

Runnymede Borough Council

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

4 September 2003 at 7.30 p.m.

Members of the Committee present : Councillors R.K. Habgood (Chairman), J.M. Edwards (Vice-Chairman), J.R. Furey, P.A. Greenwood, C.J. Norman, Mrs E.E. Price, Ms. C.M. Simmons, P.B. Tuley, P.J. Waddell and G.B. Woodger

Members of the Committee absent : None

Councillor J.R. Whiteley also attended.

262. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 July 2003 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

263. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor G.B. Woodger declared a personal interest under the Runnymede Code of Conduct for Members in respect of the item concerning Appointments to Outside Bodies owing to his position as Chairman of the Surrey Local Government Association (SLGA). The interest did not have to be regarded as prejudicial by virtue of paragraph 10 (2) (c) of the Code but Councillor Woodger did not speak or vote in respect of the SLGA nominations because of his role in the organisations appointments process.

264. PRIORITY INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE – 2003/04 PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received details of performance in the first quarter of 2003/04 in respect of the Council's ten priority indicators. Members noted that there remained areas of concern, notably the proportion of telephone calls answered and invoices paid within the target times, but these appeared to be responding to the implementation of corrective measures. The overall picture was one of sustained and improved performance, particularly in the field of benefits administration, with significant progress towards the rigorous and challenging targets the Council had set itself.

265. SERVICE PLAN 2003/04 – QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee July 2003, page 260, para 174)

Members were notified of progress with the Corporate Management Service Plan in the first quarter of 2003/04. The Plan served as a basis for monitoring and review of the Committee's objectives as drawn from a variety of sources and set out details of timescales, potential barriers and additional resource requirements as well as corrective action where it was required to improve performance. Officers were to review the target for improved reporting of financial performance to Members in the light of the slow implementation of the new financial system and reconsider whether the establishment of service level agreements remained a priority for the Payments section. Further consideration would also be given to means of increasing the proportion of payments to suppliers by BACS.

266. ELECTORAL COMMISSION REVIEW OF MINIMUM VOTING/CANDIDACY AGE

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee July 2003, page 254, para 165)

The Committee gave consideration to a consultation paper issued by the Electoral Commission which reviewed the minimum age at which people could participate in elections, both as voters and candidates. It was noted that the Commission was concerned at the declining participation rates in UK elections, especially among young people. As part of a wider review of electoral law, the Commission was therefore seeking means of encouraging younger people to engage more closely with the democratic process.

In addressing a series of questions posed by the consultation document, Members were of the view that there were no grounds for reducing the voting age from 18 to 16. The lowering of the franchise age was only one of many issues affecting voter participation. A reduction of the minimum age for candidates from 21 to 18 was, however, supported in the interests of consistency. It was noted that Officers had sought the views of the local Youth Forum but no response had been received.

RESOLVED that –

the comments set out at Appendix 'A' form the Council's response to the Electoral Commission's consultation document "How old is old enough?"

267. REVIEW OF CYCLE OF LOCAL ELECTIONS – CONSULTATION PAPER
(Ref: Minutes of Policy and Resources Committee 25 March 1998, page 963, para 709)

The Committee gave consideration to the issues raised in an Electoral Commission consultation document reviewing the cycle of local elections in England. The Commission had been asked to identify options for change because the Government was of the view that the current cycle of local authority elections was confusing for the public. Members felt that a uniform pattern of electoral cycles based on elections by thirds with a four year term of office would help lessen the confusion amongst voters. It was agreed that National and European elections should be kept separate from local polls in order to avoid the blurring of national and local issues and assist with the administrative preparations.

RESOLVED that –

the comments set out at Appendix 'B' form the Council's response to the Electoral Commission's consultation document "The Cycle of Local Elections in England".

268. DRAFT CONDUCT OF REFERENDUMS ORDER

Members noted that the Department of Constitutional Affairs had published a draft Conduct of Referendums Order in preparation for the proposed Regional Assembly referendums. The draft set out to complete the framework of generic legislation for the holding of referendums in the UK, providing for a basic structure modelled on existing rules for Parliamentary elections. Recent changes in electoral practice, including the extension of postal voting and electronic counting, had been incorporated within the Order. By way of response, the Committee endorsed comments submitted by the Association of Electoral Administrators.

RESOLVED that –

the comments of the Association of Electoral Administrators on the Draft Conduct of Referendums Order, attached at Appendix 'C', be endorsed.

269. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2002/03
(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee July 2003, page 248, para 160)

The Committee received the full statement of accounts for the 2002/03 financial year, together with an abbreviated schedule of assets. The statement largely replicated, in statutory form, the service accounts presented to Members at the July meeting. However, following discussions with the District Auditor, the housing stock valuations had subsequently been adjusted by the application of relevant price indexes in order to bring them up to date. This had the effect of increasing the balance sheet valuation of all housing assets from £187,633,000 at the last valuation in April 2000 to £280,272,000 at March 2003 prices. A full revaluation of housing assets would be undertaken as soon as resources permitted. The opportunity had also been taken to revise the accounting entries for capital expenditure on improvement grants so that they were consistent with other similar items of capital expenditure which did not create a fixed asset owned by the Council.

