

Runnymede Borough CouncilREVIEW BOARD15 April 2004 at 7.30 p.m.

Members of the Board present: Councillors J.M. Edwards (Chairman), E.G. Barrett, J. Broadhead, Ms. D.V. Clarke, Mrs L.M. Gillham, J.E. Haas, Mrs V.A. Smallman and P.B. Tuley.

Members of the Board absent: Councillor D.P. Easton

Councillor Mrs E.E. Price also attended.

841. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO BOARD MEMBERSHIP

The Labour Group had notified the Chief Executive Officer of its wish to replace Councillor P.A. Greenwood as a Member of the Board by Councillor E.G. Barrett until further notice. The Independent Group had notified the Chief Executive Officer of its wish that Councillor A. Alderson be removed from Membership of the Committee and that Councillor Mrs L.M. Gillham be appointed in his place for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting. Thereafter Councillor Alderson would be reappointed.

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

842. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Review Board meeting held on 11 February 2004 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

843. ANNUAL REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION

The Board considered and approved its Annual Report for the period 1 April 2003 to 1 April 2004 in accordance with sub paragraph 6.03(d) of the Council's Constitution which stated 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 Section E Paragraph 4 of the Report on the subject of Riversdell Close – Fencing, the Board expressed disappointment that one of the comments of the Leisure and Environment Committee at its meeting on 18 March 2004 had been that it considered that the Review Board's recommendation regarding the construction of a path should be deferred, pending the outcome of a decision being made on the Riversdell Close alleyway. The Board noted that the issue of the Fence was being considered by the Council at Agenda item 9 of its meeting on 22 April 2004.

RECOMMEND that -

the draft Annual Report at Appendix 'A', be submitted to Full Council.

844. REPORT ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BRIEFING FOR COUNCIL MEMBERS - 15 MARCH 2004

The Board expressed the view that the Member Overview and Scrutiny briefing held on the evening of 15 March 2004, facilitated by Mark Palmer, Assistant Director, Learning and Development, of the South East Employers organisation, had been worthwhile and informative. A presentation had also been received at the evening from Bob McLintock, Chief Executive and Town Clerk, Brentwood Borough Council, in which he outlined a Case Study. 28 Members of the Council had attended the training, which drew on the experience of other "fourth option" Councils, i.e. those which had not adopted the arrangement of having a single Executive for their decision making. A main theme to emerge was the desirability of looking at a few issues in depth. The Chairman confirmed that this had also been a conclusion drawn at a course which he had attended in Bristol on Review Boards.

That course had also expressed the view that Scrutiny worked better when being driven by Members, with occasional tasks being allocated from elsewhere.

The Board noted the contents of four of the forms provided by South East Employers, namely Criteria For Considering The Operation and Effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny, Identifying Items For Review, The Four Principles of Good Public Scrutiny, and Scoping Proforma For In-Depth Reviews. The Board considered that the form entitled Identifying Items for Review attached at Appendix 'B' was particularly useful in deciding on the form and content of their work programme, which formed the next item on the Agenda. Overview and Scrutiny had not originally been designed for alternative arrangements authorities, the only initial models being Executive arrangements, but alternative arrangements had been added to legislation at a late stage. The Local Government Association were trying to persuade the Government to remove the requirement for overview and scrutiny in alternative arrangements authorities. Thus, while at present it was intended to hold the briefing again for new Members and for those who had not previously attended, this would only be done after the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had announced their intentions regarding Overview and Scrutiny Committees in such authorities. The Board noted that Overview and Scrutiny in alternative arrangements authorities had generally been more effective in the field of policy development than in the area of scrutinising or challenging policy decisions. In some authorities overview and scrutiny was used in a procedural way to delay implementation of policy.

845. REVIEW BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

(Ref: Minutes of Review Board, December 2003, page 1140, para. 580)

The Board considered their Work Programme in the light of the Member briefing held on 15 March 2004, referred to in the previous item, with the aim of identifying a smaller revised work programme consistent with best practice for Overview and Scrutiny.

At its September 2003 meeting the Board had agreed the following work programme for the remainder of 2003/04 and early cycles in 2004/05 (not in any order of priority):-

- i) 5 Year Financial Forecast 2004/5 to 2008/9
- ii) Leader's Position Statement
- iii) Progress on Net Revenue Reduction Targets
- iv) Rail Transport in the Borough (particular regard to stations as "gateways")
- v) Benefit Fraud – looking at Council Tax and Housing Benefit (after Best Value process completed)
- vi) Annual Personnel Report
- vii) Anti-Social Behaviour – effectiveness of multi-agency working
- viii) Parks & Open Spaces – possible cost savings

The 5 Year Financial Forecast and the Leader's Position Statement had already been considered. The Board would be receiving periodic reports on progress made by Service Committees in meeting the Council's Net Revenue Reduction Targets. A report on Rail Transport in the Borough appeared elsewhere on the Agenda.

