

Runnymede Borough Council

LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

20 September 2001 at 7.30 p.m.

Members of the
Committee present: Councillors C.J. Norman (Chairman), Mrs S.E. Jacobs (Vice-Chairman),
Mrs F.J. Barden, E.G. Barrett, B.A. Clarke, A.G. Collins, Mrs L.M. Gillham,
Mrs C. Y. Jones and Ms. C.M. Simmons.

Members of the
Committee absent: Councillor D.W. Parr

Co-opted Members
of the Committee
absent: Mrs B. Miller and Mr T. Watson

Councillor P.J. Poole also attended.

262. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 June 2001 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

263. SAFER RUNNYMEDE

(Ref: Minutes of Executive Committee, 16 May 2001, page 1726, para. 872)

The Committee received a progress report on the Safer Runnymede initiative which also sought approvals for the purchase of new equipment.

Members were pleased to learn that Surrey County Council had offered conditional funding of £149,000 to support the Safer Runnymede Partnership's Speed Reduction Initiative. This money would cover the purchase of three new types of speed reduction equipment ;

- one portable speed indicating device, which would warn drivers of the speed limit by displaying a motorist's speed,
- one vehicle recognition system which would enable regular offenders to be identified and targeted by the Police, and
- six interactive signs which would illuminate a warning when motorists exceeded the speed limit.

Minor works would be required to accommodate and maintain these signs, and the cost of these works could be met from the County Council funding and the agreed Speed Reduction Initiative Budget.

Since the new speed reduction equipment required specific very recent technology, the Committee agreed that Contract Standing Orders should be waived to allow this equipment to be purchased from the five specialist suppliers who had developed these devices. It was noted that the speed reduction project would be monitored by the Transport Research Laboratory and would act as a pilot scheme for Surrey County Council.

With regard to the development of the Safer Runnymede CCTV network, it was reported that the Partnership's bid to install a CCTV system in the St. Peter's Hospital area had been successful, and the Home Office had agreed funding of £278,000 for the scheme. Since the new cameras would be managed as integrated parts of the existing CCTV system, and some equipment could not be obtained from alternative providers, the Committee agreed that Standing Orders should be waived to allow the existing contractors to be used for this work. Planning permission had now been obtained for the St. Peter's Hospital area extension and also for the cameras at Egham Hythe/Pooley Green.

An independent survey had been conducted as part of the Community Safety Strategy. Members were invited to a presentation of the survey results which would take place on 8 October 2001 in the Council Chamber.

RESOLVED that -

- i) approval be given for the purchase of a speed indicating device, a vehicle recognition system and six interactive signs which, together with necessary minor works, will cost a maximum of £125,000 to be funded by Surrey County Council and existing budgets;**
- ii) Standing Order C2.2 be waived in respect of the acquisition of the speed reduction equipment for the reasons set out above; and**
- iii) Standing Order C2.2 be waived in respect of the purchase of the equipment required to expand the CCTV system to St. Peter's Hospital for the reasons set out above.**

264. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN - UPDATE ON PROGRESS AGAINST CORPORATE AND SERVICES TARGETS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee received and noted the following Best Value performance information for services within its purview:

- i) the progress against the Best Value Performance Indicators 2001/02 for the period April to June 2001; and
- ii) the outturn against the Best Value and Audit Commission Performance Indicators for the financial year 2000/01.

265. 'WINDOW ON THE RIVER' - LAND AT DOCKETT EDDY, CHERTSEY MEADS
(Ref: Minutes of Executive Committee, 2 May 2001, page 1711, para. 852)

The Committee was asked to consider further the possible release of the 'Window on the River' site at Dockett Eddy which had been transferred to the Council from Surrey County Council in 1991. This site was covered by a restrictive covenant which required this Council not to use the land for any purpose other than as a public open space, and which prohibited the construction of buildings, structures or fences on the land.

The future of the site had already been considered by the former Executive Committee on 2 May 2001. That Committee had identified three broad options for the future use of the land, these being its retention as a public open space, marketing of the land for residential development (subject to planning permission and other necessary consents) or leasing the land for garden purposes or as a mooring point. Whilst noting various considerations pointing towards the retention of the site as a public open space, before reaching a final decision the Executive Committee had instructed Officers to ascertain whether the County Council would be willing to release the restrictive covenant over the site. It was agreed that the matter should then be referred to the relevant service committee under the new structure.

