

Runnymede Borough CouncilREVIEW BOARD20 April 2006 at 7.30 p.m.

Members of the Board present: Councillors C.J. Norman (Chairman), Ms. D.V. Clarke, J.B. Dean, Mrs C.E. Gant, Mrs L.M. Gillham, R.J. Ray and P.B. Tuley.

Members of the Board absent: Councillors J. Broadhead and J.E. Haas

682. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Review Board meeting held on 8 February 2006 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

683. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J. Broadhead.

684. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

In respect of the item entitled Progress Report on Review Board Work Programme, Councillors Ms. D.V. Clarke, J. B. Dean, Mrs. C.E. Gant, Mrs. L.M. Gillham, C.J. Norman, R.J. Ray and P.B. Tuley treated themselves as if they had personal interests by reason of being Members of the Council on 14 December 2005 which had made the decision on partnership arrangements with Surrey County Council. Councillor Mrs. L.M. Gillham declared a personal interest, having been present at the Corporate Management Committee on 5 January 2006 which had made resolutions regarding the Surrey Pension Fund, and Councillor C.J. Norman declared a personal interest, having been a Member of the Corporate Management Committee on 2 March 2006 which had noted the progress on the Council's net revenue reductions as part of a report on the Council's ten priority indicators of performance.

The interests recorded above were judged to be prejudicial only if the original decisions were debated. As the original decisions were not debated, the Councillors remained in the room.

685. PROGRESS REPORT ON REVIEW BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Board noted progress on the outstanding items in its Work Programme.

Concerning the initiative to enhance rail and bus transport in the Borough, the Board had previously agreed that further discussion with South West Trains, Surrey County Council, the Runnymede Business Partnership and the local community be pursued to encourage greater use of the local rail service and that the Council should continue to give its support to the proposed Airtrack Scheme. The Board had also agreed that Officers should continue to seek new signalling from Network Rail to improve traffic flow at level crossings in the Borough and had also asked Officers to enquire whether there would be any "real time" information on arrival of buses rolled out in Runnymede, (i.e. including electronic estimated time of arrival displays at bus stops), as it was understood that this had happened in the Guildford area. The Board noted that the latest position was that Surrey County Council was gradually extending the scheme of real time roll outs of bus travel information but based on the larger areas of population. Funding was generally limited, but was more likely to be forthcoming where bus operators had been proactive and where additional finance was available (such as contributions which had been negotiated which were associated with planning applications).

The Board raised the issue of disabled access at stations. It was understood by a Board Member that South West Trains would not provide disabled access or assistance after 4.00 p.m. at stations, which would probably not be late enough to serve disabled people who were on the second part of day return journeys. It was noted that South West Trains had not taken action on a number of matters raised by Officers because of the amount of time which had been taken up by them in preparing to bid for the franchise (i.e. the decision to be taken on who should have the right to continue to operate train services within the areas and along the routes which were currently

operated by South West trains). As South West Trains had made a number of substantial improvements to their service in recent years, it was likely that they would regain the franchise which included the Runnymede area, but this would not be finally confirmed as being the case until the autumn. The question of improving disabled access would, however, be taken up by Officers in their discussions with South West Trains, along with the other issues that the Board had previously identified.

Another item within the Board's Work Programme was the further development of partnership arrangements with Surrey County Council, which had been referred to in the previous Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Runnymede. At its meeting in December 2005, the Council had agreed that, subject to settling detailed arrangements and to agreement on the content of meetings, the Council would participate in the Local Committee of the County Council which covered the Runnymede area. The Council had agreed that the Chairman of the Corporate Management Committee, in consultation with the other Party Leaders, would seek to agree satisfactory arrangements for participation in the Local Committee. This would include content of Agendas, structure, topic emphasis, timing and opportunities for non-member participation. Subject to agreement being reached on the above matters, the agreed political balance of the six Borough Council representatives on the Local Committee would be 4 Conservative, 1 Runnymede Independent and 1 Labour, with nomination being made by the Party Groups. The Board noted that it was envisaged that a meeting to discuss how to take this forward would be taking place between the Leader of the Council and the new Chairman of the Surrey County Council Local Committee, towards the end of May.

At its meeting on 5 January 2006, the Corporate Management Committee had considered a series of recommendations arising from the Board's detailed examination of the triennial actuarial valuation of the Surrey Pension Fund. The Board had decided to look at this in depth because the Council was seeking a fairer calculation and apportionment of its share of Surrey Pension Fund assets. This matter had a considerable impact on the ability of the Council to finance its own local services. The imposition of Council Tax capping meant that the Council was constrained in its ability to increase tax revenues and therefore the extra cost of backfunding contributions resulted in less resources to spend on services. The Corporate Management Committee had made four resolutions on the matter.

