

Runnymede Borough Council
CORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 29 June 2004, at 7.30 p.m.

in the Council Chamber
at the Civic Offices, Addlestone

PLEASE NOTE DATE



Members of the Committee

To be appointed at the Annual Meeting of the Council on Wednesday 23 June 2004.

A G E N D A

Notes:

- i) Any report on the Agenda involving confidential information (as defined by section 100A(3) of the Local Government Act 1972) must be discussed in private. Any report involving exempt information (as defined by section 100I of the Local Government Act 1972), whether it appears in Part 1 or Part 2 below, may be discussed in private but only if the Committee so resolves.
- ii) The relevant 'background papers' are listed after each report in Part 1. Enquiries about any of the Agenda reports and background papers should be directed in the first instance to **Mr. G. Marson, Administration and Leisure Department, Committee Section, Civic Offices, Station Road, Addlestone (Tel. Direct Line: 01932 425625). (Email: gary.marson@runnymede.gov.uk).**
- iii) Agendas and Minutes are available on a subscription basis. For details, please ring Mr. B.A. Fleckney on 01932 425620. Agendas and Minutes for all the Council's Committees may also be viewed on www.runnymede.gov.uk.
- iv) In the unlikely event of an alarm sounding, members of the public should leave the building immediately, either using the staircase leading from the public gallery or following other instructions as appropriate.

LIST OF MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

PART I

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(No reports to be considered under this heading)

1. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

2. MINUTES

To confirm and sign as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 June 2004, attached at Appendix 'A'. (To follow).

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

If Members have an interest in an item please record the interest on the form circulated with this Agenda and hand it to the Legal Representative or Committee Administrator at the start of the meeting. A supply of the form will also be available from the Committee Administrator at meetings.

Members who have previously declared interests which are recorded in the Minutes to be considered at this meeting need not repeat the declaration when attending the meeting. Members need to take no further action unless the item in which they have an interest becomes the subject of debates, in which event the Member must leave the room if the interest is personal and prejudicial.

5. PRIORITY INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE - 2003/04 OUTTURN REPORT (CEO)
(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, March 2004, page 1375, para. 740)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **This report outlines the final quarter position for 2003/04 in the 10 priority indicators of service delivery performance which form the basis of more detailed scrutiny.**

2. Background Information

2.1 At the March 2003 Corporate Management Committee, Members received a report outlining new arrangements to improve the Council's performance management system. This was very much a continuing process to increase the efficiency, accountability and analysis of performance management information, and aid greater ownership of the Council's performance by staff and Members alike.

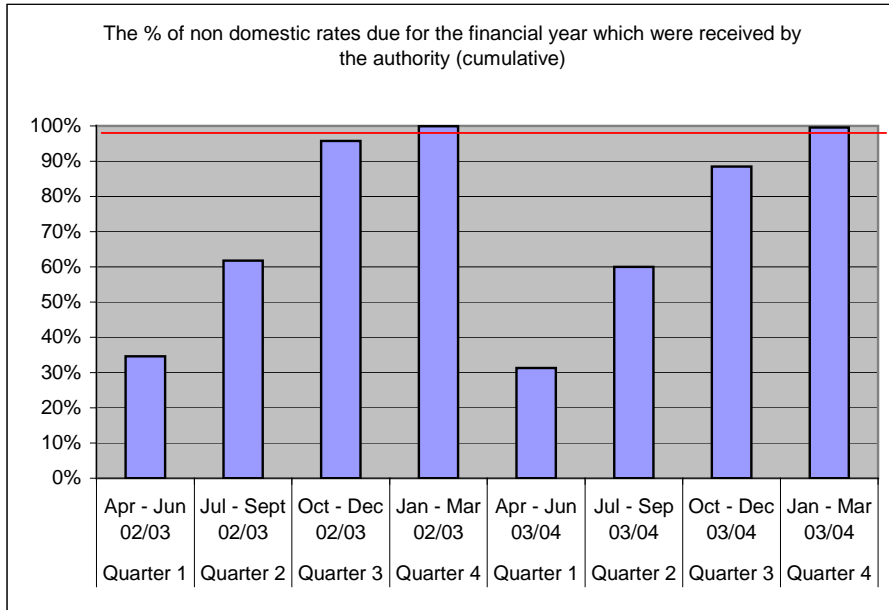
2.2 This already builds on a whole range of management information which consistently analyses the Council's performance across the range of services. A number of Government initiatives such as Best Value and Comprehensive Performance Assessment have added to the Council's current strict regime of target setting. Traditionally this has been achieved through the annual Leader's Position Statement and the setting of Aims and Targets which guide the day-to-day focus of its service priorities and new initiatives.

2.3 In recent years, the amount of performance management information collected, measured and monitored, has grown immensely. To ensure that sufficient focus is given to this, a series of Service Plans collate all the performance management information in one place. This assists in improving the efficiency of service areas, aids the management of information at Member and Officer level and provides a greater focus on the Council's main priorities.

2.4 The following sections outline the relative performance in these areas for the final quarter of 2003/04, comparing them with past performance. In each graph, the horizontal line illustrates the target for that particular period.

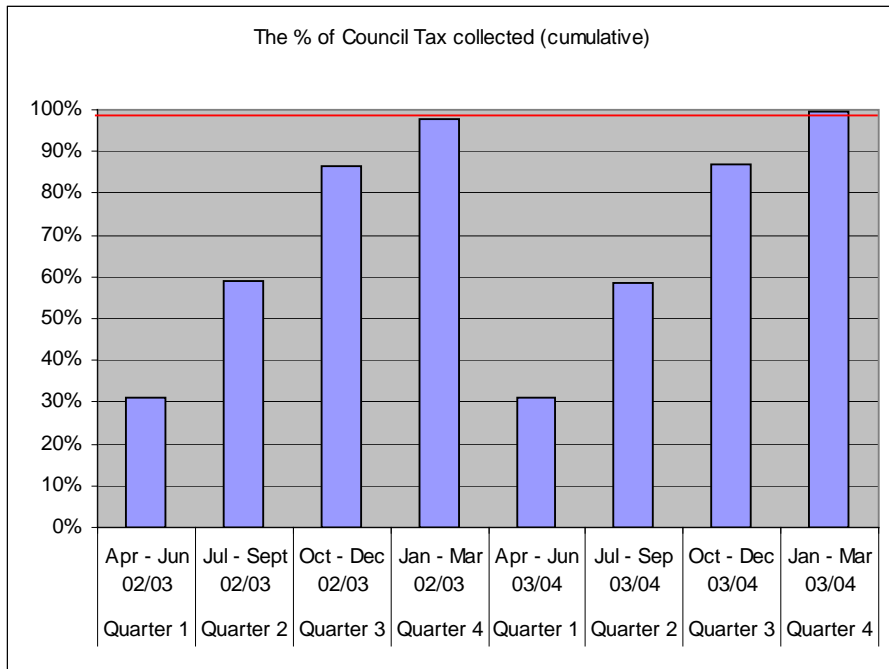
3. Performance Management

3.1 **Council Tax and Business Rate Collection**



3.1.1 The target collection of 99% for 2003/04 was exceeded with a final collection figure of 99.6%. This should maintain the Council's Business Rates Service in the top quartile of the national performance table.

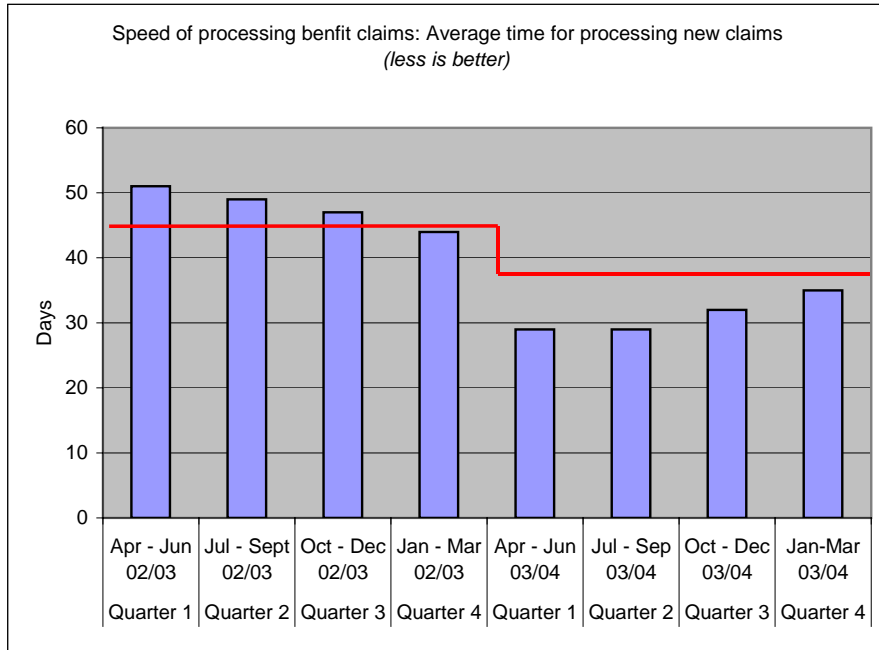
3.1.2 *No corrective action required.*



3.1.3 Council Tax collection of 98.3% exceeded the target of 98% for the year. This was a pleasing result as the net collectable debit was more than £5 million greater than for 2002/03.

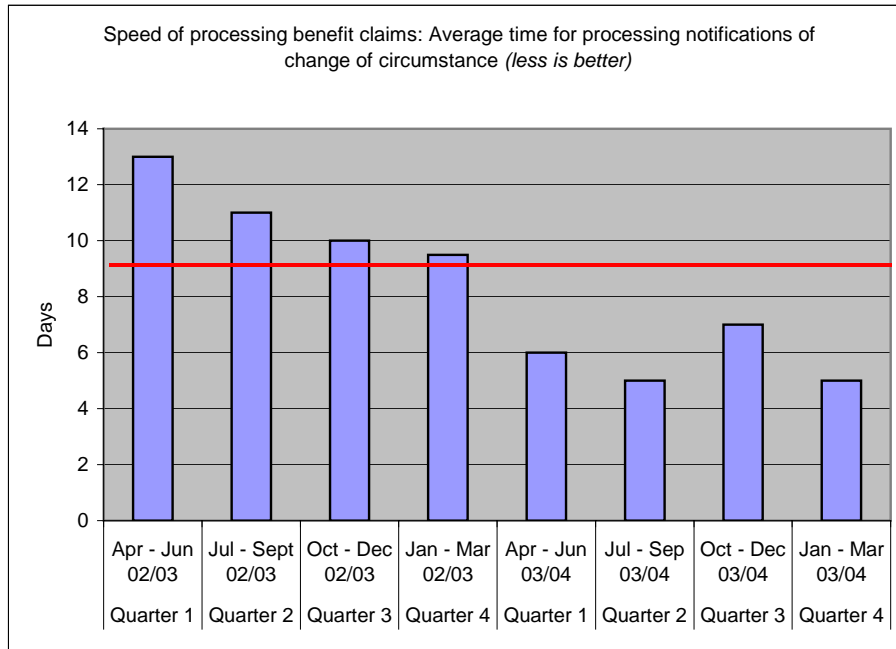
3.1.4 *No corrective action required.*

3.2 Benefit Administration



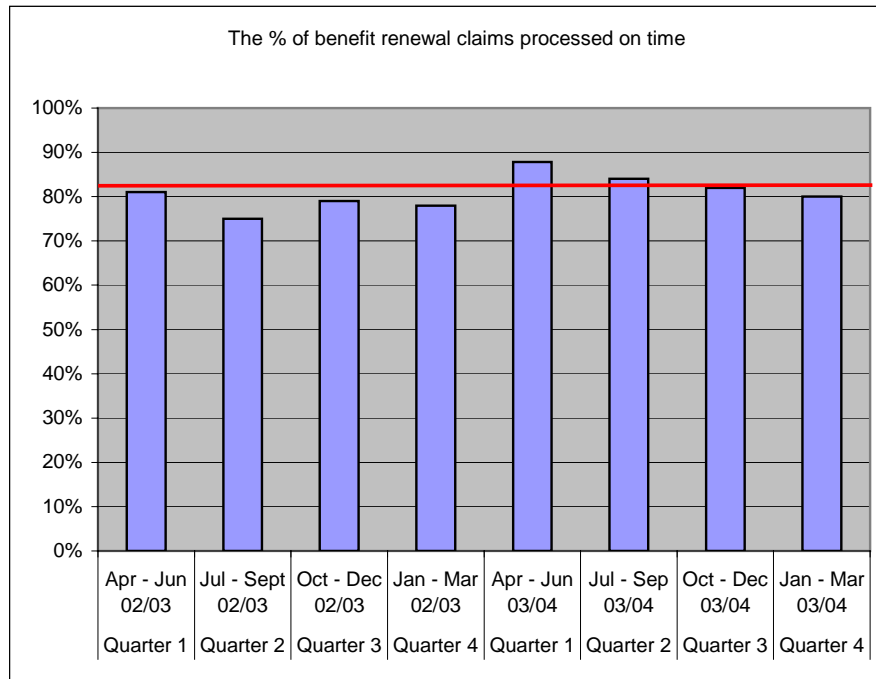
3.2.1 Although there was an increase in the average time taken to process new claims each quarter, the times taken remained below the target 36 days throughout the year. Staff turnover and the introduction of the new tax and pension credit schemes account for the increases.

3.2.2 *No corrective action is required at this stage.*



3.2.3 The improvement over the previous year in the time taken to process changes of circumstance was maintained throughout the year, ending with a last quarter average of 5 days.

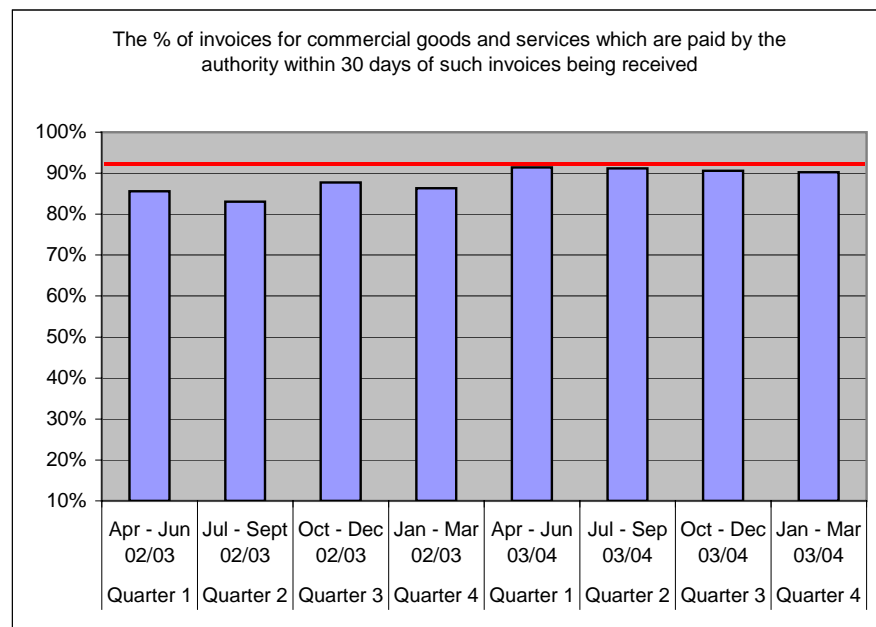
3.2.4 *No corrective action is required at this stage.*



3.2.5 Despite a gradual fall over the four quarters, the average processing time improved over that of the previous year. Benefit periods have been abolished since 1 April 2004 with renewal claims no longer being required. This indicator, therefore, will not be relevant in the future.