The Leisure and Environment Committee learned that Surrey County Council were prepared to consider the release of the covenant, in order to facilitate some form of development, subject to appropriate planning consent. However, the Committee recognised that it was very unlikely that planning permission would be obtained for a residential development on this site. Firstly, the land was in the Green Belt and in the Flood Plain, and therefore strong objections could be anticipated from the Environment Agency. Secondly, such a use would represent a departure from the Council's agreed development plan and, if approved by the Planning Committee, it would need to be referred to the Government Office for the South East. Finally, Members noted that both the Chertsey Society and the Chertsey Meads Management Liaison Group had expressed concerns at any proposal to sell the land, which could set a dangerous precedent for other 'Windows on the River'.

In view of the planning and policy considerations, and the objections raised by local interested groups, the Committee concurred that the "Window on the River" site should be retained in the

Council's ownership for use as an open space. It was also agreed that funding should be allocated for modest enhancements to the site, such as the provision of litter bins and picnic tables, to encourage greater public use of this land.

RESOLVED that -

the 'Window on the River' site at Dockett Eddy be retained in the Council's ownership for use as a public open space, and additional funding be allocated for modest enhancement works to this land.

266. BEST VALUE – PARKS AND OPEN SPACES SERVICE SCOPING AND CHALLENGE REPORT

The Committee considered the Scoping and Challenge report for the Parks and Open Spaces Service which is attached at Appendix 'A'. Members were asked to consider whether the objectives for the provision of the service continued to meet the Council's aspirations and to satisfy themselves that there had been sufficient rigour in completing the Challenge phase of the Best Value Review.

The Council's Parks and Amenities Section currently managed five staffed parks in the Borough and eighty-three open spaces, in addition to undertaking various grounds maintenance services on behalf of other Council departments. In recent years the Council had acquired an increasing number of new open spaces and this trend was likely to continue over the next five years. Therefore, Officers proposed to consider the implications this would have on future staffing levels during the next phases of the Review. Officers had also identified several alternatives for the future delivery of the service, including bringing the entire service in-house or finding suitable groups to manage certain facilities. These various options would be assessed during the course of the Review.

The Committee noted that there were still some areas of the Borough which were in need of additional recreation facilities. Members supported the Officers' proposal to review the parks and open spaces provision in Runnymede (including children's play areas) to establish the extent of any shortfalls and how these could be addressed. In particular Members wished to ensure that different types of facilities were provided to suit different age groups, from the under five's through to older teenagers.

It was reported that there were currently no National Performance Indicators for the Parks and Open Spaces Service. Therefore, Officers had produced a set of comparators which could be used for benchmarking with other local authorities. Members endorsed the Officer's proposals for change and noted that the Continuous Improvement Plan would be submitted to the Committee in January 2002, following the completion of the next three stages of the Review.

RESOLVED that -

- i) the scope of this Review and the Challenge phase be endorsed with particular areas of scrutiny as follows:**
 - a) review the provision of parks and open spaces, and children's play facilities throughout the Borough to establish the extent of any shortfalls and to seek ways to address these;**
 - b) continue to work towards developing a new urban park at Pooley Green;**
 - c) establish whether Members, and the public, feel the objectives for this service are appropriate, relevant and complete;**
 - d) assess the implications of each of the options available for the provision of this service and report back to this Committee;**
 - e) investigate the availability of suitable computer based systems for the control of grounds maintenance operations and the booking of parks facilities;**

- f) **investigate the feasibility and appropriateness of the suggested comparators and use those which produce the most useful information;**
 - g) **investigate the benefits of producing a Management Plan or Statement for each site;**
 - h) **compare the organisation of Runnymede's Parks and Open Spaces section with that of other local authorities;**
 - i) **assess the likely increase in the area of land managed by the service over the next five years and consider the implications this may have for future staffing levels;**
 - j) **investigate the feasibility of making tennis free of charge to certain users at certain times; and**
 - k) **investigate whether the requirement for clubs to have £5 million public liability insurance is appropriate.**
- ii) **the Residents' Panel and user surveys be used as prime sources for the collection of customer satisfaction data for the Consultation element of the Review; and**
 - iii) **relevant and, where available, local statistics be developed for the Comparative element of the Review.**

267. BEST VALUE - ALLOTMENTS SERVICE SCOPING AND CHALLENGE REPORT

The Committee considered the Scoping and Challenge report for the Allotments Service which is attached at Appendix 'B'. Members were asked to consider whether the objectives for the provision of the service continued to meet the Council's aspirations and to satisfy themselves that there had been sufficient rigour in completing the Challenge phase of the Best Value Review.

The provision of a sufficient number of allotment plots was a requirement of the Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1908. There were currently 15 allotment sites in the Borough, 12 of which were managed by the Council itself and three of which were self-managed. Members learned that there was a continuing over-provision of allotment plots in Runnymede. The Committee agreed that Officers should continue to review this service to match supply with local demand, and investigate alternative uses for under utilised sites. At the same time Members wished to ensure that an adequate number of plots were retained to meet any future increased interest in allotment gardening.

