holidays in July and August, creating difficulties with the availability of both Members and Officers. In the absence of any firm indication that a combined poll would increase turnout, Members were therefore of the opinion that separate elections should be retained.

Members also expressed concern at the proposal for weekend voting, which would be in addition to the traditional Thursday poll. Weekend voting would exacerbate existing difficulties with the

recruitment of casual election staff and require a substantial increase in electoral fees, the burden of which would fall on local authorities if not met by the Government or European Union. There was also the likelihood that some premises currently used as polling stations would be unavailable at weekends. Without first conducting pilot schemes it was difficult to know whether the benefits of a higher turnout from weekend voting would be sufficient to justify the extra cost. Evidence published by the Electoral Commission suggested that turnout was influenced more by local political activity and issues than by methods or times of voting.

RESOLVED that -

the observations set out in Appendix 'A' be conveyed to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as this Council's response to the consultation paper.

A requisition having been made in accordance with Standing Order 39.2 that the votes of the Committee be recorded, there voted

For: Councillors D.P. Easton, J.M. Edwards, J.E. Haas, H.W.V. Meares,
Mrs. E.E. Price, A.P. Tollett, P.B. Tuley and
G.B. Woodger (8)

Against: Councillor R. Pate (1)

Abstentions: None

464. BEST VALUE – DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT SERVICES SCOPING AND CHALLENGE REPORT

The Committee received and considered a comprehensive report on the Best Value Scoping and Challenge exercise undertaken in respect of Democratic support services which comprised the Legal and Committee Services. Individual interviews carried out with all Group Leaders and Chief Officers, together with the Assistant Head of Leisure Services, had taken the place of the more usual challenge workshop. A range of proposals to improve the service had been identified for further consideration, although Members took the opportunity to emphasise their satisfaction with the present high quality of committee agendas.

Democratic support services were presently provided in-house and located centrally, with specialist legal advice and advocacy provided externally when required. The Challenge review had considered other methods of provision but concluded that the service, which was one of the closest to the democratic process and corporate core, was easier and cheaper to administer from the centre. There were no apparent external providers of a committee administration service. While other local authority committee sections would have the expertise to undertake the work they would have to recruit more staff to do so and would, in any case, be unfamiliar with the Runnymede quality culture, working practices and procedures. Officers had not been able to trace any instance of committee servicing being externalised.

Similarly, it was noted that decentralisation of committee servicing (whereby the work was undertaken in the service departments) was uncommon and would have major implications for the Council's departmental and management structure. In practice, such a service was easier to administer from the centre so as to enhance consistency, avoid duplication of process and allow staff to provide cover for each other and share information and best practice. Previous experience, supported by Audit Commission findings, suggested that committee administration was ideally located close to or alongside the legal service to ensure that legal advice was readily available on the many legal and procedural points which arose on Committee reports. With regard to the legal services, a mix of in-house and bought in services ensured the flexibility necessary to respond to changing circumstances.

The Committee commended Officers on the depth and quality of the Challenge Report (attached at Appendix 'B') and noted the comments of the Runnymede branch of UNISON, which considered it essential for both services to be retained in-house and organised centrally with the maintenance of existing staffing levels.

The next stage of the review would involve a comparison with other equivalent service providers and consultation with relevant stakeholders. Comparative data from other Surrey Authorities and

external providers of legal services would be used, together with any relevant Best Value or local performance indicators.

RESOLVED that –

- i) the objectives of the Democratic Support Service identified in the Challenge report be endorsed as reflecting the Council's aspirations for the provision of this Service;**
- ii) the proposal to examine the following matters further during the remaining stages of the Review be endorsed:-**
 - a) Corporate Governance – health check;**
 - b) Review the range of duties undertaken by the Committee Section and the work allocations of Officers to provide a more focussed service and identify those areas of non-core Council activities which receive a higher level of support;**
 - c) Reduce the Agenda printing requirement from May 2003 to achieve cost savings;**
 - d) Investigate greater use of IT in the future to communicate with Members;**
 - e) Review how a scheme of public participation at meetings might be implemented;**
 - f) Continue to monitor the levels and scope of legal activity and identify the resources necessary to provide the service;**
 - g) Review the level of provision of Members Services;**
 - h) Review the attendance of Legal Officers at Committee meetings and implications thereof;**
- iii) the use of comparative data from other local authorities and use of national and local Best Value performance indicators for the Comparative element of the Review be endorsed; and**
- iv) the scope of this Review and the Challenge Phase be endorsed.**

465. IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT STATEMENT

The Committee endorsed, with minor drafting changes, the Council's second annual Implementing Electronic Government Statement (IEG2), which had been submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 31 October.