3.2.6 *No corrective action is required due to the abolition of benefit periods.*

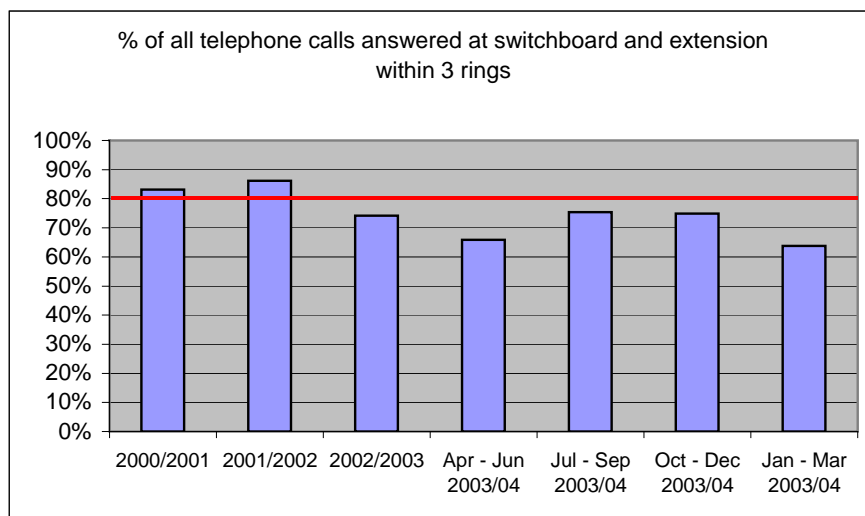
3.3 Payment of Invoices



3.3.1 The figures show a welcome improvement over 2002/03. Overall performance in 2003/04 was 90.2% of invoices paid within the 30 day limit. All Budget Managers and support staff attended training sessions in March 2003 where the need for prompt processing of invoices was emphasised. This message was reinforced during staff briefings in preparation for the CPA exercise. These led to an increased performance, although there was a slight drifting downwards through the year.

3.3.2 *Staff have been sent a general reminder about the need for processing invoices promptly and recording any reasons for delay in payment. Those sections identified as not following procedures, and/or not taking the actions necessary to process invoices in time, will be given further advice and support to enable them to comply with the Council's prompt payment policy.*

3.4 **Customer service**



3.4.1 The figures show variations between departmental performance at extensions, and also that the main switchboard has been having some problems reaching the earlier high performance. Currently the switchboard time to answer is not as good as extensions, although its call handling scores are as good or better. The switchboard is affected by issues of staff cover and is also vulnerable to increases in workload caused by circumstances and decisions affecting other work areas. Officers are considering the most effective way of addressing these issues.

3.4.2 *Extension issues are largely a matter of continual staff training and reminders. The proposed installation of a call centre type facility for parts of the Finance Department in June may improve the figures over a period, although a sudden dramatic improvement is less likely.*

3.5 **Progress on £1 million net revenue reductions**

3.5.1 The Financial Forecast that was approved in October 2003 included savings of £650,000 towards the target of £1 million. This left a balance of £350,000 to find, to which £155,000 was added to meet the cost of new initiatives. The savings target currently stands at £312,200 as follows:-

	£
Balance of savings target required in the Financial Forecast	505,000
Subsequent savings identified	
- reduction in the Position Statement provision	-100,000
- halve contribution to Basingstoke Canal	-7,500
- cash limit grant aid	-1,300
- planned increase in recycling initiatives reduced from £20,000 to £10,000	-10,000
- reductions in Safer Runnymede initiatives	-35,000
- Central Railway provision deleted	-17,000
- saving in printing of the BVPP	-6,000
- reductions in audit and inspection fees	-34,000
- reduction in contribution to IT Replacement Reserve	-100,000
Sub Total	194,200

Subsequent additional costs

- new developments in the 2004/05 Budget for which no provision had been made in the Forecast	60,000
- full year effect of the Annual Personnel Report	53,000
- additional grant to RAVS	5,000
Sub total	118,000

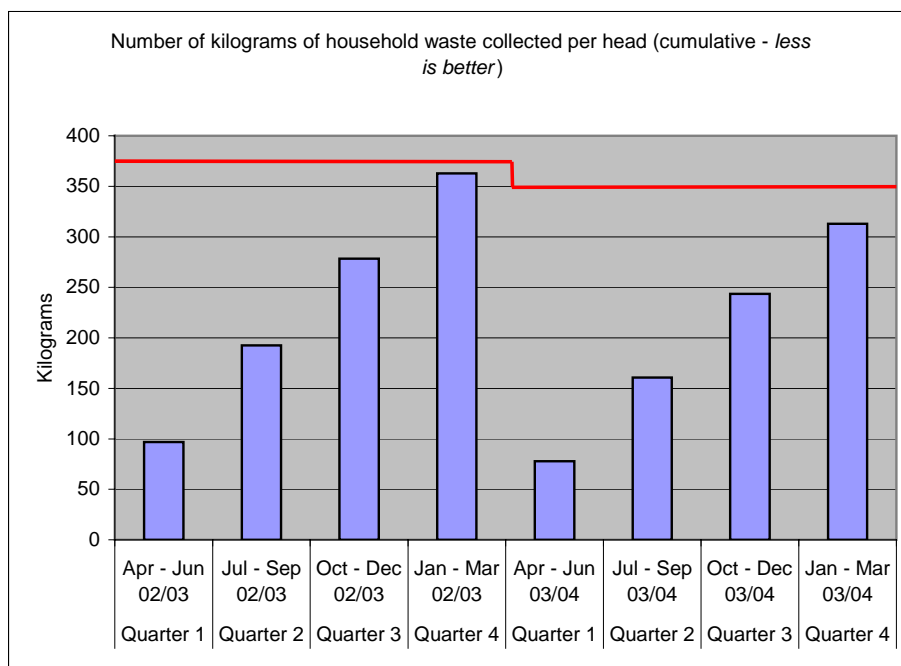
Total of revenue reductions still required £312,200

3.5.2 A range of further revenue reduction initiatives are currently being examined and, subject to Member support, Officers are confident that the target can be achieved.

3.6 **Progress on achieving 750 affordable housing units target**

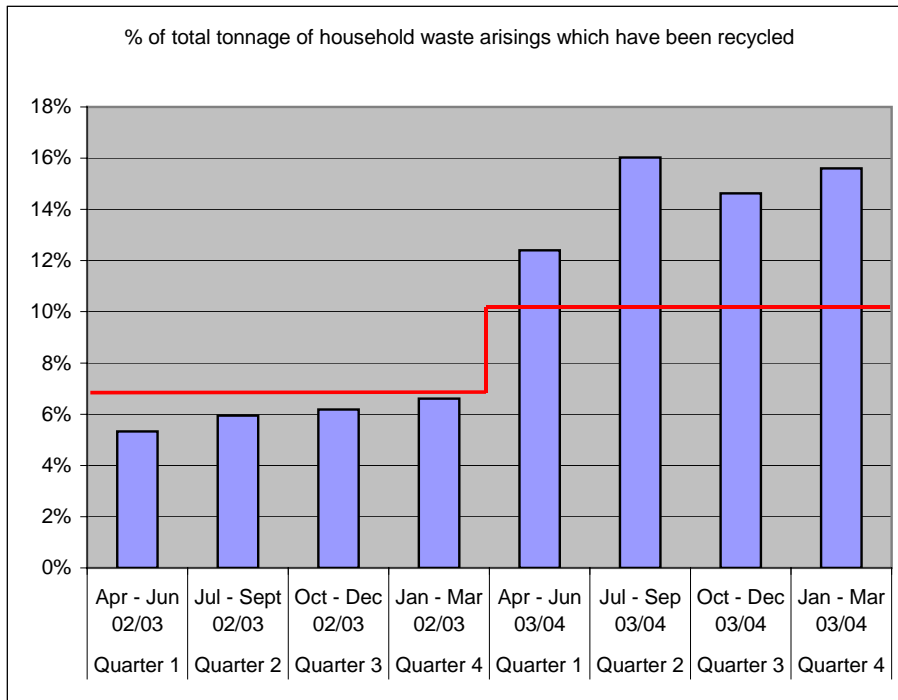
3.6.1 To date 423 units have been provided against the 750 total. 52 units are under construction and a number of schemes are about to start on site. Although this Council has made progress towards the target there is still a need to find opportunities for a further 275 units. Officers are currently working on 17 different schemes, which have the potential to deliver 342 units. However, it may not be possible to achieve all of these schemes.

3.7 **Refuse collection and recycling performance**



3.7.1 There is a marked reduction in the amount of waste collected, which has fallen by 16%. This reflects the success of the recycling initiative. The targeted reduction in waste collection has been substantially exceeded.

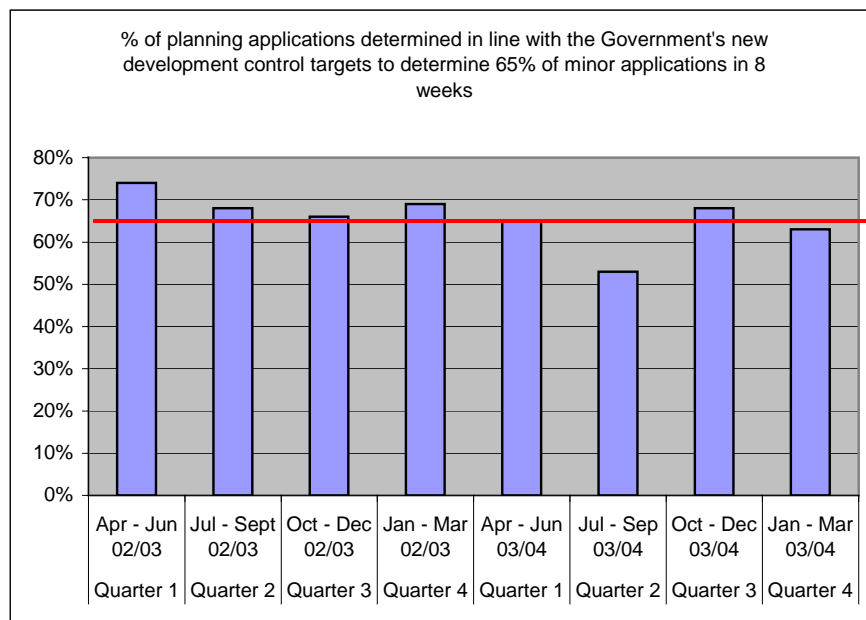
3.7.2 *Whilst targets have been met, this cannot be a reason for complacency. The Landfill Directive requires substantial waste minimisation in the future, and efforts must be made to increase recycled material and reduce waste going to landfill.*



3.7.3 The first year's target for the recycling scheme of 10% has been substantially exceeded at an average of around 15%. However, the target set by the Government for the current financial year rises to 18% and is expected to continue rising thereafter.

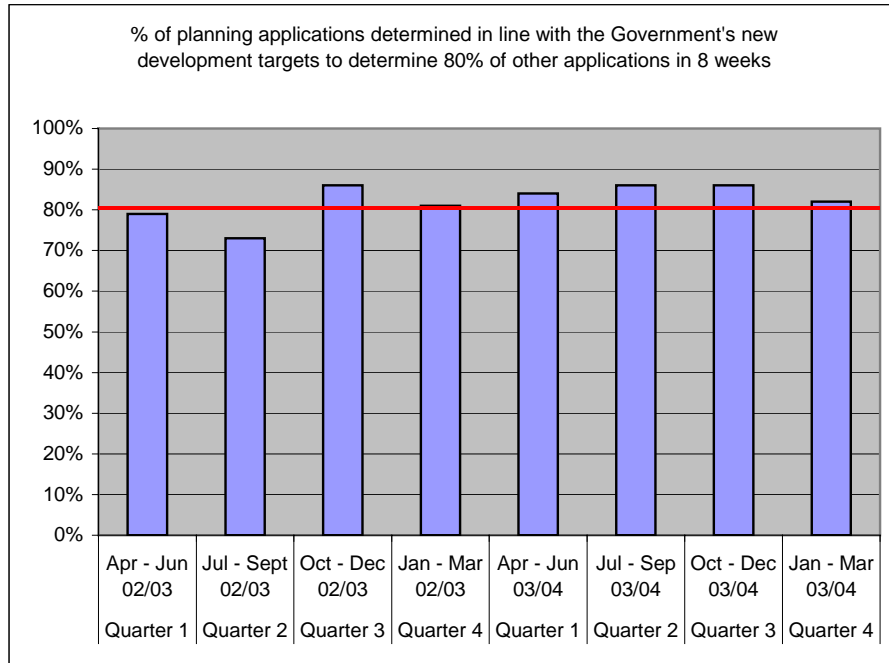
3.7.4 *Investigation is continuing into collection of additional recyclables, including cardboard and plastics. Research work is continuing with Imperial College, London regarding composting and refuse weight reduction. Promotion of recycling and public education continues to be a key element in the strategy to increase recycling rates. Flexibility in the future refuse collection arrangements may be important in introducing new recycling initiatives in the medium term.*

3.8 **Determination of planning applications within 8 weeks.**



3.8.1 Average performance for the year was below target at 62%. Turnover of staff - especially amongst qualified, experienced Officers - and difficulties of recruitment have continued to cause problems.

3.8.2 *Several posts have been filled, and a senior planner has returned from maternity leave (albeit on a part-time basis) although a team leader's post remains vacant.*



3.8.3 Targets have been met in this area.

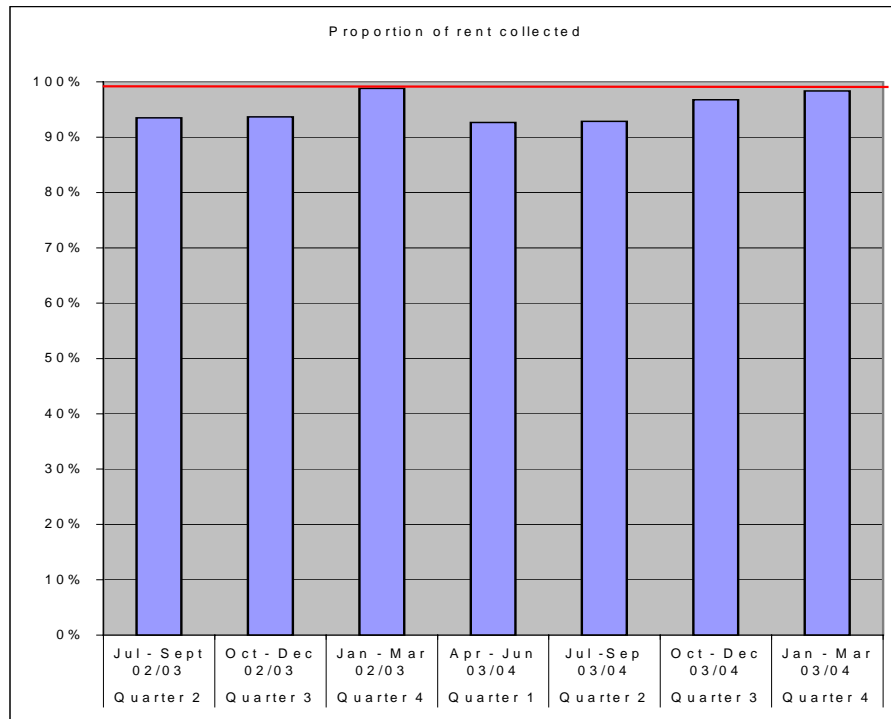
3.8.4 *No corrective action is needed at present, although the work continues to be closely monitored.*

3.9 **Progress towards achieving 'decent homes' standard**

3.9.1 During 2003/04 the number of properties that failed the Decent Homes Standard reduced from 607 to 482 (a reduction of 20.5%), which falls into the best quartile performance on a national basis. A new target to reduce the number by 20% has been set for 2004/05.