The first resolution was that no further action be taken on the issue of the past method of valuing the Runnymede share of the Pension Fund. It was agreed that a letter should, however, be sent to Surrey County Council requesting greater transparency in the calculation of asset values and the methodology used, and a change in the method of valuation so that it more accurately reflected the cashflows relating to each contributing body. The second resolution made by the Corporate Management Committee was that an item be placed on the Agenda of the Surrey Pension Fund Annual General Meeting and the Members of that Annual General Meeting be asked to vote on adopting a more transparent method of valuing the individual contributing bodies' share of the Fund in future. The third resolution was that Officers should continue to pursue an equitable settlement of the pension fund treatment of the highways agency transfer and seek support in that endeavour from the other Surrey Districts affected. Finally, the Committee had resolved that voluntary lump sum payments to the Pension Fund be not made by the Council unless the methodology adopted by the Actuary demonstrated that Runnymede would receive the full benefit (including those from market price movement) of the contributions. The Board had previously decided that it should await the outcome of the measures on which it had made recommendations before deciding whether to embark upon a full scrutiny of the issue.

The Board noted that the Surrey Pension Fund Annual General Meeting had been attended by Councillors Woodger and Alderson and the points which the Corporate Management Committee had made had been put to that meeting. The latest position was that a further meeting would be taking place between Runnymede Borough Council and Surrey County Council Officers to discuss the issues which Runnymede had raised. However, Surrey County Council's Business Development Review, which included a staff restructuring exercise, had delayed that further meeting, because the Surrey Officer responsible for Pension Fund issues would be changing as a result. The Board agreed that when it had been informed of the outcome of the further meeting between Surrey and Runnymede Officers referred to above, it would consider whether to have a full scrutiny of the issue. It was also agreed that the Runnymede Director of Finance should continue to pursue the matter with whichever Officer emerged as dealing with the Surrey Pension Fund at Surrey County Council.

Another area which the Board had previously examined was progress made by the Council in achieving net revenue reductions. The Board noted that at its meeting on 2 March 2006, as part of a report on the Council's ten priority indicators of performance, the Corporate Management Committee had been informed that the probable outturn for 2005/06 included reductions of £1,025,000, which was a higher total than had originally been anticipated at this stage. However, the reductions of £1,889,000 included in the 2006/07 Estimates were less than the amount of £2,047,000 that had been provided in the October 2005 Financial Forecast. The Board noted a list of all the planned reductions, grouped by the risk categories that had been reported in the October 2005 Financial Forecast. The amount by which each budget had so far been reduced compared with the set targets was identified against each initiative listed. The savings target had now grown from £2.6 million to £3.2 million, as a result of the constraints imposed by the Government on the level of Council Tax increases, otherwise known as "capping". It was, however, possible that there may be end of year betterments and improvements in investment income which might therefore reduce the overall level of savings which might need to be achieved. It was therefore appropriate to wait until the outcome of the outturn report for 31 March 2006 was known before taking any further action. It was envisaged that a report would be submitted to Corporate Management Committee in June setting out the latest position.

686. ENFORCEMENT OF PLANNING CONTROL – PROGRESS REPORT

The Board noted the progress report on enforcement of Planning Control as at 30 March 2006. On particular cases within the report, the Board noted the following.

- i) 40, Crockford Park Road, Addlestone
A prosecution statement was being prepared for a Magistrates' Court hearing in respect of operational development buildings and hardstanding.
- ii) Capital House, Woodham Park Road
Surrey County Council had refused permission for a waste transfer station. An Enforcement Notice was being prepared following a meeting with Officers from Surrey County Council. The Notice would need to distinguish between demolition and landscape contracting.
- iii) Thorpe Waterski, Thorpe Road, Chertsey
A Member of the Board suggested that Thorpe Waterski might have been interested at some stage in becoming a venue for the 2012 Olympics but Officers had not been informed of any application by Thorpe Waterski to the Olympic organisers. It would require major infrastructure changes (such as greatly improved road access and egress to the site) in order for this to happen and it was considered unlikely by Officers that Thorpe Waterski would want to pursue this in view of the cost involved.
- iv) Plots 14B, 15 and 16, The Moorings, Abbey Chase, Chertsey
A breach of condition notice had been issued for a residential occupation of a boat. An appeal had been lodged and a date for an informal hearing was awaited.
- v) Land adjacent to Stroude Road and Clockhouse Lane West, Egham
A public inquiry date was awaited, in respect of various breaches.
- vi) 11 Riverside, Egham
A site visit was to be made to establish whether a railing and gate had been removed as required.
- vii) Thorpe Car Sales, 262 – 264 Chertsey Lane, Staines
An Enforcement Notice had been issued in respect of existing forecourt car sales. An appeal had been lodged, an informal hearing had been held and the decision letter had quashed the Notice on technical grounds. Consideration was being given to issuing a new Enforcement Notice.