The Government was committed to promoting continuous improvement in local government services through electronic service delivery and required local authorities to make all services available electronically by 2005. The IEG Statement was a means of monitoring progress towards this target and set out the Council's rationale for the role it expected e-government to play in the wider drive to transform local authority organisation and service delivery. It was emphasised that the Statement contained a series of policy targets which were essentially aspirational and the Council was not committed to delivering all aspects of the strategy. The Government recognised that funding was a key consideration in the roll-out of the e-initiative and would make a £200,000 grant available to the Council in 2003/04 to assist with the modernisation process upon submission of a satisfactory Statement.

The Committee agreed that the Members IT Working Group should be asked to consider the relative priorities to be applied in adopting the modernising agenda set out in the Statement, with a particular focus on the cost-benefit aspects.

RECOMMEND that –

- i) the contents of the amended Implementing Electronic Government Statement attached at Appendix 'C' be endorsed; and**
- ii) the Members IT Working Group be requested to examine the relative priorities to be applied in adopting the e government modernising agenda set out in the Statement, with particular reference to the cost – benefit considerations and report back to Committee.**

466. MATCHING IT SUPPORT TO CHANGING REQUIREMENTS

The Committee received a comprehensive report identifying vulnerabilities in the IT support of essential computer systems and gave consideration to possible solutions.

Members noted that the need for greater resilience and availability of key systems was at the core of the electronic delivery of information and services to which the Council was committed. The systems supported by IT staff had grown rapidly in number, size and complexity during the previous four years, with consequent changes and expansion in the IT infrastructure. This had entailed a rapid growth in the amount of IT support required and the acquisition of a completely new set of skills to maintain systems. To date, this expansion had largely been contained within the existing IT staffing establishment, which at 8.7 FTE, was substantially smaller than that of neighbouring authorities.

The Committee acknowledged, however, that the changing patterns of working and service delivery made it essential that greater depth was provided in front line support for the major databases, servers and the network. Recovery expertise was presently concentrated in two members of staff, one of whom was on maternity leave. While problems would eventually be resolved by the Council's suppliers there were often considerable delays in getting qualified staff on site to restore systems in the event of major failure.

A partial solution to these problems could be achieved by transferring staffing resources from operations and web technician tasks to database and network support. The opportunity to do so would be provided by the imminent introduction of a new financial system. An additional resource was, however, required to minimise system down time and consequential disruptions to service delivery. Meanwhile, short term disruption caused by maternity absence in the IT Helpdesk resource could be ameliorated by providing cover with a temporary member of staff and the promotion of a junior officer. This approach had the advantage of filling an immediate gap while still providing continuity in the knowledge of systems and the workings of the Council. The net effect of these changes would be:

- a) reduce the operations staff by 0.6 FTE;
- b) reduce the web team by 0.4 FTE;
- c) increase database and network support by 2 FTE;
- d) increase Helpdesk support by 1 FTE temporarily, resulting in a net increase of 1 FTE (plus 1 FTE temporarily).

The full cost of the staffing proposals, at top of scale, would amount to between £30,000 - £58,000, depending on whether or not the staff on maternity leave eventually chose to return to work. The additional expenditure in the current financial year could be met from existing resources but the 2003/04 budget would have to be increased by £30,000 to reflect the increase in establishment.

Members considered that part of the longer term solution could also be provided by technologically based assistance and further automation of computerised processes. This could be provided in a number of ways:

- i) by providing a swift problem definition to ensure the speedy initiation of problem resolution by systematically monitoring electronically all aspects of the functioning of the systems and network. Second line support for both database administration and network management could continue to be provided remotely.

- ii) through content management, as the volume of data being published on the various websites and its increasing volatility were already starting to make manual management an onerous and unnecessarily staff intensive task.
- iii) through a customer relationship management based solution that would quickly and efficiently extract information and present it to the service provider in a way that was understandable and usable. The building blocks of such a solution were being put in place with the provision of a DMS, GIS, intranet and standards based backend databases. However, intermediate software, "middleware", would be necessary to permit the required information to be delivered not only to the service providers but directly to the public in the correct circumstances.

Finally, the Committee was also of the view that consideration should be given to alternative means of providing IT support. The Council's methods of working and systems in operation had changed substantially since an externalisation exercise in 1998 so it was now felt appropriate to revisit the following options:

- i) Joint working with other Councils, most probably, but not necessarily, in Surrey for the provision and support of computer services. This joint work could be on a system by system basis, by the sharing of support resources be they internal or external, or by the pooling of IT resources in specific areas of activity.
- ii) The externalisation of all or a number of the IT functions.
- iii) Off-site location of some or all of the systems, including the use of Application Service Provider (ASP) services for key systems.