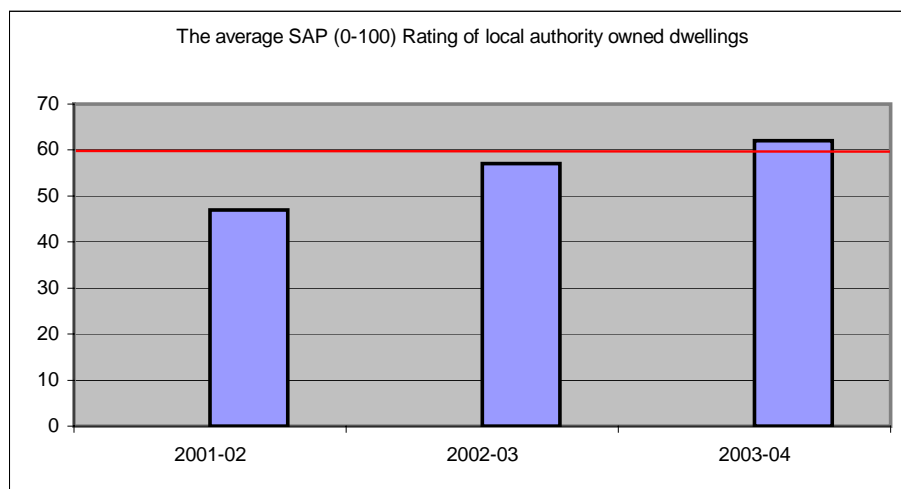
3.10 **Efficient landlord measures**

(Please see table on page 11).



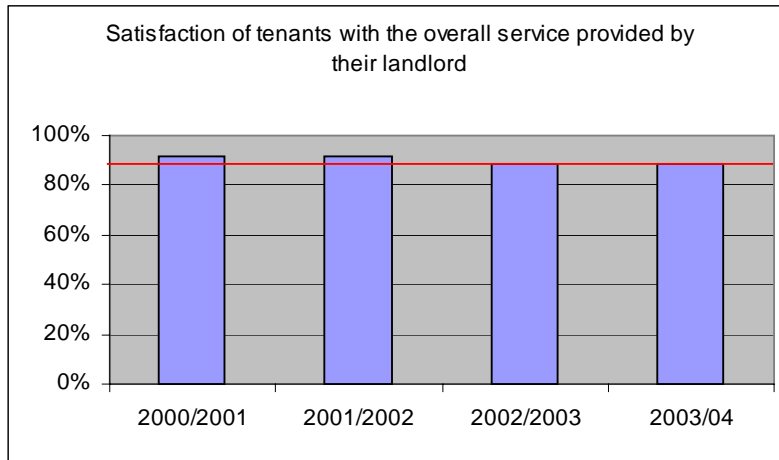
3.10.1 Rent collection during 2003/4 was below the target set. A major contributory factor was the absence on long term sickness of a key member of the team, which impacted on the ability to recover outstanding rent.

3.10.2 *An action plan has been devised which dedicates more resources to the recovery of arrears. More intense monitoring and the adoption of an incentive scheme was approved by the Housing and Community Services Committee in June, to encourage tenants to keep a clear rent account.*



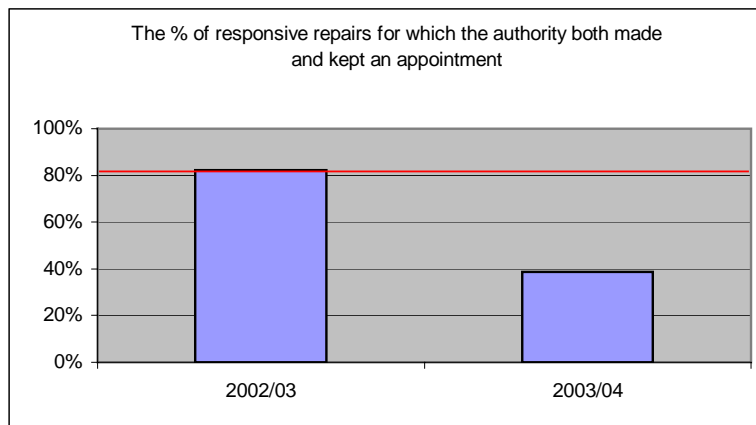
3.10.3 As a result of the Council's programme of insulation, installation and upgrading of central heating, the SAP rating increases steadily year on year. Targets have been set for further improvements in SAP ratings for the next 2/3 years. The current performance is in the top half nationally.

3.10.4 *No further corrective action is required at this time.*



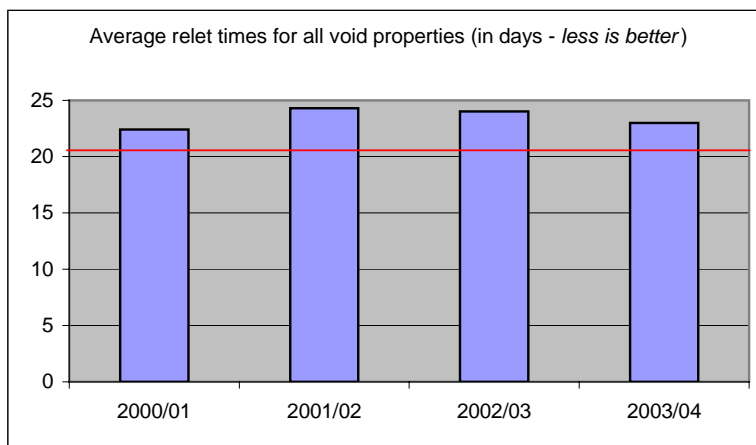
3.10.5 Overall satisfaction with the service is high. A questionnaire is sent out every three years to establish satisfaction levels. The survey was last dispatched in 2003, so is not due again until 2006.

3.10.6 *No corrective action is required at this stage.*



3.10.7 Appointments are made for repairs whenever tenants request them, although in most cases the arrangements are left in the hands of the contractor, who will make the appointment directly with the tenant. This makes accurate monitoring of this BVPI very time consuming and speculative at best, which explains the relatively poor performance indicated. Information from acknowledgement cards returned following completion of repairs indicates that there is no dissatisfaction in this area, and that few appointments are broken.

3.10.8 *The Head of Tenant Services has written to the Audit Commission pointing out the disproportionate amount of time this BVPI takes to compile and the Council's belief that the reported outcome does not reflect the true position.*



3.10.9 During 2003/4 it took an average of 23 days to let a property and this performance is better than for the previous year. Further analysis of the performance shows that the average was 20 days (achieving the target) for non sheltered units and 30 days for sheltered units.

3.10.10 *The slower performance on sheltered housing units will be considered during the forthcoming Best Value Review of this service.*

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 As can be seen in the graphs and supporting information, the Council has set itself rigorous targets which are very challenging and set a course to achieve consistent improvement in its service delivery.
- 4.2 The general picture is of improved performance in comparison to the targets which had been set for 2003/04. However, there are a small number of areas where there is a slight underperformance and these will need to be addressed over the coming weeks.

THE COMMITTEE IS ASKED

to indicate whether it is content with the progress and, where appropriate, the proposed corrective action.

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

None.

6. SERVICE PLAN 2003/04 - OUTTURN PERFORMANCE (CEO)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the outturn performance in respect of the Corporate Management Service Plan for 2003/04.**

2. Background Information

- 2.1 In the Spring of 2003, the Council introduced a revised Performance Management Framework to ensure the better use of information to improve services.
- 2.2 Each Committee has its own Service Plan which incorporates all of the Performance Indicators, indicators related to the Leader's Position Statement, Best Value Improvement Plans, local indicators and targets arising from the Community Strategy. Departments use this information as the basis of their service planning and improvement. The Corporate Management Committee receives quarterly updates on progress of the Service Plan.

3. Report
- 3.1 The Plan is attached at Appendix 'B'. There has generally been good progress across a number of targets and service areas. These include:
- i) the achievement of an "Excellent" rating in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment;
 - ii) progress on the Community Strategy;
 - iii) the successful lobbying against the Central Railway proposal; and
 - iv) a large increase in the usage of the Council's website.

4. Council Policy

- 4.1 Service Plans assist the Council to fulfill two of its strategic objectives:
- i) achieve quality services
 - ii) achieve continuous improvement.
- 4.2 "We will further develop the Performance Management Framework, to build in continuous improvement to Service Plans, rationalise targets and further integrate into departmental management." (Leader's Position Statement 2004/05).

(FOR INFORMATION)

Background Papers

None.

7. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2004/05 (CEO)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of this report is to present for approval the Council's Best Value Performance Plan for 2004/05.**

2. Background Information

- 2.1 Each year the Council has to produce a Best Value Performance Plan which outlines the Council's performance against a number of set performance indicators (BVPIs). The Performance Plan (Appendix 'C') also illustrates targets for those performance indicators in the coming three years.
- 2.2 In previous years, the Council has been obliged to produce a very detailed Performance Plan which has run to some 60 pages and has been distributed to a wide range of organisations and residents.
- 2.3 In February 2004, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) issued revised guidance for local authorities that produced Best Value Performance Plans. For those authorities that scored Good or Excellent in their Comprehensive Performance Assessment, a range of obligations have been significantly reduced.
- 2.4 Therefore, in accordance with ODPM guidance, the Council is now only required to produce the following:
- i) outturn data for BVPIs
 - ii) targets for BVPIs in the current year and subsequent two years
 - iii) confirmation that the Code of Practice (workforce matters and contracting) has been adopted.

3. Report

3.1 As Appendix 'C' illustrates, Runnymede's performance has been exceptionally good in 2003/04. In comparison to 2002/03, 72.4% of performance indicators have either improved

or maintained their position. Only 16 of the 58 indicators that fall within the Council's responsibility showed a deterioration.

- 3.2 There has been a general fall in customer satisfaction levels compared to 2000/01. However, MORI have recently completed a number of studies which conclude that this trend is also noticeable nationwide. They are completing further research as to why this is, but their initial observations are based on the public's general scepticism and other concerns about Council Tax.

4. Council Policy

- 4.1 The Council's strategic objectives are consistent with the production and purpose of the revised Performance Plan, namely the achievement of quality services, value for money and continuous improvement.

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 In previous years, the cost of producing and circulating the Performance Plan has been approximately £7,500. This year, it will simply be attached to the Leader's Position Statement and circulated electronically, representing a £7,500 saving.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

the Best Value Performance Plan 2004/05 attached at Appendix 'C' be adopted.

(TO RECOMMEND)

Background Papers

None.

8. BEST VALUE GENERAL SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS (CEO)
(Ref: Minutes of Business Management Review Board, March 2001, page 152, para. 769)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 **This report highlights some of the key findings of the recent Best Value General Satisfaction Survey, undertaken in Autumn 2003.**

2. Background Information

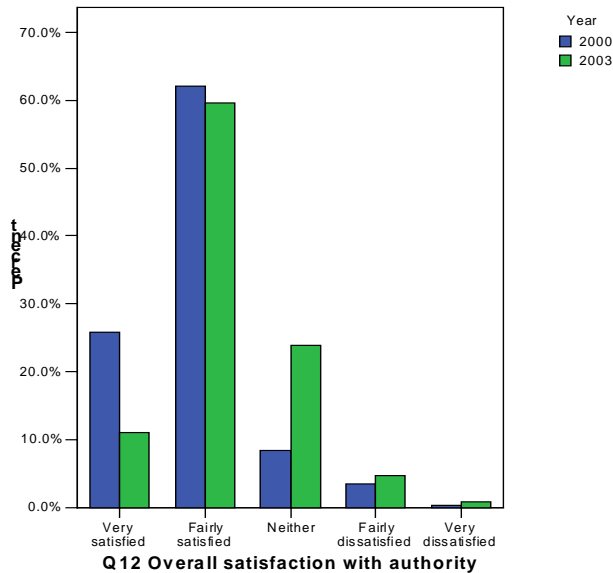
- 2.1 In 2000/01, the Council conducted a General Satisfaction Survey based on the requirements of the Best Value regime.
- 2.2 The main findings of that survey were reported to the Business Management Review Board in March 2001.
- 2.3 The most significant result, after audit work, showed that the overall satisfaction of residents with Runnymede Borough Council's services was ranked second out of all of the local authorities (of all tiers) in England and Wales.
- 2.4 To continue to fulfil Best Value obligations, the Council has to undertake a general satisfaction survey every three years, the latest being completed in Autumn 2003.
- 2.5 2,500 questionnaires (an example is attached at Appendix 'D') were sent to a random sample of residents across the Borough, using a template developed by the Audit Commission. There were 961 responses (38%).
- 2.6 Further detailed analysis will be carried out in the next couple of months on a service-by-service basis. This will include cross-tabulations against demographic data to ensure that the most detailed and accurate observations are being made. This report, therefore, is intended to give an initial overview of the main findings.

2.7 District comparisons will be made later in the year when each Council's data is published by the Audit Commission.

3. Results

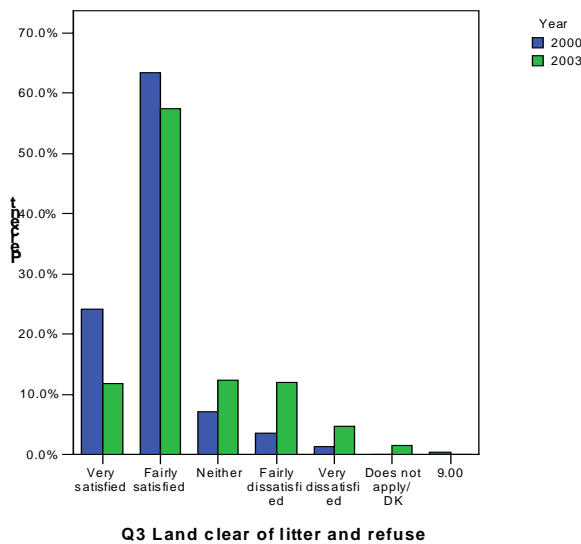
3.1 Overall Satisfaction with the Authority's Services

3.1.1 As can be seen in the graph below, the overall satisfaction with the authority has dipped from 88% to around 70%. However, it should be stressed that this trend is being experienced right across the country and MORI have commissioned research looking into why this is. Detailed work would therefore be premature before the comparative data is available. (Colour copies of the graphs will be circulated to members of the Committee).



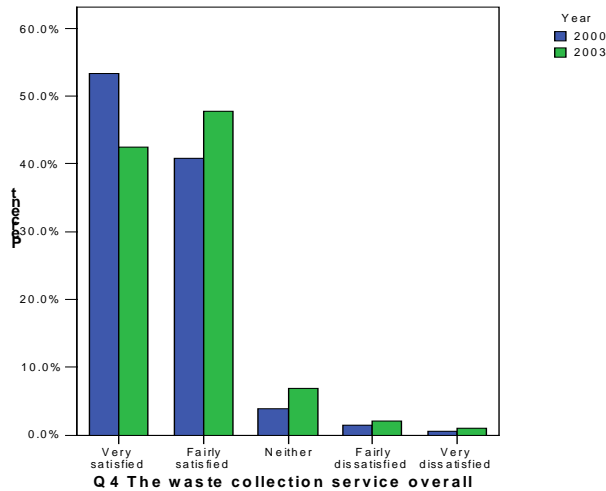
3.2 Satisfaction with the Environment

3.2.1 The graph below illustrates the high levels of satisfaction that residents have with the Council's ability to keep land clear of litter and refuse. However, there has been a notable increase in those expressing dissatisfaction compared to 2000. Further analysis is being undertaken to establish whether there are underlying trends which could explain this.



