

Runnymede Borough Council

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

6 September 2001 at 7.30 p.m.

Members of the Committee present : Councillors G.B. Woodger (Chairman), J.M. Edwards (Vice-Chairman), K.J. Clark, D.P. Easton, J.R. Furey, R.K. Habgood, Mrs S.E. Jacobs, C.J. Norman, and Mrs. E.E. Price

Member of the Committee absent : Councillor R. Pate

Councillor F.J. Tourlmain also attended.

210. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

At its meeting on 19 July 2001 the Council had modified the allocation of seats on the Corporate Management Committee in order to reflect the new political balance following by-elections on 7 June. The respective Political Groups had requested that the allocation of seats be as set out above.

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

211. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 July 2001 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

212. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor R Pate.

213. CENTRAL RAILWAY PROPOSAL

(Ref: Minutes of the Executive Committee 7 March 2001, page 1,486, para 716)

The Committee received details of a report submitted to the Strategic Rail Authority by the Local Authorities Central Railway Consortium (LACRC) in respect of the Central Railway proposals. Transportation functions were normally a matter for the Planning Committee but it was noted that in view of the corporate policy and service implications of the Central Railway initiative the Chairman of the Planning Committee was content for the Corporate Management Committee to be designated as the lead Committee for the matter in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 1.1 of Part 3 of the Council's constitution.

The LACRC comprised 16 local authorities, including Runnymede, affected by the Central Railway proposal for a 672 km rail freight link connecting the North West of England to northern France. Following a technical and financial appraisal of the project by its consultants the Consortium had presented a report to the Strategic Rail Authority which:-

- challenged the validity of the reduction in road journeys claimed by Central Railway;
- outlined the enormous environmental damage that could occur in areas protected for their high quality landscape or nature conservation value;
- questioned how the proposed 24 hour operation of the railway and terminals could occur without damaging the quality of life to many thousands of residents;

- opposed the use of a Government-sponsored Bill to promote the scheme, as this would greatly reduce the opportunity for public debate and representations;
- questioned why the scheme bypassed the Thames Gateway area (east of London) which was in need of regeneration;
- showed that the proposals contravened Green Belt and other planning policies;
- echoed the views of Chiltern Railways that freight services would disrupt its passenger services;
- pointed out that Central Railway's market forecasts required a substantial switch from accompanied roll-on-roll-off traffic to unaccompanied movement, against the current trend;
- suggested that the scheme would cost £8 billion, much higher than Central Railway's estimates, and cast doubt on its financial viability;
- drew attention to numerous technical difficulties with construction and operation; and
- requested clarification of the proposals and further information to enable the environmental and blight impacts of the scheme to be assessed.

The Committee recognised that the Central Railway proposal had the potential to make a significant contribution to reducing the amount of freight carried by road. However, it was evident that far more detailed work was required by Central Railway to address a number of shortcomings and outstanding issues. Members expressed particular concern at the blight of property arising from the uncertainty which the scheme had created. On certain sections of the proposed route around the M25, notably New Haw, Addlestone, Chertsey, Thorpe and Egham, a significant number of properties abutting the motorway would either be demolished or have their amenity significantly disturbed both during the construction and operational periods. Efforts to identify a suitable resident prepared to bring a test case seeking redress for householders disadvantaged by the proposals had so far proved unsuccessful. The proposed route was also likely to affect a recently completed office building, the B388 Thorpe By Pass, Egham Sports Centre and Abbeylands School and playing fields. The elevated route of the railway would also pass close to St. Ann's Hill which was not only a significant amenity area but also a potential national nature conservation area and a historic park and garden.

Finally Members noted that Central Railway did not appear to have undertaken much work to ensure that the construction phase of the project would not cause harm and disruption to local communities. The M25 between junctions 12 – 15 was to be widened in both directions from 2003 and the combined requirements for both sets of infrastructure work gave rise to engineering and environmental concerns.

RESOLVED that -

- i) the findings of the report submitted to the Strategic Rail Authority by the Local Authorities' Central Railway Consortium in respect of the Central Railway proposal as summarised above be endorsed; and**

RECOMMEND that -

- ii) the Corporate Management Committee be designated as the lead Committee in respect of the Central Railway proposals.**

214. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, July 2001, page 161, para 132)

The Committee received the full set of accounts for the 2000/01 financial year in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996. It was noted that the Statement replicated, in statutory form, the service accounts presented to the Committee on 5 July 2001. An abbreviated schedule of assets was also submitted for Members' information.