An outline proposal was to be produced showing the various models of partnering with an external supplier or potential joint provision with one or more neighbouring authorities and the method of assessing the implications, costs and risks of pursuing each approach. It would also be necessary to identify the costs of carrying out these investigations and the resources that would be required.

RECOMMEND that –

- i) the IT staffing establishment be amended by the deletion of the following posts;**
 - a) day time computer operator (p/t),**
 - b) Web Technician (p/t)**
 - c) computer operator (telephone support) (p/t)**

and the creation of the following posts,

 - a) Assistant Database Administrator and Network Manager (Oracle),**
 - b) Assistant Database Administrator and Network Manager (SQL Server)**
 - c) Help Desk Officer.**
- ii) Content Management (CMS) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions be investigated with a view to identifying the extent of their value to the future workings of the Council and recommending suitable products for adoption; and**
- iii) investigations into new forms of working to support IT be undertaken most notably, but not exclusively, in the areas of joint working with other Councils, in the provision and support of computer services, the externalisation of all or a number of the IT functions and the off-site location of some or all of the systems including the use of ASP (Application Service Provider) services for key systems.**

467. MEMBERS COMPUTING FACILITIES

(Ref: Minutes of Executive Committee 16 May 2001, page 1729, para 878)

The Committee gave further consideration to the provision of personal computers and internet lines to Councillors, together with a usage policy recommended by the IT Member Working Group and appropriate support arrangements.

The Council's present policy towards the provision of computer facilities for Members, approved at the former Executive Committee in May 2001, involved the supply of an industry standard PC, owned by the Authority, and the provision of a broadband internet connection (ADSL, when available, or ISDN) to each Councillor. It was noted that 13 Councillors currently used a PC supplied and owned by the Council in this way, 10 were using a machine of their own supplied by the Council under the terms of a previous scheme and 19 had either made alternative arrangements or had no access to a PC. No restrictions had, up to now, been placed on the use of the Councillors' computers and many of them were therefore routinely used for Members' private purposes in addition to Council business. This had on occasions compromised the integrity of the kit and caused problems in system support.

Members now received details of draft policies which sought to establish procedures for the provision and usage of PC's, printers and internet connections. The Committee concurred with the general principle that machines provided by the Council should be used primarily to assist Members to undertake their duties as Councillors, with personal usage permitted provided that it did not interfere with the Council's business. The Committee emphasised, however, the importance of striking a balance between controlling the use of the equipment and the need to encourage Councillors to fully utilise the advantages of electronic working and communication. It was agreed that the draft policies should be referred back to the IT Members Working Group for further consideration and clarification of the detail.

Meanwhile, Members noted that the initial work programme to install and supply the computers and lines to Members had highlighted the need to supplement the existing level of support to Councillors. Members of the IT Help Desk had been working an additional 15 hours per week to support Councillors and install the facilities. However, the process had taken longer than anticipated following difficulties with British Telecom, while the initial level of support required by Members had been underestimated. The Committee therefore agreed that a dedicated resource was required to support Members during the first 18 months of installation and usage. The full year costs of a Councillor Support Officer post, at band E, would amount to £25,084, including on costs. A further £5,000 would be required for additional work carried out by IT staff on Members behalf and licences required exclusively for Councillors use. This expenditure could be met from existing provision in the current financial year but a budget of £30,000 would be required for 2003/04. In the meantime, the PC's supplied to Members would be standardised as far as possible with simple automated procedures put in place to carry out basic tasks. This could be more readily supported and would allow Members who only wished to use a computer to carry out Council business to do so with the minimum of training.

Finally, mindful of the difficulties experienced with British Telecom in respect of the provision of broadband lines, Members were of the view that consideration should be given to the use of alternative internet service providers more responsive to the Council's needs.

RESOLVED that –

- i) the draft computer and printer provision and usage policy and internet connections policy be referred back to the Member IT Working Group for further consideration of the detail;**
- ii) a post of Councillor Support Officer based on the job description shown at Appendix 'D' be created for a fixed term of 18 months and £30,000 per annum (pro rata) be provided in the budget for this purpose; and**
- iii) alternative Internet Service Providers be investigated with a view to identifying a provider more in sympathy with the Council's operation.**

468. SYSTEMS RESILIENCE

The Committee received a detailed report examining the issues surrounding the support of Information Technology and Communications for front line services and core administrative processes and gave initial consideration to proposals for the improvement of systems resilience.