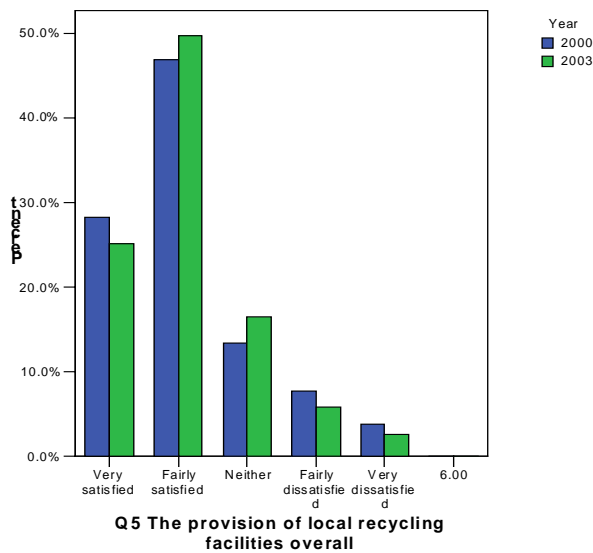
3.3 Satisfaction with Waste Collection Service

3.3.1 The Council has sustained very high satisfaction levels with its waste collection service despite the major changes consequent upon the introduction of kerbside recycling early in 2003. Very few people express negative views of the service although there has been a slight shift from those stating that they are 'very satisfied' to 'fairly satisfied'.



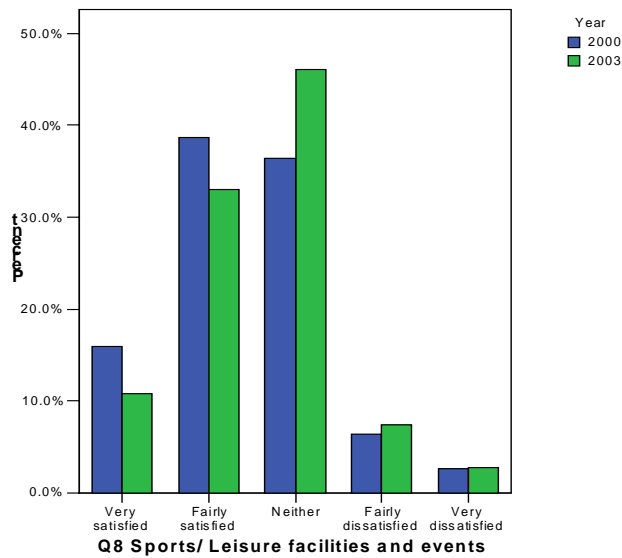
3.4 Satisfaction with recycling facilities

3.4.1 There has been a distinct fall in the proportion of people that are dissatisfied with the recycling service. This can, in part, be attributed to the new kerbside scheme that was introduced in 2003. As the graph illustrates, there are still high levels of satisfaction.



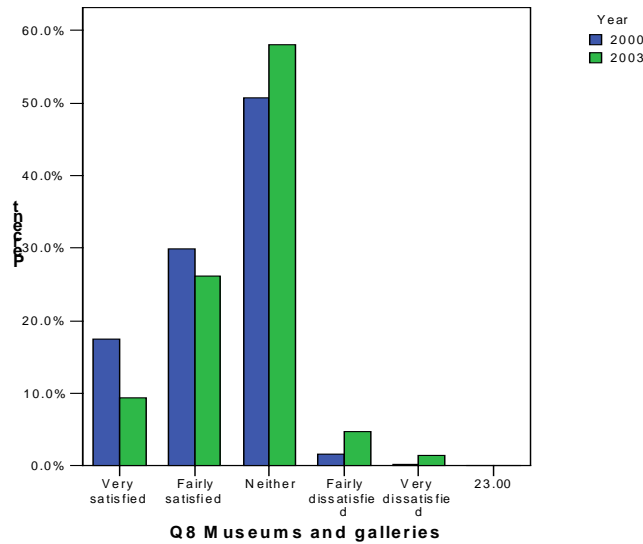
3.5 Satisfaction with Sports/Leisure facilities

3.5.1 The graph illustrates the high proportion of people not expressing either a positive or negative opinion about the Council's sport/leisure facilities. This implies that a large number of respondents do not use the facilities. Despite this, there are still significant levels of satisfaction that far outweigh those residents that are dissatisfied.



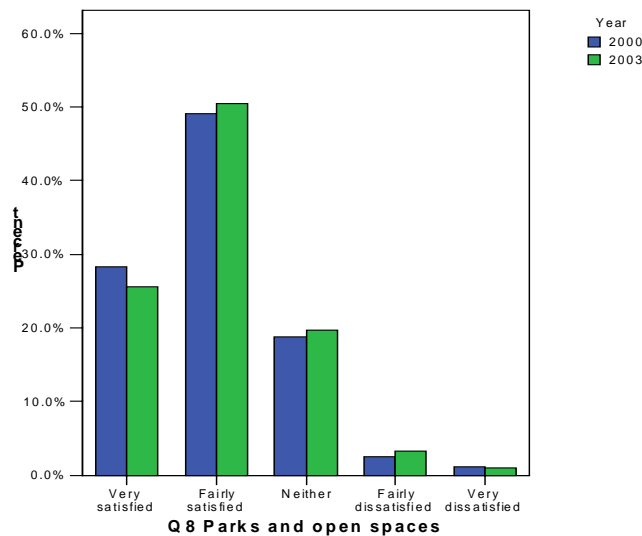
3.6 Satisfaction with Museums and Galleries

3.6.1 As with the previous question, a similar pattern is repeated here. Again, the majority of respondents who expressed an opinion gave positive views of the service provision.



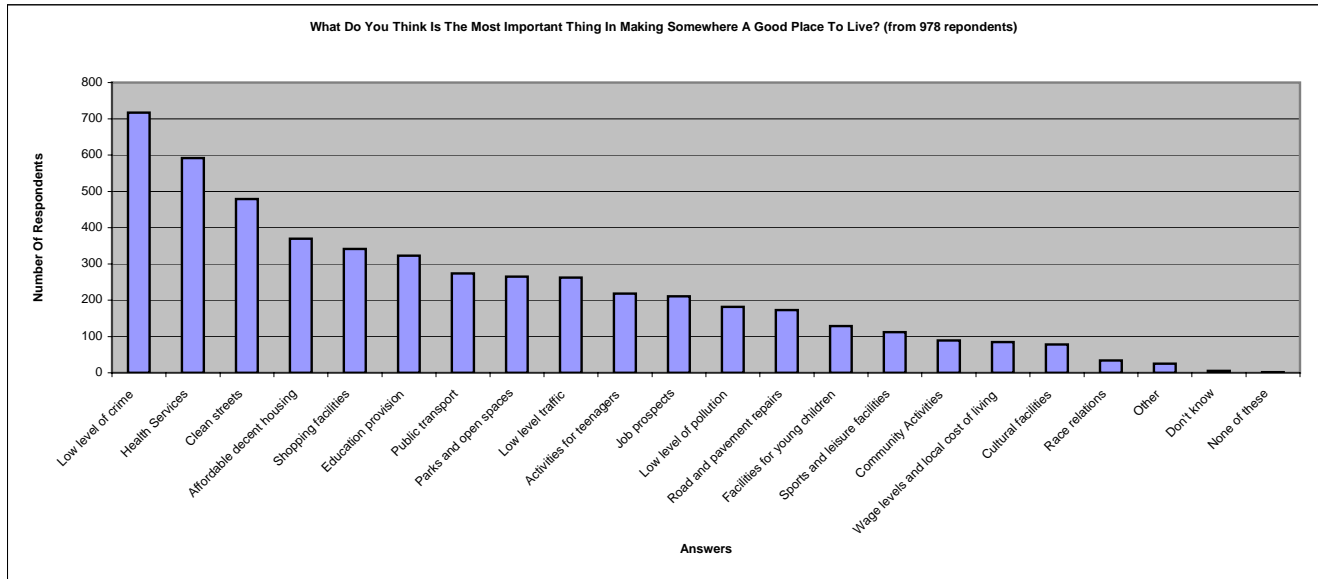
3.7 Satisfaction with Parks and Open Spaces

3.7.1 Again, satisfaction with parks and open spaces remains in the 70%-80% bracket, with little change occurring in the past three years with regards to residents' views.



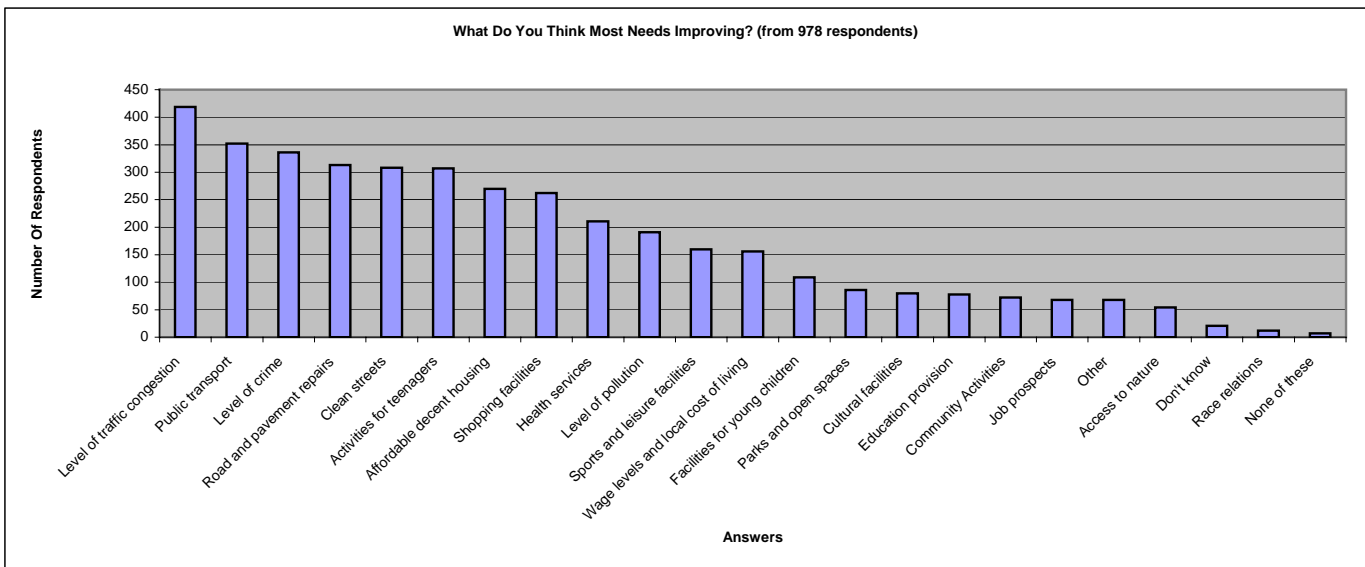
3.8 Wha

3.8.1 As the graph illustrates, three issues are clearly the most important for people when considering that somewhere is a good place to live; namely, the levels of crime; health services and cleanliness. This is important information which clearly can impact on a number of Council services. Further geographical analysis needs to take place to establish core trends.



3.9. What needs improving?

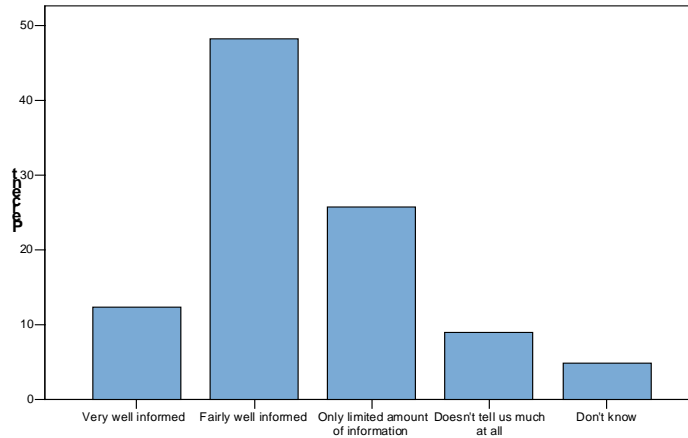
3.9.1 There is a broad range of views as to what needs improving in the Borough. This of course reflects the diverse lifestyles of residents in Runnymede and what they perceive as important. As can be seen quite clearly in the graph on the following page, the level of congestion and public transport appear to be of most concern. Furthermore, crime levels are perceived to be high, even though Surrey has one of the lowest crime rates in England and Wales. There is a clear indication that perceptions may not reflect the reality of the situation, so more work needs to be carried out to ensure that the results are not being skewed by poor communication by the various agencies involved.



3.10.1 Communication

3.10.2 The results from this question offer an interesting insight into residents' perceptions and it is clear that, in general, residents feel they are reasonably well informed. However, given the issues raised in 3.9.1, there is a difference between perception and reality.

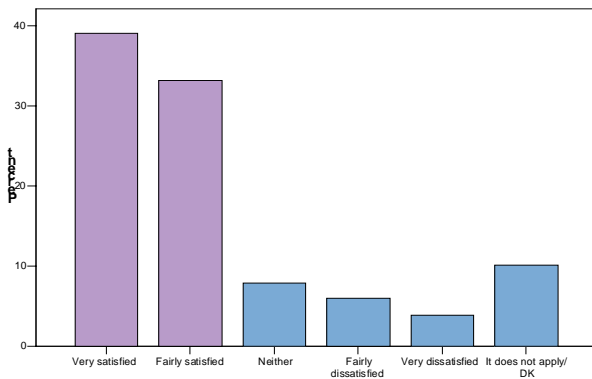
Q9 How well informed residents are kept about services and benefits



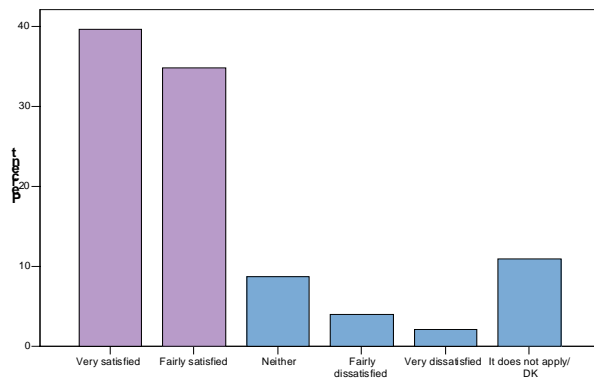
3.11 The Recycling Service

3.11.1 During the last year, the Council has introduced a substantial kerbside recycling scheme. The survey set out a number of questions regarding the service.