The accounts also included significant new features in respect of a statement of the system of internal financial controls, including the arrangements for internal audit, and additional pension

fund disclosures. With regard to the latter, Members noted that the Runnymede element of the Surrey Pension Fund, based on actuarial assumptions, showed a deficit of £12.2m as at 31 March 2003. The principal cause of this was the significant fall in stock markets since the previous valuation in April 2001. Markets however, had subsequently recovered by 10-15%, sufficient to reduce the deficit by around £2m. It was also recognised that the Accounts did nothing more than disclose the position of the fund at a fixed point in time, whereas pensions were, by their very nature, long term assets and liabilities.

RESOLVED that –

the Statement of Accounts for the 2002/03 financial year, attached at Appendix 'D', be approved.

270. CONSULTATION PRACTICE AND FUTURE STRATEGY

The Committee gave consideration to the adoption of a strategy which would formalise the Council's discretionary consultation arrangements.

Members noted that as a result of case law local authorities were often obliged to engage in effective consultation beyond the specific statutory requirements. Public bodies which had failed to properly consult during major service changes or development schemes had been subject to challenge by way of judicial review. The Government's modernisation agenda urged local authorities to fully embrace consultation as part of the drive for service improvements and better community engagement.

The Council already undertook extensive consultation in relation to major schemes, service issues and more modest but sensitive matters. The draft strategy therefore set out to codify and formalise this existing practice, which had been complimented in the recent Comprehensive Assessment Peer View, and develop a preferred approach for future consultation. In particular, the strategy sought to address the need to structure consultation exercises so that hard to reach groups, including the disabled, young people and ethnic minorities, were not excluded.

RECOMMEND that –

- i) the draft Consultation Strategy attached at Appendix 'E' be approved; and**
- ii) the Strategy be the subject of formal review in the Summer of 2004.**

271. LEGISLATION AFFECTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT - UPDATE

The Committee received a report setting out details of the recent or proposed legislation which was likely to affect the powers and duties of local authorities, together with the potential resource implications.

Members noted that the volume of legislation affecting local government had increased considerably over the previous 15 years and this trend was set to continue. Although a number of Private Members' Bills were unlikely to become law, there was a very significant range of recent Acts and Government Bills which would place considerable demands on the Council. The previously reported Licensing Act 2003, which transferred liquor licensing functions from Magistrates Courts to District Councils, carried substantial resource implications at both Member and Officer level. Draft Housing and Civil Contingencies Bills yet to be laid before Parliament were also set to confer major new functions on local authorities.

The Committee recognised, however, that the cumulative effect of all the legislation would significantly increase the workload of both Officers and Members regardless of the end product in terms of service delivery. Resourcing implications included Officer time in establishing and reporting upon the effect of the new legislation, the cost of Officer time or consultancy resource in preparing policies and procedures and the cost of Member/Officer training, maintaining compliance with statutory procedures and any new powers which the Council wished to exercise.

Members noted that an immediate resourcing issue arose from the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Compliance with the Act, which would give people the right, from 2005, to inspect and

purchase copies of information which public authorities held on any particular subject, would not be straightforward. Information dating back decades was spread across a range of formal and informal record systems, electronic and paper, in a number of departments, sometimes with individual Officers. While the Document Management System, once fully implemented, would assist with current information, historic records would continue to be a major issue for years to come. There were a number of matters that needed to be addressed including assessment of the current situation, staff awareness and training and the development of systems to determine when to keep/dispose of documents, identify and retrieve documents and deal with applications under the Act.

Officers did not have the capacity to accommodate all the planning required for such a major exercise. It was therefore agreed that consultants should be engaged to assist in the assessment and planning stage at an estimated cost of £10,000 - £12,000. The nature and cost of subsequent actions/resourcing would depend to some extent on the conclusions reached, but for a wide ranging exercise covering hundreds of thousands of records it was considered prudent to plan for expenditure of approximately £60,000 in 2004/05.

RESOLVED that –

- i) a supplementary estimate of £12,000 be approved for consultancy and preparation work needed for the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and**
- ii) the further financial and resourcing consequences of the legislation outlined in the agenda report be dealt with through the financial forecast and the Annual Personnel Report.**

272. COMMUNITY STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, April 2003, page 1214, para 750)

Members received details of the continuing development of the Council's Community Strategy and the implementation of the accompanying action plans. It was noted that the Strategy had thus far managed to successfully engage a wide range of organisations, amenity groups and community representatives despite the burdens which the development process placed on participants. Positive progress had been made by each of the six task groups across a wide range of areas.

The Local Strategic Partnership would continue to monitor the progress of the Strategy and the quarterly meetings of the Task Groups as they advanced their action plans. Meanwhile, regular meetings would be held with the various stakeholders to obtain their co-operation and participation in respect of those services that fell outside the Council's responsibilities. The annual Visioning Forum was due to take place on 8 December 2003. This would outline, in public, a full review of the progress of the Community Strategy and provide an opportunity to re-inform the Strategy's priorities through consultation in accordance with best practice guidelines and the relevant Best Value Performance Indicator target.