Further to a request which it had made in December 2003, the Board noted details of items considered over the last two years and whether they were completed or ongoing. The Board also agreed to aim to look at a few items in greater depth.

One of the issues to emerge from the Overview and Scrutiny briefing evening for Members was that the Board should strive to "add value" through themes which cut across a number of services, or exhibited "cross cutting", and which had an outward looking focus. A number of items in the Board's current list were inward looking or did not have an obvious direct immediate effect on the general public – examples of this would be items i), iii), v) and vi) as listed above.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Inspectors had suggested during their inspection of the Council in December 2003 that policy development should either be done in Service Committees or the Review Board and not both and had indicated that, in their view, this showed a lack of clarity. The Council did not support this contention as the Council's constitution made respective roles clear. The other area that the CPA Inspectors had highlighted was the criteria used by the Board for considering items. It was not clear to them why the Board had decided to look at particular items. One of the purposes of using the Identifying Items for Review form provided by

South East Employers at the briefing evening was to provide a yardstick for assessing whether items should be pursued. The Board agreed that they should seek to become more externally focussed and if possible should try to identify areas to examine which were not being covered by Service Committees.

The Board discussed possible items and agreed with the Chairman's suggestion that Members of the Board should e-mail him within the next week with items, rating them according to the Identifying Items for Review Form at Appendix 'B' and indicating at which particular meetings during the year they were suggesting that the items be reviewed. The Chairman would then communicate the results to Officers and a report would be prepared for the Board's next meeting.

846. RAIL TRANSPORT PROVISION IN THE BOROUGH - PROGRESS REPORT
(Ref: Minutes of Review Board, December 2003, page 1136, para. 572)

The Board had agreed at its meeting on 10 December 2003 to undertake a review of the rail services in the Borough that would address issues that were clearly in line with improving the quality of life and improved transportation, set out in the Leader's Position Statement and Community Strategy. It could assist in tackling crime and disorder in compliance with the Community Safety Strategy and help boost trade and tourism in line with the Economic Strategy and Cultural Strategy. It would also complement work being undertaken by the Runnymede Business Partnership Travel Initiative. The Board was informed of current progress and opportunities for enhancing the quality of the local rail service. In December 2003, the Board had set out a series of listed items which formed the scope of the review. South West Trains were the local train operating company (TOC) who had recently received confirmation that their franchise had been extended to February 2007 with an option to extend for up to a further 5 years. Recent discussions with South West Trains had resulted in some positive action.

As part of the initiative to improve passenger safety and implement the Runnymede Community Safety Strategy, work had been undertaken to establish the feasibility of linking the South West Trains Control Centre at Wimbledon with the Safer Runnymede Centre. This had been established as a practical possibility and orders had been placed with British Telecom for the fibre optic cable links. At the same time links which did not exist at present would be put in place between Addlestone and Chertsey Stations and the South West Trains Control Centre. This work would be completed shortly and would enable 24-hour surveillance to be undertaken within the Safer Runnymede Centre in addition to the South West Trains Control Centre. This provided major advantages in that the cameras on the stations effectively became integrated as a part of the town centre systems and the pictures could be relayed on to the Surrey Police Incident Handling Centre. The improvement would apply to all railway stations in the Borough. At the same time improvements would be made to the camera installations to ensure they all provided evidential quality pictures. This had been achieved with a matched funding partnership. The funding for the Runnymede contribution was derived from the Section 106 Agreement associated with the Aviator Park development in Addlestone together with Home Office funding. The total cost of the closed circuit television (CCTV) works was in the region of £50,000. Security on the trains had also improved with highly visible travelling personnel now patrolling stations and trains. These "Travel Safe" Officers operated throughout the network to provide assistance to passengers.

As part of the same discussions with South West Trains, arrangements had been made to install cycle shelters at Egham, Chertsey and Addlestone, in association with more general station improvements (improved signage, disabled access and refurbishment works at Addlestone Station). This had improved the station environment and encouraged people to cycle to local stations. (This was linked to new cycle shelter provision at Royal Holloway, Egham Sports Centre, Aviator Park, Runnymede Pleasure Grounds, The Hythe Centre and Runnymede Hotel). The total cost of the cycle shelters and other works at the stations and other locations was in the region of £92,000. Of this total, the Department for Transport provided £45,000, South West Trains funded £27,000, Royal Holloway £8,000 and £7,000 came from the Section 106 Agreement for Aviator Park (for the Addlestone Station work). The shelters at the leisure facilities were funded by Runnymede.