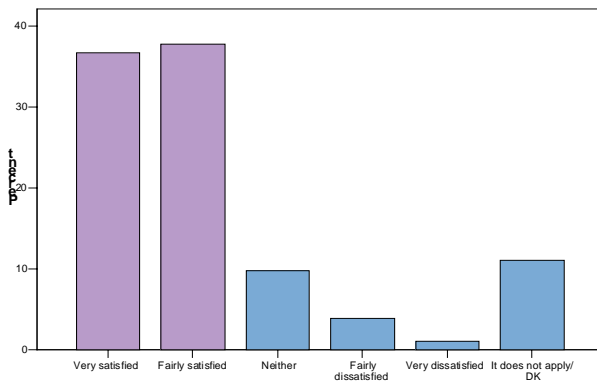
Q6 The container provided for items of recycling



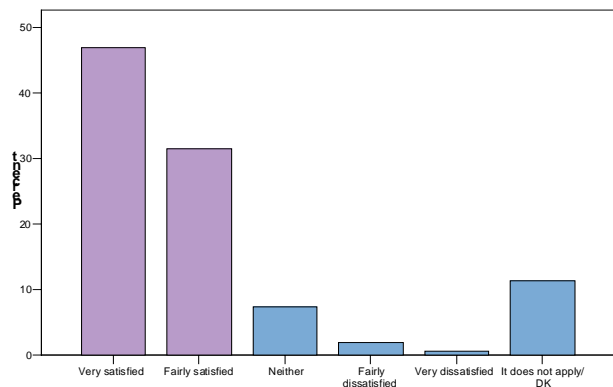
Q6 The place you have to leave your items for recycling awaiting collection



Q6 How "clean and tidy" the street is following the collection of items for recycling



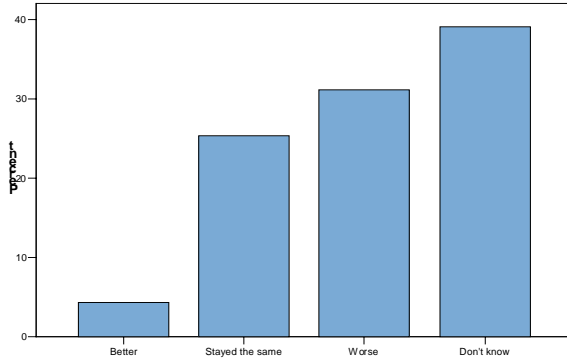
Q6 The reliability of the collection of items for recycling



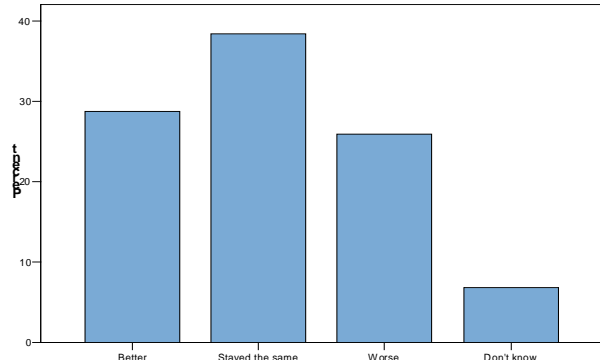
3.12 Have things got better or worse?

3.12.1 Below is series of graphs which illustrate the most significant issues that were raised in response to this question. According to residents, shopping facilities have, on balance, improved in the last three years. However, affordable housing, the levels of crime, pollution, traffic congestion and wage levels/cost of living, are perceived to have worsened during that period.

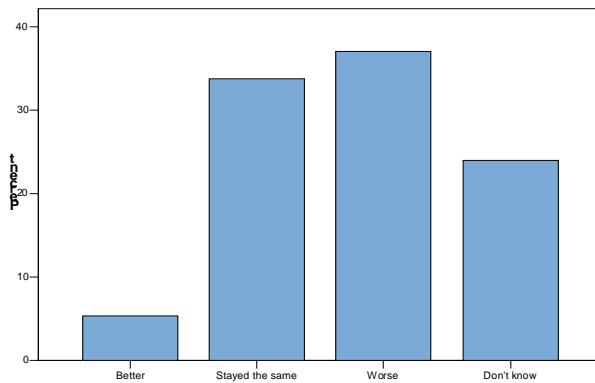
Q19 Affordable decent housing



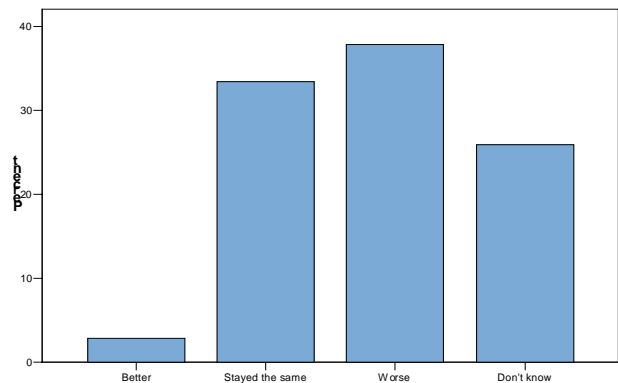
Q19 Shopping facilities



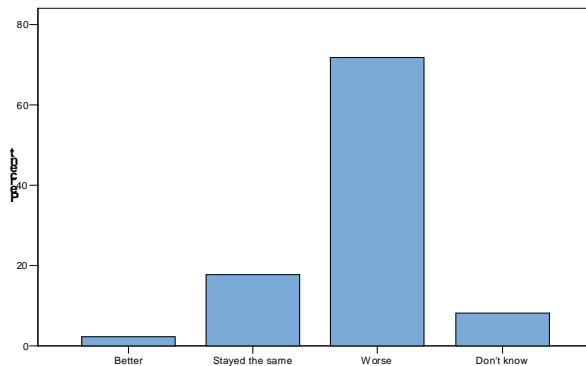
Q19 The level of crime



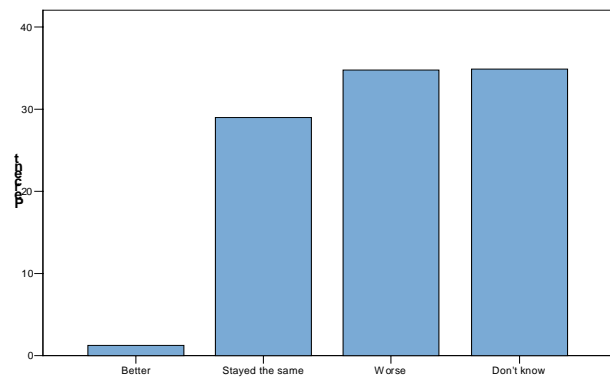
Q19 The level of pollution



Q19 The level of traffic congestion



Q19 Wage levels & local cost of living

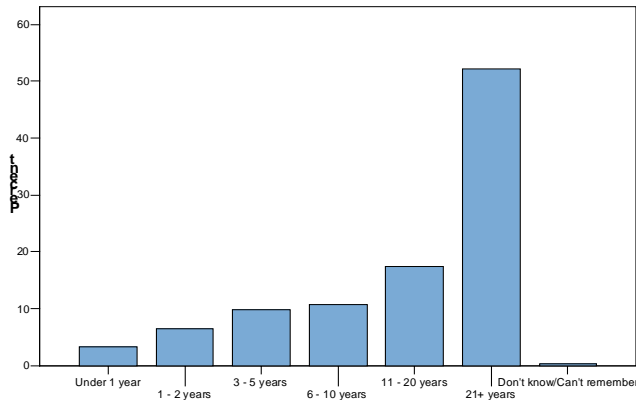


3.13 Contextual Information

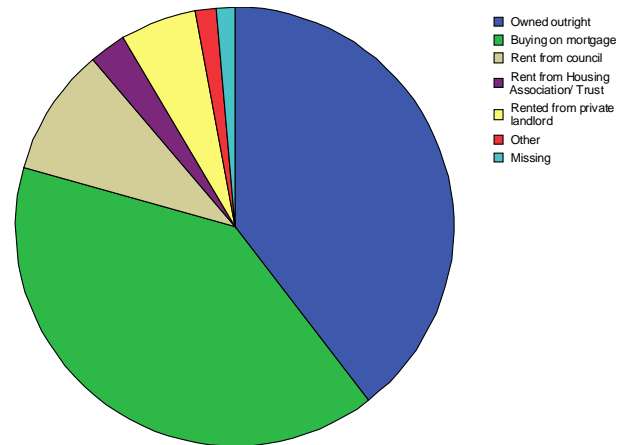
3.13.1 Home ownership in the Borough is running at over 80%. This impacts on many of the Council's services, local economic performance and the social infrastructure. Furthermore,

over half of the Borough's population have lived in Runnymede for more than 20 years and nearly 80% for over 5 years.

Q24 How long in area



Q25 Home ownership



4. Council Policy

4.1 “Engaging with and being responsive to public opinion through consultation on important issues, ensuring clear communication of our policies” (Leader’s Position Statement 2004/05, p. 6)

5. Resource Implications

5.1 The results of further analysis may provide information that could impact on services in the future.

6. Conclusion

6.1 In most cases satisfaction levels remain very high, although there have been small dips in percentages since 2000. There is a great deal of important information that has been gathered with regards to the views of residents. Over the coming months, more detailed analysis will be undertaken to establish underlying trends on a service specific basis and will specifically inform changes in service levels and standards required from contracted services.

(FOR INFORMATION)

Background Papers

None.

9. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2003/04 (DF)
(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee June 2003, page 27, para. 52)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of this report is to approve the Statement of Accounts for the last financial year (2003/04).**

2. Background Information

2.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 (the Regulations) came into effect from 1 April 2003. The implications of the Regulations were reported to the Corporate Management Committee in June 2003.

2.2 The Regulations introduce a number of new requirements for the preparation and approval and audit of local authority accounts. In particular the Regulations require:

- Authorities to approve the Statement of Accounts by 31 August in 2003/04 and publish them by 30 November. These deadlines will ultimately move to 30 June and 30 September respectively for the 2005/06 Statement.
 - The inclusion of a statement of internal control with the Statement of Accounts.
 - The Statement to be signed by the Chairman of the Committee that approves the Statement to signify formally the completion of the Council's approval process of the accounts.
- 2.3 It is accepted as good governance for Members to be presented with the statement of accounts as soon as possible after the year-end, so that they can:
- receive assurance that accounting systems have operated adequately and been closed down satisfactorily;
 - have confidence that the budget for 2004/05 has a secure foundation; and
 - understand the corporate financial performance during the year and the position at 31 March 2004.
- 2.4 A comprehensive report on the final accounts for 2003/04 was presented to the meeting of this Committee held on 3 June. The Statement of Accounts reports the same position but presents it in the form required by statute and recommended accounting practice.
3. Report
- 3.1 The Statement of Accounts is set out at Appendix 'E'. The document has the following main sections:
- A financial review of 2003/04 by the Director of Finance
 - Statement of Responsibilities
 - Statement of Internal Control
 - Auditor's Report (only in draft at this point in time; the Report assumes that the Auditor will have no qualifications to make)
 - The main accounting policies used
 - The main accounting statements
 - Notes to the accounts
 - Summaries of Trust Fund accounts administered by the Council
- 3.2 The statement follows the *Code of Practice for Local Authority Accounting* (the Code) and associated guidance. It meets the legal requirement imposed on local authorities.
- 3.3 The statutory arrangements for the external audit of local authority accounts have not been aligned with the timetable for approval set out in the Regulations. Therefore the Committee will have to approve the Statement of Accounts without an audit opinion in this and future years. The external auditors will commence their examination of the accounts at the end of July and hope to be able to issue an opinion on the accounts in September.
- 3.4 The Statement of Accounts includes significant new features this year in respect of:
- Pension Fund accounting and disclosures.
 - A Statement of Internal Control.
- 3.5 A number of other changes required by the Code are also incorporated into the Statements.
- Pension Fund Accounting
- 3.6 Local authorities are required to adopt the accounting standard *FRS 17: Retirement Benefits* in 2003/04. FRS 17 sets out the principles of accounting for retirement benefits. FRS 17 is a complex accounting standard, but is based on a simple principle i.e. that an organisation should account for retirement benefits when it is committed to give them, even if the actual giving will be many years into the future. The objectives of FRS 17 are that financial statements set out at fair value the assets and liabilities of the organisation relating to

retirement. The Statement of Accounts includes the full set of disclosures required by FRS 17.

- 3.7 It must be emphasised that the introduction of FRS 17 does not impact on the Council's tax or rent setting decisions. The Government has made Regulations so that the FRS 17 entries are reversed out of the accounts to achieve this. This is carried out by way of compensating entries to and from the "Pensions Reserve" in the accounts. The net charges in respect of pensions to be borne by taxpayers and tenants therefore remain those set by the Pension Fund actuary in his statutory triennial review of the Fund.
- 3.8 The recently appointed Surrey Pension Fund actuary, Hymans Robinson, has provided the figures for the FRS 17 accounting entries. In his report the actuary is at pains to emphasise that the figures must only be used for FRS 17 accounting purposes. He has also set out the basis on which he has calculated the figures (in particular, relying on the valuation work carried out by the previous Fund actuary, Watson Wyatt) and the limitations that this imposes. The actuary will soon commence his full statutory triennial valuation of the fund (with a valuation date of 31 March 2004). This valuation will establish a comprehensive analysis of the Runnymede element of the Surrey Pension Fund and will set out the required level of Council contributions to the Fund for the 3-year period starting in 2005/06.
- 3.9 The actuary calculates the annual charge to services in 2003/04 based on the FRS 17 principles, to be £1,010,000. This can broadly be compared to the total amount actually paid to the Pension Fund in 2003/04 of £869,000 (this being the statutory contribution required in accordance with Pension Fund Regulations). In accounting terms the additional £141,000 has been recognised in the Consolidated Revenue Account and Housing Revenue Account, but with corresponding reversing entries to ensure that the impact of FRS 17 is neutral.
- 3.10 Whilst recognising the limitations of the FRS 17 figures, it is possible to make a broad conclusion that the Council's current contribution to the Fund is likely to increase following the actuary's formal valuation. The Financial Forecast allowed for an additional employer's contribution of £100,000 from 2005/06 and it appears likely that this provision will be required.
- 3.11 The consolidated balance sheet and related notes to the accounts summarise the position of the Runnymede element of the Pension Fund – based on a set of actuarial assumptions – as at 31 March 2004. This summary shows a deficit of £6.6m, a considerable improvement on the deficit of £12.2 million at 31 March 2003 disclosed last year. The volatility of the Fund position is a function of the methods used by the FRS 17 standard. FRS 17 takes a snapshot of the Fund as at 31 March and in particular the valuation of fund assets (especially the shares portfolio) at this date.
- 3.12 In very broad terms, the large Fund deficit has primarily been caused by the significant falls in stock markets since the April 2001 valuation, despite the partial recovery experienced in 2003/04. The notes to the statements give detailed disclosures on the assets and liabilities of the Pension Fund.
- 3.13 The deficit is a very significant amount for Runnymede. However, care needs to be taken in interpreting these figures. First, the calculation is based on investment values as at 31 March. In 2003 this date was close to market low figures on the UK and USA stock market indices. These markets had significantly recovered in 2003/04, this alone being sufficient to reduce the deficit by around £5.6 million. Secondly, it is important to see pensions for what they are; that is long-term assets and liabilities. The accounting requirements of FRS 17 disclose the position of a pension fund at a point in time, but it must be recognised that pensions for current employees will not become payable, in some instances, for a long time into the future. Therefore it is the long-term position of the Fund that is important.

Statement of Internal Control

- 3.14 Corporate governance extends beyond financial probity to include all aspects of the conduct of an authority's business. However, governance issues relating to internal controls are particularly pertinent to the preparation and publication of the Statement of Accounts.
- 3.15 Regulation 4 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 require a statement of internal control to be published with the Statement of Accounts. The Council is also required to carry out an annual review of the effectiveness of its system of internal control. The Statement

included in the Accounts is designed to meet both these requirements. Guidance has also recently been issued on the required contents of this Statement and the process for establishing and maintaining a system of internal control and the annual review process. The Guidance requires the Statement to be signed by the Chief Executive Officer and the most senior Member of the Council (the Leader).

- 3.16 This new statement is a considerable change to the previous Statement on the System of Financial Internal Control, which covered financial controls only. It is set out in pages 11 to 18 of the Statement of Accounts.
- 3.17 The guidance states that the Council should satisfy itself that it has obtained relevant and reliable evidence to support the Statement. Runnymede has always prided itself on good corporate governance and Officers consider that the Statement can be reviewed as part of the Statement of Accounts process this year. In future years it is suggested that the effectiveness of the system of internal control be considered formally by the Standards and Audit Committee prior to the Statement being formally approved by this Committee.

