

Runnymede Borough Council

SERVICES REVIEW BOARD

11 July 2002 at 7.30 p.m.

Members of the Review Board present : Councillors P.J. Poole (Chairman), B.J. Relph and P.B. Tuley

Members of the Review Board absent: Councillors D.W. Parr and K.J.T. Walmsley

Councillors H.W.V. Meares and R.J. Ray also attended

167. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Review Board meetings held on 12 February 2002 and 16 May 2002 were confirmed and signed as correct records.

168. MEETING OF SERVICES REVIEW BOARD MEMBERS

The record of this inquorate meeting held on 11 April 2002 was noted.

169. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D.W. Parr and K.J.T. Walmsley.

170. HOUSING STRATEGY STATEMENT

Members of the Review Board considered the proposed Housing Strategy Statement. The Council was required annually to submit a copy of its Housing Strategy that was "fit for purpose", drawn up in accordance with Government requirements, together with supporting statistical information to the Government Office for the South East (GOSE). This information, along with the Council's Asset Management Plan, Capital Strategy, Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and Service Plan, was used by the Government to form an assessment of the Council's performance and to decide on the allocation of housing and other capital resources. The production of the Strategy was an important exercise as it provided an opportunity to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the housing situation in the Borough and to establish a plan of action for the next five years. The Service Plan had been produced in response to Best Value Housing Inspectors recommendations.

The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan was currently being finalised. This might result in some minor changes being required to the Housing Strategy document. The Capital Programme had been revised to include a larger proportion of funds for the Do It Yourself Shared Ownership Scheme. This was a very successful scheme that had operated within the Borough for some years.

The full financial implications of the Roakes Avenue and Bowes Road Wapshott Road redevelopment were not yet known. The revised Capital Programme did not therefore take these issues into account. Further reports on this redevelopment would be submitted to the Housing and Community Services Committee in the autumn cycle. The programme would, of course, be adjusted as soon as the full financial impact was known

The strategy would be widely distributed when finalised and an abridged version would also be produced. The words "acceptable standard" on page 2 of the document related to public sector housing standards (Housing Act 1985) and the words "decent homes" related to the Government's new housing standards for Council properties. The difficulty in defining "affordable housing" was noted. The definition within the Strategy was based on the findings of the Housing Needs Survey. It was agreed that the Borough Housing and Community Services Manager should consult with the Borough Technical Services Officer to check that the definition was consistent with the Local Plan. 204 affordable housing units had been achieved by May 2002 and the target was 375 in July 2003, and 750 by 2005.

The Council aimed to achieve all of the objectives within the Strategy, which were not in priority order and were as follows:-

Objectives

- i) Provide a range of affordable housing for those in need, including those with special needs.
- ii) Ensure that private and public housing is fit and of an acceptable standard.
- iii) Provide good quality services to the Council's tenants.
- iv) Ensure that homelessness is kept to a minimum and that homeless people are given appropriate assistance.
- v) Develop safe and sustainable communities where people will want to live.
- vi) Provide services fairly to all sections of the community.

Households were identified by the Housing Needs Survey as living in "unsuitable" housing if their accommodation was too small, of poor quality or did not cater for a disability.

Several Householders had indicated that they were not interested in help towards reducing energy costs. They would be asked again whether they wished to take up energy efficiency grants.

The Housing Strategy had to be submitted to the Government Office for the South East by 31 July 2002. A Special Meeting of the Housing and Community Services Committee was being held on 22 July 2002 to approve the two documents. In view of these timescales, the Board agreed not to call in the decision of that Committee.

**RESOLVED that –**

- i) the revised Housing Strategy Statement be noted and the comments set out in the schedule at Appendix 'A' be considered by the Housing and Community Services Committee; and**
- ii) as delay in implementation will prejudice the interests of the Council, the Board's call-in power be not exercised for this matter.**

171. ENFORCEMENT OF PLANNING CONTROL - PROGRESS REPORT

The Board noted the progress report on enforcement of Planning Control as at 25 June 2002. Members noted steps being taken to recruit staff to the Enforcement Section and requested that an Enforcement Strategy be prepared and reviewed by this Review Board.

The Planning Committee on 3 July and the Corporate Management Committee on 4 July had agreed that the Senior Enforcement Officer post be formally regraded from grade D/G to MM2 in respect of the new postholder and the post of Enforcement Officer at Grade D be filled as soon as possible. These measures would hopefully alleviate the backlog of work in the section.

172. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION

Members of the Board discussed those topics that they considered should be examined under the statutory Overview and Scrutiny function over the coming year.

The Corporate Management Committee at its meeting on 4 July 2002 had considered a report concerning the best arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny in Runnymede. The Committee had agreed to recommend to Council on 18 July that a single Review Board be instituted with sufficient flexibility to form sub-committees and working groups as required. The Council should be able to co-opt non members to the Board. Co-options would have to be approved by Full Council. Nine Members of the Council would be about the right size for the Board Membership. This would permit a political ratio of 7 Conservative to one Independent to one Labour without

unduly straining the political balance legislation. The Board should be free to set its own Agenda (as set out in Government Guidance and the Council's Constitution), and should select one or more dominant themes for its programme in each Municipal Year. As the Board would have the potential to split into a sub-committee or form working groups, it would be appropriate to appoint more than one Vice-Chairman either for the whole or part of a Municipal Year in order to reflect the division of labour and responsibility. In addition, the Independent Remuneration Panel, which advised on the level of Members Allowances, should be asked to re-examine the Scheme of Member Allowances, with particular reference to the responsibility allowances for Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Review Boards, and possibly to allow for the appointment of Lead Members on particular topics.

The Board identified the following principal topics set out below which they wished to be reviewed by the new single Review Board, which was now proposed, on the lines set out above.

- i) Review of Planning and Development to achieve savings with target of 20% over a three year period, including savings from the introduction of document management implementation.
- ii) Cost savings in parks and open spaces expenditure linked to the Best Value Review of this area.
- iii) Cost savings from the transfer of the Highway Agency Service and activities to Surrey County Council.
- iv) A review of the Information Technology service and its systems particularly the problems experienced by staff in the housing benefits section and other areas of the Council's work.

Other topics which the Board identified which might be reviewed were:-

- Capital Projects over £100,000
- Revenue increases over £25,000 or 8%
- Best Value reviews
- Leader's Position Paper
- Human resources and development strategy
- Best Value process overall
- Community Strategy
- Cultural Strategy
- Cost savings initiatives
- Management of relationships with partner organisations
- External appointments feedback

Furthermore, scrutiny might also take place on an exceptional basis for issue led reviews and call-ins.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 9.30 p.m.)