Officers reported that the majority of expenditure for the Allotments Service fell into the category of overheads, leaving a limited sum available for maintenance and repairs to Council managed sites. Members concurred that Officers should continue to promote the self-management of Council allotments, and it was noted that the Council was able to fund one-off improvements to sites adopting self-management schemes. Although some of the allotment sites in the Borough were thought too small to be self-managing, it was suggested that such sites could be incorporated into a larger scheme run by plot holders or a local horticultural society.

Officers reported that there were currently no National Performance Indicators for the Allotments Service, and therefore Officers would develop a range of relevant comparators which could be used for benchmarking with the other North West Surrey Authorities. As regards consultation, Officers proposed to undertake a satisfaction survey of allotment plot holders, Residents Panellists and Councillors. Members agreed to endorse the Challenge stage of the Allotments Service Review, and it was noted that a final report would be submitted to the Committee in January 2002.

RESOLVED that -

- i) **the scope of this Review and the Challenge phase be endorsed with particular areas of scrutiny as follows:**

- a) **to continually monitor whether there is justification for the continued provision of allotment plots to meet current and future demand in accordance with the requirements of the Act;**
 - b) **continue to review the service at regular intervals to match supply to demand and seek suitable alternative uses for under-utilised land with particular emphasis on the Chertsey and Pooley Green sites;**
 - c) **seek cost effective means of advertising and promoting the service to ensure any latent demand is satisfied;**
 - d) **undertake a satisfaction survey of all allotment plot holders, the Resident Panellists and Members to determine the quality of service which would match reasonable expectations;**
 - e) **achieve a letting rate of 75% of available allotments and an improvement in cultivation levels;**
 - f) **continue to promote the benefits of self-management of allotment sites and achieve 2 further self-management schemes;**
 - g) **install a cost effective computerised allotment booking and record system;**
 - h) **develop a range of meaningful and relevant comparative statistics and explore expenditure comparisons with other local authority managed allotment services to learn from best practice elsewhere;**
 - i) **improve the quality of site facilities and maintenance in conjunction with the rationalisation of allotment holdings and self-management schemes on a self-financing basis;**
 - j) **consider whether Council policy is appropriate and, if so, investigate the leasing of allotment sites for self-management or management by a local horticultural society;**
 - k) **seek to achieve a 55% income/expenditure return (ex Capital Charges); and**
 - l) **review the overheads incurred by the service with the objective of reducing expenditure.**
- ii) **the Residents' Panel and user surveys be used as prime sources for the collection of customer satisfaction data for the Consultation element of the Review; and**
 - iii) **relevant and, where available, local statistics be developed for the Comparative element of the Review.**

268. BEST VALUE – CEMETERIES AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS SERVICE SCOPING AND CHALLENGE REPORT

The Committee considered the Scoping and Challenge report for the Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards Service which is attached at Appendix 'C'. Members were asked to consider whether the objectives for the provision of the service continued to meet the Council's aspirations and to satisfy themselves that there had been sufficient rigour in completing the Challenge phase of the Best Value Review.

It was reported that the Council owned four cemeteries in the Borough and managed four closed churchyards. The Committee supported the Council's existing policy of ensuring that each cemetery had sufficient unused land to meet projected demand for the next ten years. Members noted that

there was a substantial area of surplus land at Englefield Green Cemetery and that options for the future use of this land could be considered by the Economic Development Committee. It was reported that some graves at Addlestone Cemetery had recently been subject to vandalism, and it was agreed that Officers would investigate the condition of this site.

During the remaining phases of the Review, Officers would compare the quality and organisation of Runnymede's Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards Service with that of other local authorities. Officers had also identified three possible options for the future delivery of the service and these would be assessed under the 'Compete' stage of the Review. Members endorsed the proposals for change set out in the Challenge Report and noted that a Continuous Improvement Plan for this service would be presented to the Committee in January 2002.