RESOLVED that -

- the Statement of Accounts for the financial year 2000/01 be approved.**

215. HIGHWAYS AGENCY AGREEMENT – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, July 2001, page 165, para 142)

The Committee considered a request from Surrey County Council to enter into a temporary Highways Agency agreement with the County Council's Executive, expiring on 31 March 2002. Although highways functions were normally a matter for the Planning Committee it was agreed that the Corporate Management Committee should consider the matter in view of the staffing, financial and general policy implications.

As previously reported, the existing highways agency agreement had been due to be terminated with effect from 31 March 2002 at the instigation of Surrey County Council. However, as a consequence of regulations made under the Local Government Act 2000, the arrangement had been automatically terminated on 1 September 2001. This had arisen because the County Council had introduced its statutory Executive structure on that date and the regulations provided that all agency arrangements which became the responsibility of a Council's Executive were to be terminated as soon as the Executive Structure came into force. The Executive then had the power to agree new agency arrangements.

The Committee was informed that the County Council, which had decided on the introduction of its new structure and date of termination of the agency agreement before the regulations came into force, had held a special meeting of its Executive on 1 September to authorise extensions to the existing arrangements. Meanwhile Agency Districts had been asked to agree to a new agency on the same terms as the original and lasting from 1 September 2001 to 31 March 2002. The Chief Executive Officer, acting in consultation with the Chairman under Standing Order 42, had agreed to a temporary extension of the agency pending formal consideration by this Committee.

Members noted that the Council had the option of refusing the extension unless the County agreed to conditions and guarantees regarding compensation for the loss of the agency and future provision within the Borough. There was, however, no guarantee of an appropriate settlement with the County Council. Neither Authority was prepared for the immediate handover of responsibilities that this would entail. Members therefore considered that the wider service objectives outweighed whatever advantage might be sought from the County Council. The only responsible course of action in the circumstances was to confirm the continuation of the agency. This maintained the position as understood by both Councils and avoided any additional disruption to public or staff. Preparations for the handover would be able to continue according to the original timetable.

RESOLVED that -

the Borough Secretary and Leisure Services Officer be authorised to enter into a formal agreement with Surrey County Council, acting through their Executive, renewing the Highways Agency Agreement until 31 March 2002.

216. STANDARDS COMMITTEE – MEMBERSHIP

The Committee gave consideration to the desirability of appointing a second independent member to the Standards Committee.

Runnymede had introduced its Standards Committee in May 2000, ahead of the statutory duty to do so. It presently comprised 6 Members, one of whom was independent of the Council. However, it was noted that the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) Regulations 2001, which had come into effect on 28 August, provided, inter alia, that where Standards Committees had more than three members at least 25% must be independent. In order to maintain the Council's policy of ensuring that all political groups were represented on the Standards Committee, with the majority group retaining at least half the seats, it would therefore be necessary to appoint a second independent member.

The Committee noted that the appointment of an independent member must normally be approved by a majority of Members of the Authority and follow a process of advertisement in a local newspaper and consideration of applications. However, as Runnymede had a Standards Committee before the regulations came into force it need not for the moment comply with the requirement for advertisement and application. All group leaders would be consulted on the nomination in accordance with the usual practice.

RECOMMEND that -

a nomination for a second independent member of the Standards Committee be considered by the Council on 25 October.

217. GIS – BEST VALUE SERVICE REVIEW AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN
(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee 31 May 2001, page 34, para 48)

The Committee, having endorsed both the scope of the review and the challenge phase for the GIS service at its meeting on 31 May 2001, now gave consideration to the completed Service Review and proposed Continuous Improvement Plan. It was noted that the review had followed the Council's adopted format and in so doing addressed the four elements of Challenge, Compare, Consult and Compete. The Committee considered that the proposals contained in the Continuous Improvement Plan, which were based on the findings of the review, fairly reflected the Council's aspirations for the service. Members took the opportunity to emphasise the need for GIS to be properly integrated with the new Corporate Document Management System in order to maximise the service benefits.