Following lengthy discussions with South West Trains on the timetabling of the services that operated on the Weybridge to Waterloo line (via Addlestone, Chertsey, Virginia Water, Egham and Staines) significant changes had taken place. Until recently the service from Addlestone and Chertsey to Waterloo required a change to be made at either Staines or Weybridge. This was a service that only operated hourly. However, as from September 2003, a half hour interval service

had been introduced to run direct from Addlestone and Chertsey (via Staines) to Waterloo without the need to change.

The Board agreed that liaison take place with South West Trains to promote the changes both to the service and passenger facilities, that the Runnymede Business Partnership should become involved in promoting the local service changes to the wider business community and that consideration be given to identifying the opportunities for 'branding' the local Weybridge-Staines line with associated marketing and possibly special ticketing arrangements.

In tandem with the issues set out in the preceding paragraphs, detailed consideration would be given to the other issues identified by the Board in December 2003. Some of the matters that were separately being pursued were better signage and train information at stations, and integrating train and bus services. Others would involve consultation with a wider group of stakeholders. It was difficult to secure improvements to Byfleet and New Haw Station, in view of land ownership issues.

The funding for the work undertaken to date had been received from a variety of sources, with some pump priming monies provided by the Council in the form of Section 106 allocations. Some of the next stage of work (better signage and integrating train and bus services) was being undertaken in consultation with Surrey County Council and drawing upon Local Transport Plan monies. The longer term projects (on-station facilities, increased platform lengths, signalling arrangements and passenger user and community surveys) would require the resource implications to be assessed and would be subject to a subsequent report to the Board. It was intended to report to the Board's next meeting by way of an update and with further details on resource implications, if possible. The Board suggested that the Reaching Runnymede Panel might be used as part of a community survey.

The Board commended the progress which had been made and the co-operation with South West Trains which had been achieved. The Board suggested that the Council might consider installing signs alerting the public to the location of stations, should seek a later last train out of London and might include a feature in the Borough's Annual Report on the progress which had already been made.

RESOLVED that -

- i) progress on enhancing the local rail service be noted;**
- ii) further discussion with stakeholders (South West Trains, Surrey County Council and Runnymede Business Partnership) and the local community, be endorsed; and**
- iii) Officers identify the opportunities for the longer term capital works required to improve the local rail infrastructure.**

847. ENFORCEMENT OF PLANNING CONTROL – PROGRESS REPORT

The Board noted the progress report on enforcement of planning control as at 19 March 2004. This only represented a fraction of the planning enforcement section's work, consisting of cases on which action was continuing.

A number of the cases were very complicated and could not be summarised without abridging some of the complexity. Furthermore, some of the information could not be publicly divulged. However, in order to make it clearer what was to happen next on each case and in what timeframe, the Board agreed that future reports should contain two further columns, one entitled "next steps" and the other entitled "timescale".

Notices took a while to prepare as their accuracy was a key part of successful proceedings. It was noted that the priority order for enforcement previously established by the Planning Committee had been helpful to Officers in deciding on an order of action when responding to public queries. Local Authorities were about to be given powers to serve notices requiring the height of a domestic hedge to be reduced if it exceeded two metres and was adversely affecting a neighbour's reasonable enjoyment of their property. This would lead to an increase in enforcement type work. "Hedge" in this context included trees and shrubs.

The Board discussed the following cases:-

- i) The Conifers, 111A, Almnors Road, Lyne
Residential Caravan Site hardstanding and roadway/walls and tarmacadam of site

A report would be submitted to the Planning Committee, following re-assessment of personal circumstances made following a site visit.

- ii) The Annex (Lucia Angelis), Thorpe Lea Road, Egham
Change of use of a building to a 3 bed dwelling

Compliance had not yet occurred. The situation would continue to be monitored. An injunction had been refused by a judge on human rights grounds, the Council's action having been deemed to be disproportionate, in the circumstances. The Planning Committee had subsequently resolved to take no further enforcement action at this stage.

- iii) Padd Farm, Hurst Lane, Egham
Various changes of use of land and buildings and operational development

The problem with this site was that every time the Council served a notice, another unauthorised use would occur which would require the serving of a further notice. A further report was being prepared for the Planning Committee in respect of new breaches.

- iv) 52, Abbey Road, Chertsey
Poor appearance of property

The mortgagee had taken possession and the property had now been marketed. No further action was being taken at present.

- v) 21A and 22A Station Parade, Virginia Water
Change of use of first floor to office use for a temporary period of 2 years

It was agreed that a Member be advised as to the business in contravention.

- vi) 23 Ayebridges Avenue, Egham
Erection of a brick built detached 'games room'

Compliance had now occurred.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.)