273. EVALUATION OF STAFF SALARY RANGES

(Ref: Minutes of Standards Committee, March 2003, page 1207, para 736)

At the request of the Standards Committee following difficulties in assessing a grading appeal, Members gave consideration to the introduction of a system for evaluating jobs which would make it easier to compare posts with those elsewhere in the Council, in other local authorities and in the private sector.

The Committee noted that Runnymede, in common with the majority of Surrey District Councils, currently had no formal methodology for ascribing salary ranges to particular posts. Informal comparisons were made with other posts in the Authority and comparable posts in appropriate organisations in both the public and private sector. The annual review of salaries used a variety of data from surveys and statistical reports in order to inform its recommendations, including the Annual Management Salaries Survey, South East Employers Salary Survey, Surrey Personnel Officers Group Salary Survey, the Retail Prices Index and pay awards in other local authorities as well as the economy in general. However, developments in equal pay legislation now placed a greater responsibility on employers to ensure a fair and consistent approach. The lack of an

objective system for setting salaries for posts would not assist the Council if it was required to defend an equal pay claim.

The Committee received details of various options for evaluating jobs and the comments and respective preferences of both the management side and the Runnymede branch of UNISON. Members were of the view that the proposed reversion of the Civic Offices, and the ongoing implementation of the Document Management System and new methods of working presented an opportunity to undertake a wider and more comprehensive review which would include the staff appraisal and performance related pay schemes and the introduction of competency assessments as well as a formal job evaluation and benchmarking scheme. It was therefore agreed that consultants should be engaged, at a cost of no more than £20,000, to undertake this review. A pilot scheme could then be developed in consultation with UNISON in order to establish the best way forward. As a first step a report would be presented to the Committee setting out the proposals by the consultants together with a programme and an estimate of costs. It was noted that the results of a recent independent survey of staff views on a variety of matters, including the appraisal and performance related pay schemes, would also be reported to Committee in the near future.

RESOLVED that –

- i) in the light of the move to new and open plan offices and the introduction of new ways of working, the opportunity be taken to evaluate job roles and appraisals;**
- ii) consultants be appointed to undertake a detailed scoping exercise, at a cost of no more than £20,000, the scope to include an exploration of the role of competency assessment and benchmarking with other appropriate authorities;**
- iii) following the presentation of a report on the consultants findings, a pilot scheme be undertaken in consultation with UNISON and a detailed report submitted in order to determine the way forward; and**
- iv) a virement of £20,000 from the provision for Position Statement Initiatives be approved for the purpose of the consultancy exercise.**

274. APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

- a) Minor Authority Governor – Christchurch Church of England Junior School

Members noted that the Council's representative on the governing body of Christchurch Church of England Junior School had resigned. As the school had asked for more time to nominate a potential replacement, it was

RESOLVED that –

the appointment of a Governor of Christchurch Church of England Junior School be deferred.

- b) Egham United Charity

The Council's representative trustee for the Hythe on the Egham United Charity had submitted his resignation. Members noted that it was necessary for the replacement to be a Hythe resident.

RESOLVED that –

Mrs Yvonna Lay be appointed to the Egham United Charity as the representative trustee for the Hythe for a four year period.

(Councillors P.A. Greenwood and Mrs E.E. Price requested that their abstentions be recorded in accordance with Standing Order 25.3)

c) Surrey Local Government Association

The Surrey Local Government Association (SLGA) had invited nominations for appointments to several outside bodies where vacancies had arisen. Members considered the most significant of these to be the Surrey Supporting People Commissioning Body and proposed Councillor P.J. Waddell, Chairman of the Housing and Community Services Committee, for the vacancy.

RESOLVED that –

Councillor P.J. Waddell be nominated to the SLGA to serve on the Surrey Supporting People Commissioning Body.

275. WRITE OFFS

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

RESOLVED that –

- i) the rent arrears, totalling £8,142.33 be written off as irrecoverable;**
- ii) the non domestic rate arrears, totalling £2,013.85 be written off as irrecoverable; and**
- iii) the sundry debtor debts, totalling £7,846.57, be written off as irrecoverable.**

276. URGENT ACTION - STANDING ORDER 42

Members noted details of the following actions which had been taken after consultation with the Chairman of the Committee under Standing Order 42:

<u>Officer</u>	<u>Action Taken</u>	<u>Central Index No.</u>
Director of Housing and Community Services	Authorisation of capital programme provision and a capital estimate of £275,000 to underwrite Apex Housing Association expenditure in respect of the Bowes Road/Wapshott Road redevelopment	533
Chief Executive Officer	Purchase of Anti Virus Software at a cost of £4,100 in order to provide an interim solution to spam emails.	534

277. INFORMATION STRATEGY MEMBER WORKING GROUP – MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Information Strategy Member Working Group held on 24 July 2003, attached at Appendix 'F', were received and noted.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 9.30 p.m.)