Audit Considerations

- 3.18 The Statement of Auditing Standard (SAS) 610 *Communication of Audit Matters to those Charged with Corporate Governance* requires auditors to report to Members all mis-statements that have been advised to Officers but not adjusted for. There are no such adjustments notified by the auditors at this stage.

Valuation of Housing Assets

- 3.19 The valuation of the balance sheet assets and other valuations used in the Statement of Accounts are based on valuations carried out by the Valuer to the Council. The valuation date for the majority of the housing assets was 1 April 2000.
- 3.20 Since that date local property prices have increased substantially. The relevant government guidance expects local authorities to capture any material changes in valuations so that housing assets will always be shown in the balance sheet at current valuations.
- 3.21 A methodology has been agreed with the Valuer to the Council and the Auditor that allows the housing stock valuations to be adjusted in a straightforward way. In summary, this involves applying relevant price indexes (the ones used are published by the Nationwide Building Society) to the April 2000 valuations to bring them up to date. The balance sheet valuation of all housing assets at March 2004 was £290,468,000.
- 3.22 Last year it was reported to this Committee that a full revaluation of housing assets will be carried out as soon as resources allow. The full valuation is currently scheduled for March 2005 (for reporting in 2005/06) in accordance with the agreed 5-year rolling programme of revaluations of all Council property. As the housing assets represent such a significant proportion of the Council's asset base the Valuer has agreed to bring forward the full revaluation of housing assets by one year i.e. a valuation date of 31 March 2004 for reporting in the 2004/05 accounts.

Accounting Issues

- 3.23 Some of the entries in the accounts are very technical. This is particularly the case for capital accounts. Entries here often relate to the statutory capital financing system for local authorities and the interaction of this with the system for accounting for capital. The result can seem confusing, even to practitioners. However, the entries are necessary to give effect to the rules affecting local authorities and to allow, in particular, fixed assets to be shown on the balance sheet in accordance with accepted valuation principles.

Contingent Liabilities

- 3.24 For the first time a number of contingent liabilities are set out in the Statement (see pages 5 and 6). In accounting terms a contingent liability is defined as either:
- A possible obligation that arises from past events and whose existence will be confirmed only by the occurrence of one or more uncertain future events not wholly within the Council's control; or

- A present obligation that arises from past events but is not recognised because
 1. It is not probable that a transfer of economic benefits will be required to settle the obligation; or
 2. The amount of the obligation cannot be measured with sufficient reliability.
- 3.25 Members will recognise that assurance over the outcome of the identified issues cannot currently be given. Officers will report to the relevant Committee if the status of the potential liabilities changes.

Status of the Statement of Accounts

- 3.26 The statements are in their final form. There will inevitably be a number of drafting and minor amendments. However, there is no intention to make any further significant amendments, therefore avoiding the need for re-submission to this Committee.

4. The Statements

- 4.1 The Financial Review gives a brief explanation of the financial activities of the Council in 2003/04. An explanation of the purpose of the main accounting statements is given at the head of each statement. The statements are supported by a multitude of notes and supporting information.

- 4.2 The net cost of services in the Consolidated Revenue Account is different to that reported in the General Fund Summary reported to this Committee on 3 June. The differences are the result of the approaches the Council has traditionally adopted in setting and managing its budgets, and the formal requirements of preparing consolidated final accounts. A reconciliation of the two statements is given in Appendix 'F'.

5. Schedule of Assets

- 5.1 As previously requested by Members, an abbreviated schedule of assets is given in Appendix 'G'. Members' attention is drawn to the valuation note provided at the end of the Schedule that sets out the basis of the valuation.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 came into force on 1 April 2003. The Regulations require Members to approve the Statement of Accounts by a resolution of a Committee or full Council as soon as is reasonably practical. The deadline for this approval is 31 August 2004 for the 2003/04 Statement of Accounts. This deadline will be brought forward to 30 June for the 2005/06 Statement of Accounts.
- 6.2 The Regulations require the Member presiding at the meeting to sign and date the Statement of Accounts to indicate the Committee's approval (see page 19 of the Statement)
- 6.3 The Regulations also require the Director of Finance to sign and date the Statement of Accounts to certify that it presents fairly the financial position of the Council at the end of the year and its income and expenditure (also on page 19).
- 6.4 Authorities are required to publish a Statement of Accounts as soon as reasonably possible after the audit is concluded. In any event they must be published by 30 November 2004 (this date moves forward to 30 September for the 2005/06 Statement of Accounts), even if the audit has not been concluded. The Regulations do not define what constitutes publication but the intention is to have a stock of printed copies (including a copy at libraries in the Borough) and a copy on the Council web site.
- 6.5 The Statement of Accounts has to be published with the audit certificate and opinion and a copy of any advisory notices issued. If publication takes place before the conclusion of the audit (as it invariably will because of the time taken to complete the external audit) there must be a declaration and explanation of the fact that an opinion had not been given at the date of publication.

- 6.6 The Regulations require authorities to advertise that the audit has been concluded and that the Statement of Accounts is available for inspection by electors. If the auditor has required a material amendment to the Statement of Accounts since their initial publication, an explanation of the required amendments must accompany the audited Statement.
- 6.7 The Regulations also set out the arrangements for advertising the rights of electors to question auditors and inspect the accounts and supporting documents.
7. Resource Implications
- 7.1 In recent years there has been a large number of additional statutory and profession-led disclosures and explanations required to support the Statement of Accounts. The statement for 2003/04 runs to 73 pages. In 2002/03 it was 57 pages long. Five years ago (1999/2000) it ran to only 48 pages. The additional disclosures and explanations primarily relate to the valuation of capital assets, supporting information for the HRA, and for 2003/04, pension fund accounting and the statement on internal control.
- 7.2 The much advanced production timetable for the approval and publication of the Statement of Accounts adds a great deal of concentrated work within the Accountancy Section. The Section has managed to cope with this additional workload by planning the production process and bringing forward the dates that information is required from Budget Managers. It should be recognised that this has led to an intensive three-month period of work for the Accountancy Section, in not only closing and preparing the accounts, but managing their day to day workloads. Without the benefit of the current stable and experienced staffing complement in the Section, there is no doubt that more resources would have been required to meet the workload and timetable demands.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

the Statement of Accounts for the financial year 2003/04 be approved.

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom: A Statement of Recommended Practice (CIPFA).
Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 – Statutory Instrument and Guidance Circular; ODPM Circular 04/2003

10. POOLEY GREEN LEVEL CROSSING (DTS)
(Ref: Minutes of Planning Committee, 20 March 2002, page 952, para. 646)
1. Purpose of Report
- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the results of monitoring at the Pooley Green level crossing following the replacement of the automatic half barriers with full width barriers operated by signallers at Feltham via CCTV.**
- 1.2 **Transportation Planning issues are for Economic Development Committee following comment by Planning Committee. To avoid this matter waiting until September, the Chairmen of both those Committees have agreed that this matter can be considered at this meeting under the Scheme of Delegation.**
- 1.3 **The matter has come forward at the request of Councillor A. Alderson.**
2. Background Information
- 2.1 The Pooley Green level crossing is in Vicarage Road, Egham, approximately 650m north-east of Egham Station.
- 2.2 Officers reported to the Planning Committee on 20 March 2002 that Railtrack had applied to the HM Inspector of Railways (HMIR), on behalf of the Secretary of State, for a Level

Crossings Order to allow the installation of new full width barriers to replace the existing half barriers.

- 2.3 On 4 October 2000, a bus was driven onto the level crossing and forced to stop by the traffic congestion in front of it. The stationary bus was hit by a train and carried along the line. Fortunately the passengers had left the bus and none of the train's occupants were injured.
- 2.4 After this incident Railtrack monitored the crossing and found that, when the road was congested, vehicles regularly drove onto the crossing without ensuring that they could drive off the other side.
- 2.5 The existing 'half-width' barriers were lowered automatically when an approaching train was detected. The HMIR considered this to be unsafe and Railtrack proposed the new 'full-width' barriers, which would be monitored with CCTV and operated from the signal box at Feltham.
- 2.6 Railtrack had stated that, due to the associated operating and signalling systems, the full width barriers would be closed for road traffic for a total of between 40 and 45 minutes per hour at peak times, instead of about 10 minutes per hour with the existing barriers.

3. Representations to the Level Crossing Order

- 3.1 Several individuals and organisations were involved in the consultation process before the new barriers were installed. These included the local Borough and County Council Members, the MP for Runnymede and Weybridge, Surrey Police, Surrey Fire and Rescue, Surrey Ambulance, the Highways Agency, local bus operators, Egham Chamber of Commerce, Surrey County Council's Local Transportation Director, Passenger Transport and Traffic and Safety Group Officers, the Egham and the Thorpe Ward Residents' Associations and some other businesses and local residents. All of these consultees were concerned at the effect that the increased barrier down time would have on traffic, pedestrians and businesses in Egham. The Borough Council submitted representations opposing the barrier proposals. Surrey County Council also made representations expressing concerns that Railtrack had not adequately considered the alternatives or the effect that the proposals would have on the highway.
- 3.2 The Highways Agency also sent representations to the HMIR. The Agency commissioned a consultant to assess the likely effects of the new barriers on the local highway network. The consultant concluded that the increased 'barrier-down' time would cause increased queue lengths at the level crossing and that the changes would be potentially detrimental to the safe and efficient operation of the trunk road network. Philip Hammond, the MP for Runnymede and Weybridge, raised the issue in the House of Commons as an Adjournment Debate on 6 March 2002.

4. Transport Impact Assessment

- 4.1 The HMIR instructed Railtrack to commission a consultant to carry out a Road Transport Impact Assessment in order to predict the effects on the highway network of the increased 'barrier down' time as a result of the new barriers.
- 4.2 The report looked at alternative measures and concluded that it would not be possible to bridge or tunnel the crossing due to limited space and its situation, or to provide any effective highway improvements due to the significant length of queues and the limited highway land available. The report suggested signing an alternative route. However, as the other level crossings in the vicinity are equally congested, there is no feasible alternative route. An alternative route would not, in any case, solve the problem for bus services. The report also suggested minor traffic management measures to solve local problems such as 'Keep Clear' markings. Minor measures such as these are unlikely to have a significant effect in solving the congestion problems.
- 4.3 Neither Railtrack nor the consultant reported having considered changes to the train services as a possible solution.
- 4.4 The consultant's Transport Impact Assessment report concluded that although the proposed barrier arrangement would exacerbate the extensive queuing that occurred at the level

crossing in peak hours, the changes were necessary as the existing automated half barrier level crossing operation compromised both rail and highway safety to an unacceptable level.

5. HMIR Report and the Level Crossing Order

5.1 Having considered the safety issues, the representations and the Transport Assessment Report, the HMIR, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport, gave Railtrack the authority to install the full width barriers.

5.2 The report explained the three possible outcomes from the process:-

1. The level crossing Order would be made without change as requested by the crossing operator, after consideration of safety, legal issues and representations received; or
2. The level crossing Order would be made with changes to that requested by the crossing operator, after consideration of the technical, safety, legal issues and representations received; or
3. The Order would be referred to the Secretary of State for consideration where the HMRI considered that it would be inappropriate to make the Order.

5.3 In this case, the HMRI recommended that the Order be made with changes to the draft Order proposed by Railtrack. The Order was made on 16 August 2002 and came into force on 26 August 2002.

5.4 The changes to the draft Order included:

- Automatic, rather than manual, raising of the barriers to be the normal method to assist in minimising 'down-time'.
- Railtrack to formally instruct their signallers on minimising delays to road users. It also required Railtrack to formally monitor and record 'barrier-down' times, and take corrective action if required. The level crossing was to be fitted with a black box recorder that can be used for such monitoring.
- Railtrack to advise relevant local authorities if there were significant increases to the current levels of train services planned (over and above that in place on the date that the Order was signed). This excludes temporary or emergency situations.

5.5 Railtrack installed a substantial part of the electrical and CCTV equipment during June 2002 and completed the barrier installation and commissioning in August 2002.

6. Monitoring

6.1 Railtrack originally announced their proposals when the Borough Council still had an Agency Agreement with Surrey County Council to manage the highways in Runnymede. The Agreement ended in March 2002 and it became the County Council's responsibility to monitor the road traffic and report back. Railtrack provided the County Council with £10,000 towards the cost of installing road traffic flow and queue monitoring equipment to check the extent of the resulting congestion and compare it with the predictions in the Transport Assessment report.

6.2 The County Council stated that it would be several months before the monitoring equipment was installed and for sufficient data to be collected and draw conclusions.

6.3 As required by the Level Crossing Order, Railtrack also installed equipment to monitor the level crossing 'barrier-down' times at Pooley Green to check the actual times against those previously predicted.

6.4 Railtrack also agreed to install equipment to monitor the level crossing 'barrier-down' times at Pooley Green to check the actual times against those previously predicted.

6.5 Since the barrier installation Railtrack has become Network Rail and some of the key staff that were involved with the barrier installation have moved to other jobs or left the company.

Consequently, it has been difficult to obtain the 'barrier down' time information. The most recent information was supplied by Network Rail in September 2003 and covered the period between 22 to 28 June 2003.

6.6 In summary these figures are :-

Figures recorded on seven consecutive days (22-28 June 2003)

Monday to Friday

05.00 - 09.00 average downtime per hour is 16.5 minutes with an average of 7 operations.

16.00 - 20.00 average downtime per hour is 21.5 minutes with an average of 9 operations.

On a weekday, over one hour, the maximum amount of time that the barrier remained closed to traffic per hour was a total of 24.13 minutes, this was over 10 operations.

This is compared to an average total downtime per hour of 10 minutes before the upgrading and the prediction during the planning stage for the post-upgrade of between 30 and 40 minutes total downtime per hour.

6.7 Surrey County Council has supplied information relating to traffic flows and queue lengths at the level crossing. Long queues already occurred at the level crossing before the barriers were changed. This was a factor in the bus accident that occurred in October 2000. The consultant commissioned by Railtrack before the alterations predicted that the new barriers would increase the queue lengths.

6.8 The County Council's queue length figures when the barriers are down, after the new barrier installation, show the following :-

- South side of the crossing (vehicles travelling to Egham)
a.m. increased queue length as predicted.
p.m. increased queue length. Worse than before the alterations but not as bad as predicted.
- North side of the crossing (vehicles travelling away from Egham)
a.m - Road full. (queue stretches back to the junction with The Avenue/High Street and into these roads). This is worse than predicted.
p.m. – Road full, as predicted.

6.9 All queues normally discharged through the crossing when the barrier was next raised.

6.10 The main issue from the drivers' perspective is the amount of time that they have to wait at the crossing. Queues obviously accumulate during the time that the barrier is down and the drivers most affected are the ones at the front of the queue. As shown in 6.4 above, these drivers have to wait considerably longer than they did before the new barriers were installed.

6.11 Some of the queue lengths are not as long as was predicted. There are two possible reasons for this. It is likely that some drivers have diverted away from the area but there are several possible routes over a wide area and the extent of the diverted traffic would be impossible to quantify. Also, the predicted queue lengths were based on barrier down times of between 30 and 40 minutes but the monitoring figures show that the actual down times have not reached this level.

7. Counsel's Opinion

7.1 The Borough Council sought Counsel's opinion on the matter. Counsel considered that the Railway Inspector had made a number of errors in his letter that set out the reasoning behind the making of the Order.

7.2 In particular, the Inspector had not taken proper account of the impact on the highway network as he misunderstood the law in relation to this issue. The Traffic Impact Assessment undertaken on behalf of Railtrack prior to the Order being made was also considered flawed in some aspects of the conclusions upon which the Inspector relied.