RESOLVED that -

- i) the scope of this Review and the Challenge phase be endorsed with particular areas of scrutiny as follows:**
 - a) continue to ensure that there is sufficient land available at each cemetery to satisfy the likely demand for burials for ten years;**
 - b) Members to decide whether they wish to revisit the question of how best to use the surplus land at Englefield Green Cemetery;**
 - c) assess the quality of the Cemeteries Service currently provided compared with that offered by other adjacent authorities;**
 - d) assess the implications of each of the options available for the provision of this service and report back to this Committee;**
 - e) compare Runnymede's cemeteries costs, and fees and charges with those made by other local authorities;**
 - f) have a disability audit carried out at each cemetery and closed churchyard;**
 - g) compare the organisation of Runnymede's cemeteries and closed churchyards with that of other local authorities;**
 - h) investigate the availability of suitable computer based systems for maintaining the Burial Register.**
- ii) the Residents' Panel and user surveys be used as prime sources for the collection of customer satisfaction data for the Consultation element of the Review; and**
- iii) relevant and, where available, local statistics be developed for the Comparative element of the Review.**

269. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ENFORCEMENT POLICY

(Ref: Minutes of Leisure and Environment Committee, June 2001, page 123, para. 101)

Members learned that the Best Value Reviews for the Food Safety and Hygiene Service, and the Occupational/Municipal Health, Safety and Welfare Service had identified a need to review and republish the Council's Food Safety, and Health and Safety Enforcement Policies. Subsequent guidance from Central Government had also suggested that the Environmental Services Department should have a policy or policies in place covering all aspects of Environmental Health.

Officers had accordingly drawn up a generic Enforcement Policy for Environmental Health, meeting Best Value requirements, which was presented to Members for approval. The Committee considered the new Enforcement Policy and it was agreed that this document should be adopted by the Council.

RESOLVED that -

the Environmental Health Enforcement Policy, covering all aspects of work of the Environmental Health Department, be adopted as attached at Appendix 'D'.

270. GUARDS POLO CLUB, WINDSOR GREAT PARK - FOOD HYGIENE AND HEALTH AND SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES

Members were advised that the Guards Polo Club was situated on the boundary between Runnymede Borough Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The Polo Club's main offices were located on the Windsor and Maidenhead side of the boundary and since 1992 the Club had been registered as a food premises with that local authority. However, part of the Club's kitchen facilities extended over the Runnymede side of the boundary, as did some of the polo fields. This had recently resulted in some procedural difficulties.

Following negotiations, Officers from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead had agreed to take over all food hygiene and health and safety responsibilities in respect of the Guards Polo Club site, including the area located in the Borough of Runnymede. The Committee accordingly agreed that it would be sensible to appoint the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead as Runnymede Council's agent for all its food hygiene and health and safety functions in respect of the Polo Club.

RESOLVED that -

the Borough Secretary and Leisure Services Officer be authorised to appoint the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead as this Council's agent for all its food hygiene and health and safety functions in respect of the Guards Polo Club.

271. PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES - CARRIAGE OF ASSISTANCE DOGS

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association had written to local authorities requesting that they attach a condition to Private Hire Drivers' Licences that would require drivers to carry Guide and Assistance Dogs belonging to passengers free of charge, unless the driver had a medical condition that would preclude such action.

Section 37 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 already placed a duty on Licensed Taxi Drivers to carry Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dogs free of charge, but this legislation did not extend to drivers of Private Hire Vehicles (PHV's). However, Licensing Authorities outside London had powers under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, enabling them to attach conditions to Private Hire Driver's licences which they considered reasonably necessary. This power was subject to an appeals procedure and where a driver could establish medical grounds for not carrying an Assistance Dog, this condition could be omitted from the licence.

So far 186 local authorities had adopted a requirement to carry Assistance Dogs, whilst 63 were in the process of doing so. Runnymede Officers had already consulted Private Hire companies in the Borough on the carriage of Assistance Dogs. Though some smaller operators had expressed concerns about the presence of dog hair on car seats, a significant number had indicated that they would have no difficulty in accommodating Assistance Dogs.

The Committee concurred that a condition should be attached to Private Hire Drivers' Licences in Runnymede, requiring the carriage of Assistance Dogs, in order to promote equality of access for disabled users.

RECOMMEND that -

the following condition be attached to Private Hire Drivers' Licences, except where medical grounds exist justifying its omission: "Private Hire Drivers must carry a Guide, Hearing or Assistance Dog belonging to a passenger free of charge."

272. HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION BILL 2001

The Committee received a letter from Dr Des Turner, MP, seeking support from local authorities for his draft Home Energy Conservation Bill 2001. Members considered the draft Bill which comprised three parts. Parts 1 and 2 contained measures to improve the Home Energy Conservation Act and to co-ordinate local and national measures on fuel poverty. Part 3 proposed a national licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) which would include energy efficiency, fire safety, amenity and management requirements.

Members noted that the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health had been campaigning for a licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation and that this sentiment had been echoed by Runnymede Councillors in debates concerning HMO's.

The Committee expressed its support for the measures contained in the draft Bill including the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation which was thought to be particularly relevant to Runnymede in view of the number of HMO's in the Borough. Members agreed that the Committee's views should accordingly be conveyed to the Constituency MP.