The Council was now highly dependent upon a number of key computer systems for the efficient operation of both administrative support and the direct provision of services to the public. It was therefore increasingly important to minimize the amount of 'down time' of certain core systems in order to avoid the disruption of services. Despite recent work to rectify problems with the Civic Offices electrical supply, present levels of resilience were no longer sufficient to ensure the consistent availability of vital systems.

Members noted that there were a range of options to enhance resilience, including the running of parallel servers off-site with on line replication of data, the provision of back up servers on site and the provision of servers with redundant components that doubled up on all key elements of the system. It was agreed that further investigations should be undertaken to identify the potential costs and benefits of these solutions, in particular, the clustering of major servers and the provision of off-site parallel servers. In the meantime, software would be installed to automatically monitor the Oracle and SQL server databases and the Windows Network operating system so that system failures and performance problems could be better anticipated and minimised. Given a substantial rise in the number of viruses received from the internet it was also thought prudent to supplement the existing anti-virus protection by loading anti-virus software on to all PCs. The total purchase cost of the new software amounted to £16,500 for which a new capital budget was required.

RESOLVED that –

- i) software to monitor the operation of the Revenues and Benefits, Housing and DMS databases be purchased and installed at a total one-off cost of £8,000 and the revenue implications be noted;**
- ii) software to monitor the operation of the Windows operating system (Active Directory) be purchased and installed at a total one-off cost of £5,500 and the revenue implications be noted;**
- iii) anti-virus software be run on all PCs at a cost of £3,000 per annum;**
- iv) a capital budget of £16,500 be approved, to be financed from capital receipts or Government grant; and**
- v) the costs and benefits of increasing the resilience of key computer systems be investigated and a report on the matter prepared for this Committee and the Review Board.**

469. DETERMINATION OF THE COUNCIL'S TAX BASE FOR 2003/04

In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, Members received details of the Council Tax Base calculation for 2003/04 (Appendix 'E' herewith) together with the necessary adjustments.

RECOMMEND that –

- i) the report of the Treasurer for the calculation of the Council's tax base for the year 2003/04 be approved, and**
- ii) pursuant to this report and in accordance with the Local Authorities' (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the amount calculated by Runnymede Borough Council as its Council Tax Base for the year 2003/04 shall be 32,458.**

470. REFERENCE FROM LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEEAbbeyfit (Formerly Abbeylands Sports Centre)

(Ref: Minutes of Leisure and Environment Committee, March 2002, page 957, para 656 and Council Minutes, April 2002, page 1092, para 713)

At its meeting on 21 November 2002 the Leisure and Environment Committee had approved draft Heads of Agreement as a basis on which to construct detailed documentation between this Council, The Jubilee High School Foundation and Surrey County Council, should this Authority wish to proceed with a targeted investment in Abbeyfit Sports Centre. The Corporate Management Committee now gave consideration to a request for a supplementary estimate of £17,000 to fund an independent evaluation of the proposal and business plan for the new sports centre facilities. It was noted that the consultants would not be appointed until the School Foundation and County Council had settled, in writing, the Heads of Agreement as a basis for a formal relationship with the Council.

RESOLVED that –

a supplementary estimate in the sum of £17,000 be approved in order to fund the independent evaluation of the proposal and business plan, only to be expended when Heads of Agreement have been settled with the School Foundation and Surrey County Council to the satisfaction of the Leisure and Environment Committee Chairman.

471. 147/149 STATION ROAD, ADDLESTONE – POTENTIAL ACQUISITION - REFERENCE FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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 9 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Economic Development Committee had approved the acquisition of a retail unit at 147/149 Station Road, Addlestone (known locally as 'Dangerfields') as part of a land assembly exercise with a view to redevelopment. Members noted the asking price for the property and stamp duty implications.

RECOMMEND that –

capital programme provision for the purchase of 147/149 Station Road, Addlestone and a capital estimate in the sum of £386,250 (to include associated costs of the transaction) be made.

472. VACANT AND UNFIT PROPERTIES COMPULSORY PURCHASE - REFERENCE FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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 9 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Economic Development Committee had also authorised attempts to obtain a series of Compulsory Purchase Orders on specified vacant and unfit domestic properties. The intention was that the properties be bought back in to use, possibly as affordable housing. It was hoped to complete the acquisition and disposal on a break even basis, although allowance had been made for a 5% shortfall which might need to be met by the Council. The total estimated purchase cost amounted to £3m but the process of purchase and onward sale would be undertaken on a phased basis, with receipts being rolled over into the next phase. A capital estimate of £1m was therefore sought for the purpose.

RECOMMEND that –

a capital estimate of £1m be approved, to be financed from sales and reinvested on a rolling basis to completion of the acquisition programme.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 10.42pm)