- 7.3 Counsel considered that, for a number of reasons, a challenge by way of a Judicial Review would be unlikely to succeed. However, Counsel considered that the Variation or Revocation of the Order was possible provided that the results of the monitoring proved that the effects of the barriers on the local highway network, and/or local traders, were unacceptable.
8. Feedback from Consultees following the New Barrier Installation
- 8.1 Immediately after the new barrier installation a few comments were received from individual members of the public. These were mainly concerned with the length of time that they had to wait in cars and on foot at the level crossing and complaining at the length of time that they have waited when no train has passed. Letters with similar comments have been published in local newspapers.
- 8.2 The Egham Chamber of Commerce complained in an article in a local newspaper about the effects of the new barriers. The Chamber Chairman reiterated the Chamber's concerns about the loss of trade and the effects of congestion in a letter to the Council.
- 8.3 All of the consultees were asked to provide feedback to the Council on the effects of the new barriers but none has provided any evidence or information since that time.
9. Conclusions
- 9.1 The monitoring information suggests that drivers and pedestrians have to wait at the crossing longer now than they did before the barriers were changed. In some cases the queues are less than predicted. The barrier down times per hour have not reached the 30 to 40 minute per hour duration that Railtrack originally predicted and it is likely that some drivers have found alternative routes.
- 9.2 Before the barriers were changed there were queues at the level crossing in peak time. Although the length of the queues has increased the queues generally clear at each opening of the barriers.
- 9.3 Consultees such as the emergency services, bus service operators and businesses that, before the barriers were changed, were concerned that the new barriers would delay their services have not told Council that they have had problems since the new barriers were installed. No evidence has been provided to indicate that the new barriers have significantly affected the prosperity of the town by deterring businesses or their customers for operating there.
- 9.4 Replacement of the automatically operated half barriers with manually operated full width barriers has significantly reduced the likelihood of vehicles being trapped between the barriers when they are lowered and has prevented vehicles being able to manoeuvre around the barriers when they are down, which were the causes of accidents at the level crossing.
- 9.5 Counsel advised that the Variation or Revocation of the Order was possible provided that the results of the monitoring proved that the effects of the barriers on the local highway network, and/or local traders, were unacceptable. Considering the information available following the barrier installation, although the effects on the local highway network and/or trades is more detrimental than before, it is questionable whether it could be described as unacceptable.
- 9.6 Considering the likely cost and extent of the work involved installing the new barriers it is unlikely that Network Rail would be required to remove the new barriers and restore the old one.
- 9.7 It is possible that rail service operators will want to increase the number of train services using the level crossing in future and the Level Crossing Order required Network Rail to advise relevant local authorities if there are significant increases to the current levels of train services planned and to formally instruct their signallers on minimising delays to road users, to formally monitor and record 'barrier-down' times, and to take corrective action if required.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

- i) Surrey County Council be requested, as Transport Authority, to require Network Rail to periodically demonstrate that they are continuing to instruct signallers on minimising delays to road users in accordance with the Level Crossings Order; and**
- ii) Surrey County Council be asked to remind Network Rail that they are required to advise relevant local authorities if there are significant increases to the current levels of train services planned.**

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

None stated

11. MEMBERS' COMPUTER SUPPORT (CEO)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to bring Councillors up to date with the current situation regarding computer support for Members and to recommend the way support should be provided in future.**

2. Background Information

- 2.1 It is the Council's policy to enable Councillors to use information technology compatible with that used by the rest of the Authority to carry out their duties as effectively and efficiently as possible.
- 2.2 Progress in achieving this goal has fallen into a number of stages:
- 2.2.1 Initially it was felt inappropriate that the Council should provide hardware and support. Councillors were allocated a computer allowance that they could use to provide whatever facilities they thought necessary.
- 2.2.2 This was later amended to offer an alternative whereby the Council supplied a computer for Councillors as an alternative to the allowance and a degree of training was provided
- 2.2.3 These arrangements were superseded by the present scheme, the key features of which are:
- every Councillor is offered a desktop computer
 - a broadband link is provided to Members homes where possible
 - a training programme is offered covering all aspects of computer use as identified by Councillors
 - support is provided by a member of staff dedicated to both supporting and developing the use of computers by Councillors.
- 2.3 The present scheme was put in place in 2003 as an 18 month trial that would be used to increase Councillor computer usage and provide information that could be used to determine how the long term support of Councillors should be organised.

3. Objectives

- 3.1 The objectives of the computer provision are set out below:
- to enable Councillors to benefit from the investment in technology made by the Council as a whole;
 - to provide Councillors with the information and facilities they require to undertake their role most effectively and efficiently; and
 - to meet Government targets for the use of information technology for Councillors and thus protect the Council's 'excellent' status

- 3.2 For Council staff, the major features of IT usage that have been implemented and are ongoing lie in the following areas:
- the universal use of email as the preferred means of communication internally and with other agencies and, to a lesser extent, with the public;
 - standardised software for normal business tasks (ie Microsoft Office programs and Adobe Acrobat);
 - increasing use of the Document Imaging and Workflow systems to potentially allow the delivery of all information to the one Workstation;
 - a standardised, secure means of working remotely that is available for staff and suppliers;
 - use of browser based front ends to applications so that all departmental and corporate systems are moving towards a predictable look and feel.
- 3.3 At the outset of the present phase of Councillor support there was a target to move all Councillors to the position where they had access to the facilities outlined in paragraph 3.2.

4. Progress

4.1 The following progress has been made:

- By the end of the 2003/04 Municipal Year, all Councillors had been moved to the position where they could be contacted electronically. This contact is at present a mixture of solutions with some Councillors using their own hardware, some their own Internet connection and some their own email addresses. Appendix 'H' gives a breakdown of the situation in May 2004.
- All Councillors have been offered training in a number of areas. These courses have been run at all times of the day including evenings to accommodate Councillors other commitments. A programme of the training that has taken place is shown in Appendix 'I'.

4.2 A number of issues have been identified in the course of the programme:

- i) where Councillors use their own equipment supporting their Council usage becomes very complex and the lines between what is support for the Council's benefit and what is support for private usage becomes difficult to define;
- ii) Similarly, integrating a Council computer into another network used by a Councillor can be time consuming and expensive in time and resources;
- iii) training is most effective when the Councillors are using a standardised PC with a known configuration;
- iv) While highly cost effective, the use of desktop PC's does pose problems with regard to space as far as some Councillors are concerned. The kit is not easily brought into the Civic Offices if a hardware problem arises. Experience elsewhere suggests that laptop computers resolve many of these issues;
- v) Having a dedicated support resource is essential. The issues that arise concerning Councillors and their support needs are significantly different from the requirements of staff for a number of reasons:
 - all users are remotely based
 - they are not using a standard PC on the Council's local area network
 - they do not make heavy use of the Council's major production databases and servers
 - they receive different training from staff
 - they have communications configuration issues not shared with LAN users
 - their priorities are difficult to synchronise with production priorities for staff.

5. Options Available

- 5.1 As part of the evaluation of the options available, all the District and Borough Councils in Surrey and Surrey County Council were contacted to see how Member support was handled. The results of this fact-finding exercise are shown in Appendix 'J'.
- 5.2 From this table it can be seen that the priority given to Member support varies around the county and a number of solutions are in place. These are:
- i) Externalisation of support. While this has been put in place in one Council, Spelthorne, this has only been a partial solution in that the agreement with the supplier only covers part of the total support required by Councillors. The Spelthorne contract provides every Councillor with a standard PC, printer and connection to the Council. Installation of this agreed configuration and its support is part of the contract but all additional support, training etc. is chargeable at a daily rate.
 - ii) Support provided by the Council's IT Help Desk. This seems to be the preferred solution adopted in 7 cases. Where this is provided it is a telephone support service with no provision for supporting Councillors in their homes. Also this approach can lead to severe prioritisation issues for the Help Desk as the normal classification of calls would rank a system failure on a core system with staff unable to work as a high priority and place the failure of a single PC in a lower category.
 - iii) No support whatsoever. This is the practice in one Council.
 - iv) Support by a dedicated resource co-ordinating suppliers and in-house resources to ensure delivery of a service appropriate to Councillors needs. This is essentially the model tested in Runnymede over the trial period. Guildford uses this approach with great success and a similar approach was taken in Surrey Heath for a period of 12 months with some success but the post was not refilled when the member of staff moved on.
 - v) Joint working with other Councils. Surrey Heath has been approached with a view to it reappointing a support officer and pooling this resource with Runnymede. However, as Surrey Heath is currently carrying out an extensive internal reorganisation, it will not be possible to progress negotiations on the possibilities of joint working in the near future.

6. Resource Implications

- 6.1 The present post of Councillor Support Officer was created as a fixed term contract. It is proposed that this post be made permanent using the revised Job Description shown in Appendix 'K'.
- 6.2 It is clear that the nature of the support required by Councillors is very variable. When new initiatives are being pursued it is a full time task carrying out all the upgrading, training and implementation tasks and indeed requires additional resources which are taken from the general Council IT support. At other times the workload is much lighter, involving mostly trouble shooting.
- 6.3 It is therefore proposed that the post holder combines Councillor support activities with providing project management support for the Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) programme. This programme will be completed by the end of the financial year 2005/6 at which time the job description and the need for a full time post will be reviewed.
- 6.4 The salary for the IEG element of the job is a proper charge to the IEG grant provided by the Government for the sole purpose of implementing electronic government. Thus, one third of the present cost of Councillor support provision would no longer fall on the General Fund, representing a saving of some £10,000 in salary costs over the eighteen month period.
- 6.5 It is proposed that the salary paid for the project management part of the job would be on one scale higher than that of the Councillor support element to reflect the more specialist skills required.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 A new set of objectives for Councillors IT support now needs to be established following the fulfilment of the targets set for the 18 months trial project. The present arrangements form the basis for future cost effective delivery of the service. Officers propose that the achievements to date be consolidated and the delivery targeted in a slightly different way, learning from the experience gained in the past year.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that –

- i) the post of Councillor Support Officer be made permanent using the job description attached at Appendix 'K';**
- ii) the IEG project management elements of the job be funded from the IEG grant at a cost of £4,000 in 2004/05 and £8,000 in 2005/06; and**
- iii) upon completion of the IEG work at 31 March 2006, the duties of the post be reviewed.**

(TO RECOMMEND)

Background Papers

None.

12. INFORMATION STRATEGY MEMBER WORKING GROUP - MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Information Strategy Member Working Group held on 3 June 2004 are attached at Appendix 'L'.

(FOR INFORMATION)

Background Papers

None.

13. TELEPHONE SYSTEM - HARDWARE REPLACEMENT (CEO/DAL)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the need to replace parts of the telephone system hardware earlier than had been anticipated.**

2. Background Information

- 2.1 The Council's present telephone system, an Alcatel 4400, was installed in 1996. Part of the hardware provided is a rectifier and battery pack. These provide emergency power should the electricity supply to the switch be interrupted.

3. Report

- 3.1 When the hardware replacement programme was put forward in 2003 it was anticipated that the rectifier and battery pack, although beyond the end of its anticipated life, would be serviceable for another 12 months.
- 3.2 However, recent testing has shown that it has now failed and needs urgent replacement. The unit will not now function correctly and maintain uninterrupted power supply to the telephone system.
- 3.3 It is therefore proposed that a replacement unit be funded from the capital provision for the programme hardware replacement in advance of the late summer upgrades that usually take place.

4. Resource Implications

4.1 The cost of the new rectifier and 8 hour battery pack from the supplier of the Alcatel 4400 are as follows:

Hardware	£4,364
Installation and testing	1,290
Total	£5,654

4.2 The price reflects the level of discounts normally received by the Council. It is essential that the unit be properly installed and tested and this requires a level of knowledge of the switch and its configuration that could not be readily obtained from an alternative supplier. It is therefore proposed that the Council purchases the unit and its installation and testing from the supplier Nextiraone. This will require the waiver of the requirement in Contract Standing Orders to seek competitive tenders or quotations.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that –

- i) a replacement rectifier and battery pack be purchased from, and installed and tested by, Nextiraone, the funding of £5,654 to be met from the capital provision for the 2004/05 hardware replacement programme; and**
- ii) Contract Standing Order C2.1 be waived in view of the need to use the supplier of the existing equipment.**

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

None.

14. ASSOCIATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF RUNNYMEDE (AIR) - FUNDING (DF)
(Ref: Minutes of Executive Committee, 2 August 2000, page 361, para 209; and Housing and Community Services Committee, September 2001, page 290, para 225)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of this report is to recommend a temporary advance to AIR (the Association for the Improvement of Runnymede) in 2004/05 in order to support its administrative costs until payments for schemes are received from various environmental trusts.**

2. Background Information

2.1 The Association for the Improvement of Runnymede was established in 2000 as an independent environmental body in order to utilise the landfill tax credits scheme to the benefit of local community projects. The Council has paid the following amounts of grant aid to support the cost of administration.

	£
2000/01	13,000
2001/02	7,500
2002/03	5,000
2003/04	5,000
2004/05	5,000
	<u>£35,500</u>

2.2 The most recent payment of £5,000 was made in April.

3. Report

3.1 AIR expects to receive contributions of £12,607 towards its administrative costs from several environmental trusts during the 2004/05 financial year. The contributions are based on a

proportion of the scheme costs that are being supported and will be paid on completion of each scheme. Unfortunately, there have been unavoidable delays on all of the schemes and the earliest financial contribution is not anticipated before September. The Council is involved with three of the schemes, as follows:-

Project	Grant to be paid to AIR by	£
Thorpe Green Car Park	Hanson	350
Warwick Avenue	Biffaward	2,171
Walton Leigh	Biffaward	2,902
		5,423

- 3.2 AIR started its financial year (on 1 April 2004) with a balance of £1,191 and received the Council's grant of £5,000 in April. The organisation's administration costs are approximately £900 per month, which means that AIR has sufficient funds to cover its budget for the first half of the year. However, any further delays in the completion of the approved schemes, and therefore receipt of financial contributions from the environmental trusts, could precipitate a cashflow problem. AIR has therefore asked if the Council would be prepared to advance up to £5,000 on the understanding that this would be repaid when it receives sufficient financial contributions.
- 3.3 Officers support this request. AIR has played a pivotal role in attracting money from environmental trusts to support projects in the Runnymede area. The organisation will be paid £12,607 when the current approved schemes are completed and the only uncertainty is the timing of these completions. Under the circumstances, Officers recommend that the Committee authorises the payment of up to £5,000 to AIR in the event that it encounters cashflow difficulties later in the year. If a payment proves necessary, this could be financed from the provision for Position Statement Initiatives, in the expectation that this will be repaid during the course of the following twelve months.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

- i) a payment of up to £5,000 be made to AIR, to be refunded when AIR receives funding for environmental schemes from the environmental trusts; and**
- ii) this be funded from the provision for Position Statement Initiatives.**

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

None stated

15. COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS FOR PENSIONERS (DF)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of this report is to consider a request to apply a discount to the Council Tax bills paid by pensioners.**

2. Background Information

2.1 The Local Government Act 2003 gives billing authorities like Runnymede the power to reduce the Council Tax liability for particular individuals or for classes of individuals. When these new powers were considered at the meeting on 8 January 2004, the Committee decided that it would consider the merits of awarding a discount as each case arises.

3. Report

3.1 A request has been received from a Council Tax payer in Row Town for the increase in the Council Tax billed to pensioners to be reduced to the rate of inflation. This has been prompted by the publicity given to the proposals floated by Kent County Council to promote a similar scheme amongst the Kent districts which, in the event, was not pursued.