Officers reported that items on HMO's would normally be considered by the Housing and Community Services Committee and, therefore, in this instance, the following recommendation would be referred to Full Council for approval.

RECOMMEND that -

the draft Home Energy Conservation Bill 2001 be supported in its entirety, and representations accordingly be made to the Constituency MP.

273. BEST VALUE – LICENSING AND REGISTRATIONS SERVICE SCOPING AND CHALLENGE REPORT

The Committee considered the Scoping and Challenge report for the Licensing and Registrations Service which is attached at Appendix 'E'. Members were asked to consider whether the objectives for the provision of the service continued to meet the Council's aspirations and to satisfy themselves that there had been sufficient rigour in completing the Challenge phase of the Best Value Review.

It was reported that most of the Licensing and Registrations Service was provided in-house by a part-time Licensing Officer in the Environmental Services Department. Licences for House to House and Street Charitable collections, small lotteries and gaming machines were administered within the Borough Secretary's and Leisure Services Department, which had no enforcement capability. Members agreed that it would be difficult to externalise these functions in view of the small scale of the service. Moreover, the Police had expressed concerns at any proposals to contract out the service, and it was thought that the Charity Commission might also withhold information if this function were externalised.

During the Challenge workshop it had been suggested that an extra part-time Licensing Officer would improve the enforcement capability and enable all the Licensing and Registrations functions to be brought under a single umbrella. This option would be considered further during the remaining stages of the Review. However, it was noted that this appointment would have resource implications for the Environmental Services Department, but would not result in equivalent savings in the Borough Secretary's and Leisure Services Department.

The Committee expressed its support for the proposals for change identified during the Challenge stage. In particular, in view of the health risks associated with body piercing, Members agreed that Officers should encourage the Home Office to bring this activity within the scope of the Licensing legislation. Members endorsed the scope of the Review and noted that a Continuous Improvement Plan for the service would be presented to the Committee in January 2002.

RESOLVED that -

- i) the scope of this Review and the Challenge phase be endorsed with particular areas of scrutiny as follows:**

- a) **investigate the practicality and cost of bringing all Licensing and Registrations functions under a single umbrella, with improved enforcement capabilities;**
 - b) **in future, share information with the Police regarding tattooists, as a matter of routine, in order to increase the protection of minors;**
 - c) **suggest to the Home Office that body piercing should be brought into the scope of the legislation;**
 - d) **during the annual review of fees and charges, consider whether it is appropriate to have a sliding scale for taxi/private hire operators, based on the number of vehicles operated;**
 - e) **review the unsocial hours rate for taxis with the purpose of encouraging the use of taxis after pub closing hours and discouraging drink driving;**
 - f) **explore the opportunities for a partnership with the taxi trade for the transport of people in wheelchairs, to improve mobility in the Borough and overcome resistance to non cost effective short journeys;**
 - g) **review the decisions to move away from taxi testing and metal plating in conjunction with the current part-time enforcement resource; and**
 - h) **investigate whether medical consultations can be dealt with through a single doctors' practice to see if it offers a faster and more cost-effective service.**
- ii) **the Residents' Panel and customer surveys be used as prime sources for the collection of customer satisfaction data for the Consultation element of the Review; and**
 - iii) **North West Surrey benchmarking information and nationally published figures be used for the Comparative element of the Review.**

274. URGENT ACTION - STANDING ORDER 42

The Committee noted that, acting in accordance with Standing Order 42, the following action had been taken by the Officer shown below after consultation with the Chairman;

<u>Officer</u>	<u>Action Taken</u>	<u>Central Index No.</u>
Borough Environmental Services Officer	Refusal of future Public Entertainments Licences in respect of John Battleday Waterski, in view of noise nuisance caused by a waterski event held on 28 July 2001.	480

275. LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE - MINUTES

RESOLVED that -

the Minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Sub-Committee held on 20 August 2001, attached at Appendix 'F', be received and adopted.

276. ABBAYLANDS SPORTS CENTRE JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2001, attached at Appendix 'G', were received and noted.

277. CABRERA TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Cabrera Trust held on 18 June 2001 and the Minutes of the ordinary meeting of the Cabrera Trust Management Committee held on 16 July 2001 were received and noted. These Minutes are attached at Appendices 'H' and 'I' respectively.

278. RIVERSIDE WALK ADVISORY COMMITTEE - MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2001, attached at Appendix 'J', were received and noted.

279. RUNNYMEDE ARTS DEVELOPMENT STEERING GROUP - MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2001, attached at Appendix 'K', were received and noted.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.46 p.m.)