viii) Padd Farm, Hurst Lane, Egham

A further report would be made to Planning Committee in May 2006 after Planning Contravention Notice responses had been considered and assessed, fresh site inspections had been undertaken and further breaches had been pursued.

ix) The Farm Shop, Hardwick Lane, Lyne

Enforcement Notices would be drafted if the owner failed to cease retail use and remove structures in the areas of the premises which were not authorised for these purposes.

x) Renalds Herne, Coldharbour Lane, Egham

Unauthorised works had been made to a listed building. A Magistrates' Court hearing date had been arranged. Officers were in regular contact with the School which was in contravention to attempt to prevent such breaches of listed building requirements in future.

xi) Land At Addlestone Moor, Addlestone

Enforcement appeals were likely to be lodged in respect of storage of showmen's equipment and erection of a fence and gate. The compliance period for Enforcement Notices was six months. The Board noted that appellants would normally wait until the end of the relevant period which was allowed before they appealed. It would also often take several weeks for the Planning Inspectorate to validate the appeal, once it had been received by them.

xii) Tasis School, Coldharbour Lane, Thorpe

A Breach of Condition Notice was being considered in relation to removal of sheds and the use of the playing field at the weekend. Officers were in dialogue with the School.

Reduction In Staffing Numbers In The Enforcement Section Of Planning Division

The Board asked about the effect on the enforcement section of a recent loss of a member of staff as part of the Council's net revenue reductions as reported to the Board at its last meeting. It was noted that staff had found that they were currently having to spend a considerable amount of time answering e-mails which otherwise could be spent in investigating complaints of alleged planning breaches. A report would be made to the Planning Committee shortly in which it would be proposed that more information than had been given previously would be forwarded to complainants when the receipt of their complaint was acknowledged. Complainants would be asked to leave the matter with Officers and not keep continually enquiring about progress. It was hoped that these new ways of working would help to offset the reduction in staffing resource.

Enforcement action had always been viewed by Officers as a last resort after all attempts at negotiation with the persons in breach had not succeeded. The formal process of taking action was now taking longer to complete. As set out in numerous examples in the progress report considered by the Board, there were now substantial delays which could occur at a number of stages in the process. Appellants had several months during which they could appeal and other hold-ups could take place in the registering of appeals by the Planning Inspectorate and in the arrangements made by the Planning Inspectorate for appeal hearings, site visits and public inquiries.

687. ANNUAL REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION

The Board considered a draft Annual Report for the period 1 April 2005 to 1 April 2006 in accordance with sub paragraph 6.03(d) of the Council's Constitution which states that Overview and Scrutiny Committees must report annually to full Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate.

Regarding the section of the report on the pilot collection of green garden waste in the borough, the Board noted that approximately half of the households in the borough had the green garden waste facility. The problem with increasing the rollout of this measure was the cost involved. Negotiations were taking place with Surrey County Council to help fund extension of the

coverage. The possibility of Runnymede deploying a further vehicle for green waste collection was also being considered. It was noted that some of the amenity sites within the borough were not always available for use and were sometimes closed for short periods. Representations were being made to Surrey County Council to attempt to make it easier for members of the public to gain access to and dispose of their recyclable waste at these sites. The easier it was for the public to recycle, the more they would be inclined to do it.

On partnership arrangements with Surrey County Council, it was envisaged that a meeting to discuss how to progress this would be taking place between the Leader of the Council and the new Chairman of the Surrey County Council Local Committee, towards the end of May.

On rail and bus transport in the borough, concerning the proposed Airtrack scheme, financial approval was unlikely to be forthcoming from the Department of Transport, although there was a strong policy and business case for it. The problem at the moment was finding an organisation or organisations, whether they were the Government or private companies, individually or in combination, who were prepared to bridge the £170 million gap in funding which had been identified.

The Board agreed that over the year good progress had been made, especially with the rail transport issue. There had been no item on which detailed scrutiny had been undertaken during the year. The issues regarding the Pension Fund on which the Board intended to undertake a detailed scrutiny had not been moved forward as quickly as the Board hoped, because of organisational changes at Surrey County Council. The Pension Fund might, however, become the subject of detailed scrutiny by the Board in due course, depending on what further information was received from Surrey County Council. The Board agreed that it should aim to look more at policies and less at decisions in the future.

The Review Board agreed to recommend the Report subject to one change to the lettering.

The Review Board's Report for 2005/06 is attached at Appendix 'A'.

**RECOMMEND that -
the report be received.**

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.30 p.m.)