- 3.2 The overall Council Tax rose by 6 per cent this year. The charges for a Band D property are shown below:-

<u>2003/04</u>	<u>2004/05</u>	<u>Increase</u>
£1,072.08	£1,136.88	£64.80

- 3.3 The applicant does not state the criteria which he considers the Council should adopt to determine eligibility for a discount. It has been assumed that his demand would be satisfied if eligibility were restricted to those dwellings occupied solely by senior citizens.
- 3.4 According to the Mid-2002 population estimates, there are 12,667 people in the Runnymede area aged 65 or over (i.e. 16 per cent of the population). There is no information available to identify precisely how many dwellings these people occupy. The only data held by the Council that relates pensioners to households is the information that is provided when individuals apply for Benefit. Officers consider that a reasonable estimate of the number of dwellings affected would be 7,000.
- 3.5 If the Council Tax increase had been restricted to the rate of inflation (2.8% at December 2003), then this would have resulted in an increase of £30.02 at Band D. Assuming that pensioners occupy on average a Band D property, this means that the cost of discounting pensioners' bills to the rate of inflation would be £243,000 in 2004/05. This excludes the cost of administering the scheme.
- 3.6 If the Council were to decide to exercise its discretion to apply this discount to properties occupied by pensioners, the legislation requires that the entire cost has to be met from the Council's General Fund.
- 3.7 In considering the merits of awarding a discount to all pensioners, Officers believe that the Committee will need to satisfy itself that it is justified in treating pensioners more advantageously than any other class of taxpayer. Clearly, there are pensioners on fixed incomes who find it difficult to meet above inflationary increases in their bills. Equally, there are other pensioners who enjoy a better standard of living than other members of the community. The Committee will need to decide if there is a case for awarding a discount regardless of income.
- 3.8 Pensioners on low incomes are entitled to claim Council Tax Benefit, although the low savings limit of £16,000 does mean that many people are not eligible. The Council Tax Benefit caseload is 3,450, of which 1,862 are pensioners. 463 of these cases are couples, so the total number of pensioners receiving a reduction in their bills through the award of Benefit is 2,345 out of the total population over 65 of 12,667 (i.e. 18.5%).
- 3.9 A further relevant consideration this year is the announcement made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his budget statement that households with someone aged 70 or over will receive a £100 payment to help with their Council Tax bills in 2004/05. This payment is being made with their pension.

THE COMMITTEE IS ASKED -

whether or not it wishes to reduce the Council Tax liability of pensioners.

(TO RECOMMEND)

Background Papers

None stated

16. LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME - NEW INTERNAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCEDURE (CEO)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval to the appointment of a "specified person" for the resolution of disputes under the Local Government Pension Scheme.**

2. Background Information

- 2.1 The Occupational Pension Schemes (Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure) Regulations 1996 (SI.1996 No.1270), made under Section 50 of the Pensions Act 1995, required Occupational Pension Schemes such as the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) to make arrangements for the resolution of disagreements between the Managers of the Scheme on the one hand, and on the other, active, deferred and pensioner members, their widows, widowers and dependants, their nominated representatives and prospective members.
- 2.2 Regulations 99 to 104 of the LGPS Regulations 1997 provided for the Scheme's arrangements in this respect, and Regulations 97 and 98 (initial determinations of questions) were also relevant.
- 2.3 Regulations 27 to 32 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations 2004 (SI No.2004/573) make important changes to the arrangements.
- 2.4 The main features of the new arrangements, which came into force on 1 June 2004 are:-
- responsibility for the first stage of the procedure (arrangements for the determination of disputes) is to be vested in a specified person, typically, the person or body who considered and made the initial decision against which the dispute has arisen; and
 - the responsibility for second stage determinations falls to the relevant administering Authority. This removes the former role undertaken at this stage in the process by the Secretary of State in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).
- 2.5 These new arrangements essentially bring the LGPS system more into line with the intention of the Pensions Act, i.e. that pension disputes should be resolved internally before progressing to an external, independent consideration by the Pensions Ombudsman.

3. Report

- 3.1 Employing Authorities are required to appoint a "specified person" to hear appeals against decisions they make, or fail to make, that affect their employee's or their dependant's LGPS benefits. Employers must also decide who will hear appeals in respect of compensation benefits under the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2000. In the event that at some point in the future the Secretary of State is no longer responsible for hearing such appeals, employers are also invited to consider now who should hear injury allowance appeals under the Local Government (Discretionary Payments) Regulations 1996. A flow diagram is shown at Appendix 'M'.
- 3.2 The Local Government Pension Scheme and associated Regulations are complex and Officers believe that there is no-one sufficiently competent within the Authority who would be appropriate to undertake the role of the "specified person".
- 3.3 The administering Authority for the LGPS, Surrey County Council, in recognising the difficulties that will face many Scheme employers, such as District Councils, have offered the services of their Pensions Manager to hear such appeals. Their letter is reproduced at Appendix 'N'. Officers welcome this helpful offer and it is likely that other District Councils in Surrey will have a similar response. This approach would bring both a level of consistency and expertise to the process which could not be achieved by individual employers.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 Under the Local Government Pension Scheme internal resolution of disputes procedures, the Authority is required to appoint a "specified person" to resolve internal disputes.

5. UNISON Views

- 5.1 The Runnymede branch of UNISON has commented as follows:

"In view of the expertise needed to settle such disputes, it seems sensible to accept the offer being made by Surrey County Council's Pensions Manager.

If any UNISON member has such a dispute to be resolved, they will be advised by a representative from the Pensions Unit at UNISON's Head Office and will be accompanied at all stages in the process, should that be their wish.

UNISON would like to see a robust monitoring process in place as is suggested in the ODPM guidance to ensure transparency and accountability."

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

the Pensions Manager at Surrey County Council be appointed as the "specified person" for hearing and resolving internal disputes in this Authority in connection with the Local Government Pension Scheme, the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2000 and the Local Government (Discretionary Payments) Regulations 1996.

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

Local Government Pension Scheme England and Wales New Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure - A Practitioner's Guide (with effect from 1 June 2004) (ODPM)

17. MORTGAGE SUBSIDY SCHEME (CEO)
(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, 6 November 2003, page 923, para. 439)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval to the introduction of a Mortgage Subsidy Scheme as part of the recruitment incentive package.**

2. Background Information

- 2.1 In recognition of the high cost of residential property in the local area, and as an aid to staff recruitment, the Policy and Resources Committee approved in 1987 the introduction of a Staff Equity Sharing Scheme. The Scheme worked on the basis that the employee would select a property and the Council would purchase the freehold of the property and then grant the employee a 99 year lease for which the employee would pay a sum representing the value of the share he/she purchased. He/she would pay rent on the remaining share. For new staff who are moving into rented accommodation, a Rental Equalisation Scheme was introduced in 1989 which meets the difference in the cost of rented accommodation on a reducing basis over 12 months.
- 2.2 Whilst the Rental Equalisation Scheme has proved popular over the years, the Staff Equity Sharing Scheme has only been used on a small number of occasions since its introduction. The attraction to the Council of the scheme was that although financial resources would be tied up in the property, ultimately, depending on the property market, there would be no net cost to the Council. It is believed that the notion of being only a part owner of a property has been a deterrent to a number of potential applicants who were already in the house market.
- 2.3 As part of the review of staff benefits, the Corporate Management Committee at its meeting in November 2003 asked Officers to investigate and report further on the possible replacement of the Staff Equity Share Scheme with a simple Mortgage Subsidy Scheme which offered support on a gradually reducing basis over a period of time, such payments being subject to repayment to the Council if the individual left the Council's service within a defined period.

3. Report

- 3.1 The high cost of housing in the local area remains a deterrent for many potential job applicants from outside the area and consequently recruitment is mainly limited to applicants already living within commutable distance of the Borough.
- 3.2 The introduction of a Mortgage Subsidy Scheme would potentially increase the availability of suitable applicants for vacant posts. This would be particularly useful in areas of skills shortage where the number of potential applicants is fairly restricted.
- 3.3 Mortgage Subsidy Schemes are in use in a number of other Surrey Authorities and have generally been found to be helpful in the recruitment of high quality staff.
- 3.4 A draft Scheme is detailed at Appendix 'O' for Members' consideration.
- 3.5 Funds have been identified nationally to assist key workers in obtaining accommodation but to date these schemes have been targeted at key workers employed by other agencies e.g. teachers, police, health staff and social workers, and not at this Council's staff.
- 3.6 A lot of pressure is being put on the Government to widen the current key worker definition. If this was to occur some of the Council's staff could become eligible for the growing number of key worker units being built in the county or to help through the Key Worker Living Programme (the replacement for the Starter Home Initiative). It is therefore proposed that the operation of this scheme be reviewed in the event that any of the Council's staff become eligible for assistance from other schemes.

4. Council Policy

- 4.1 This item is being brought for Members' consideration at the direction of the Corporate Management Committee in November 2003 and is in line with the following Council policies:-

- Personnel Philosophy and Objectives (Policy and Resources Committee 25 November 1992)
"We operate Personnel Policies and a remuneration package to recruit and retain high calibre staff";
- Personnel Strategy (Corporate Management Committee 2 October 2003)
"Attracting and keeping our valued staff by promoting the benefits of working for Runnymede - fair and competitive pay and benefits package";
- Leader's Position Statement 2004/05 (Council, November 2003)
"Involving, valuing, developing and rewarding our staff in their employment and providing a good, safe working environment".

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 The cost of the Scheme will vary according to the area from which the employee is moving and the type of property that is being purchased.
- 5.2 The Scheme, which operates over a four year period, would cost between £6,500 and £17,500 (at current mortgage rates) over the four year period. The extent to which the Scheme is taken up is an unknown quantity at this stage and Members would receive an annual update on usage and costs in the Annual Personnel Report.
- 5.3 The cost of the Scheme would be partly offset by reduced costs of re-advertising and greater effectiveness through higher quality appointments.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 Staff receiving assistance under the Mortgage Subsidy Scheme would be required to enter into an agreement drawn up by the Director of Administration and Leisure whereby the cost of such assistance would be recoverable by the Council in the event that the employee left the Council's service during the four year period that the Scheme operates.

7. UNISON Views

- 7.1 The Runnymede branch of UNISON comments as follows:

- 7.2 "The Branch Committee considers that although the proposed scheme is welcomed, it will, however, be of very limited benefit to new starters and would not significantly enhance the Council's recruitment incentives package. Complicated issues including mortgage interest fluctuations and potential basic disagreements over baseline valuations might preclude staff from taking up the scheme.

The Branch Committee urges the Council to extend the scheme in terms of the amounts on offer and its scope to include existing staff and not just potential recruits who can already afford their own homes.

Excluding potential new recruits from the scheme who have moved to the area with their partners appears to be inconsistent with the current thinking on achieving a work/life balance through having a holistic approach towards staff as well as attracting people to the area and to work in the public sector.

In a similar vein, the Council should be encouraging more junior staff to develop and stay in the area, which might include those in rented accommodation, school leavers and graduates who have not yet got onto the property ladder.

The Council might also like to consider joint working with other Surrey Authorities to produce a county-wide scheme. Partnerships often reduce costs while helping a greater number of people.

Therefore, although the new scheme is welcomed, UNISON considers that it could be developed to benefit a greater number of people."

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

- i) the Mortgage Subsidy Scheme detailed at Appendix 'O' be introduced; and**
- ii) a report on usage and costs of the Scheme and the requirement for any supplementary budgetary provision be submitted on an annual basis in the Annual Personnel Report.**

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

None

18. PERSONNEL SERVICES MEMBER WORKING GROUP - MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Personnel Services Member Working Group held on 25 May 2004 are attached at Appendix 'P'.

(FOR INFORMATION)

Background Papers

None

19. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT MEMBER WORKING GROUP - MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Local Government Act Member Working Group held on 5 May 2004 are attached at Appendix 'Q'.

(FOR INFORMATION)

Background Papers

None

20. WATERING OF HANGING BASKETS IN ADDLESTONE (DTS)
(Ref. Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, June 2003, page 23, para 47.)

1. **Purpose of Report**

1.1 **To seek Members' views as to whether a supplementary estimate should be approved for the watering of hanging baskets in Addlestone.**

2. **Background Information**

- 2.1 This matter would normally be the subject of an initial report to the Economic Development Committee with a recommendation, if appropriate, to this Committee for a supplementary estimate. However, in view of the need to determine this request as early in the Summer season as possible, the Chairmen of both the Economic Development Committee and this Committee have agreed to this Committee assuming all of the relevant functions.
- 2.2 Over the last two Summers, local traders and the Addlestone Chamber of Commerce have provided hanging baskets at first floor level above shop units throughout the town, these being in addition to the floral troughs and bedding provided by the Council's Parks department.
- 2.3 The baskets provided by the Chamber of Commerce are the small domestic type, which are moss lined; their impact is relatively small. These have proved to be expensive to maintain, as they require watering every day, sometimes twice a day in very hot weather. Last year there were 93 such baskets in Addlestone. The Parks department have advised against the use of this type and recommended a smaller number of larger commercial baskets, as provided elsewhere in the Borough. These allow for bigger floral displays, which have a greater impact, and they include a water reservoir that allows for less frequent watering.
- 2.4 In 2002, no provision for watering the smaller moss baskets had been made, and in order to prevent the display being spoiled, Officers arranged for a contractor to carry out daily watering, paid for from unallocated funds from the town centre maintenance budget.
- 2.5 Last year, the Chamber of Commerce requested a sum of £4,000 to water the hanging baskets and Members, being of the view that the display enhanced the appearance of Addlestone, agreed a supplementary estimate in June 2003.
- 2.6 The Committee emphasised, however, that the Chamber would be expected to devise some form of alternative arrangement in future years, which did not rely on public funding. To this end, it was suggested that the Chamber might consider combining its floral displays with those of the Council to avoid the need for two separate planting and maintenance regimes.

3. **Report**

- 3.1 A request has been received from the Addlestone Chamber of Commerce to again provide a sum of £4,000 to enable the watering of the hanging baskets. The Chamber have not approached Leisure staff with a view to providing combined displays, or the provision of more appropriate hanging baskets with water reservoirs, which reduce the need for daily watering.

4. **Council Policy**

- 4.1 The Leader's Position Statement indicates that the Council should play an effective role in enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors and provide an attractive environment for those who conduct their business in the Borough. The Council's other main vision is to maintain vigorous financial control of its affairs to keep to a minimum any additional call on Council Taxpayers.

5. **Resource Implications**

- 5.1 Current budgets for Runnymede in Bloom, highway shrubs and flower beds and town centre maintenance are fully spent each year. Funding to this level is not available within existing Leisure budgets.

- 5.2 If the Committee wish to support this request, then a supplementary estimate will be required. Members are reminded of the current programme of reduction in net revenue expenditure by the end of 2005/06.
- 5.3 At the Council meeting in March 2004, the recommendation of the Review Board was agreed that if Service Committees approve proposals beyond their Committee budget projections, they should be required, in the first instance, to identify compensating savings from within their own resources.
- 5.4 It should also be borne in mind that if such sums were made available to Addlestone, then equity would demand that a similar response should be given if an approach were to be received from the Chertsey and Egham Chambers.

THE COMMITTEE IS ASKED –

to determine whether a supplementary estimate is appropriate for this expenditure.

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

None

21. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

the press and public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following reports under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the reports in question would be likely to involve disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraphs 1, 5 and 7 of Part I of the Schedule 12A of the Act.

(TO RESOLVE)

PART II

Matters involving Exempt or Confidential Information in respect of which reports have not been made available for public inspection

a)	<u>Exempt Information</u>	<u>Paras</u>
22.	OFFICES FOR THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR - APPLICATION TO THE FUTURE BUILDERS FUND	7
23.	SICK PAY	1
24.	NON DOMESTIC RATES - APPLICATION FOR HARDSHIP RELIEF	5 and 7
25.	WRITE OFFS	7