RESOLVED that -

- i) **the GIS Service Review and Continuous Improvement Plan attached at Appendix 'A' be approved with particular reference to the following :-**

	<u>Targets to be implemented at Officer level</u>	<u>Timescale</u>
a)	Establish a formal Service Level Agreement with Land Charges.	April 2002
b)	Carry out a detailed survey of existing and potential users to establish where GIS could achieve service benefits.	December 2001
c)	Gain ISO 9000 accreditation for data capture.	June 2003
d)	Prepare a programme for maximising the service benefits of GIS on a corporate basis including assessment of benefits against costs. This programme to be compatible with the Council's ICT Strategy and IEG programme.	April 2002
e)	Prepare a user guide to enable improved access to existing data held on GIS.	October 2001

- ii) **the Borough Technical Services Officer be requested to report to a future meeting of the Committee regarding implementation and monitoring of the Continuous Improvement Plan.**

218. INFORMATION SYSTEMS – BEST VALUE REVIEW AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN
(Ref: Minutes of Business Management Review Board January 2001, page 1,194, para 595)

Members deferred consideration of the Information Systems Best Value Review and Continuous Improvement Plan in order to allow the IT Member Working Group the opportunity to comment on the proposals contained within it.

RESOLVED that -

the Information Systems Best Value Review and Continuous Improvement Plan

be referred to the IT Member Working Group for consideration prior to submission to this Committee

219. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN – UPDATE ON PROGRESS AGAINST CORPORATE AND SERVICE TARGETS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee received details of the outturn against the Best Value and Audit Commission Performance Indicators for 2000/01 together with progress against the targets in the first quarter of 2001/02. Members noted that the performance thus far was generally satisfactory. Where this was not the case, and there was no more fundamental obstacle to progress, the appropriate remedial action had already been taken. Concern was, however, expressed at the presence in the indicators of Community Safety targets for crime reduction since this was not a matter over which the Council had any direct influence.

220. MICROSOFT LICENSING

The Committee noted details of changes in Microsoft Software Licensing and the measures taken by Officers to minimise the cost to the Council.

Microsoft Corporation, which supplied a large proportion of the software used by the Council, had given notice that in future users would no longer be permitted to simply acquire upgrade licences when loading new applications. Instead they would be required either to repurchase licences or join an annual 'Software Assurance' programme. This would considerably increase the cost of Microsoft products for the Council. In order to postpone the impact of the new regime Officers had therefore taken advantage of the present licensing scheme to arrange for the free upgrade of existing licences for the next two years. This would ensure that the software running on the desk top would remain compatible for two years and usable for a further three to four years, thereby saving the Council an estimated sum in excess of £30,000.

221. WRITE-OFFS

The Committee agreed that a variety of debts should be written off as irrecoverable.

RESOLVED that -

- i) the non-domestic rate arrears totalling £8,864.27, be written off as irrecoverable; and**
- ii) the Council Tax arrears, totalling £1,012.76, be written off as irrecoverable.**

222. REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Housing and Community Services

At its meeting on 25 July 2001 the Housing and Community Services Committee had recommended that the Association for the Improvement of Runnymede (AIR) receive an additional grant of £2,500 to assist with administrative costs in the current financial year. Members now agreed to a supplementary estimate in this sum but were of the opinion that consideration should be given to alternative funding mechanisms for the 2002/03 financial year. AIR's financial difficulties arose principally from delays in the receipt of fee income and loans or guarantees might therefore be a more appropriate form of assistance than grant aid .

RESOLVED that -

- i) a supplementary estimate of £2,500 be approved for 2001/02 in order to assist AIR with administrative costs; and**

- ii) the Housing and Community Services Committee be requested to examine the feasibility of alternative funding mechanisms such as loans or guarantees for AIR in 2002/03.**

Planning Committee

At its meeting on 15 August 2001 the Planning Committee had recommended that provision of £500,000 be made in 2002/03 for legal and consultancy costs associated with the Council's defence of the refusal of planning permission for a Motorway Services Area at Simplemarsh Farm at a forthcoming Public Inquiry. Members noted that this figure did not include any additional staff resources and asked that Officers explore all possible means for either recovering or limiting the Council's overall contribution.

RECOMMEND that -

- i) budgetary provision in the sum of £500,000 be made in the financial year 2002/03 for legal and consultancy costs associated with the Public Inquiry into the proposed Motorway Service Area at Simplemarsh Farm; and**
- ii) Officers be requested to thoroughly explore means of limiting and/or recovering the Council's expenditure on the Public Inquiry.**

223. URGENT ACTION - STANDING ORDER 42

Members noted that the following action had been taken since the Committee's last meeting after consultation with the Chairman under Standing Order 42:

<u>Officer</u>	<u>Action Taken</u>	<u>Central Index No.</u>
Chief Executive Officer	Agreement to replacement of the Trilogy Voters Millennium electoral registration software package for a sum not exceeding £22,000 in view of Trilogy's inability to support the package without additional payments.	481

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 9.55 p.m.)