

Runnymede Borough Council

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 5 December 2002, at 7.30 p.m.

in the Council Chamber

at the Civic Offices, Addlestone



Members of the Committee

Councillors G.B. Woodger (Chairman), J.M. Edwards (Vice-Chairman), D.P. Easton, R.K. Habgood, J.E. Haas, H.W.V. Meares, C.J. Norman, R. Pate, Mrs. E.E. Price and P.B. Tuley.

and all other Members for information

## AGENDA

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, Committee Section, Borough Secretary's and Leisure Services Department, Civic Offices, Station Road, Addlestone (Tel. Direct Line: 01932 425625).**
- iii) Agendas and Minutes are available on a subscription basis. For details, please ring Mr. B.A. Fleckney on 01932 425620.
- 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.

COMMITTEE SECTION



## **LIST OF MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **PART I**

#### **Matters in respect of which reports have been made available for public inspection**

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
1. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP	3
2. MINUTES	3
3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	3
4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	3
5. ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER	3
6. INTERNAL AUDIT	3
7. AIMS AND TARGETS – INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT	5
8. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTERLY UPDATE ON PROGRESS	6
9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT/EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2004 – CONSULTATION PAPER	6
10. BEST VALUE – DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT SERVICES SCOPING AND CHALLENGE REPORT	9
11. IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT STATEMENT	12
12. MATCHING IT SUPPORT TO CHANGING REQUIREMENTS	13
13. MEMBERS COMPUTING FACILITIES	22
14. SYSTEMS RESILIENCE	24
15. DETERMINATION OF COUNCIL'S TAX BASE FOR 2003/04	28
16. REFERENCE FROM LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE	28
17. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC	29

### **PART II**

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

a) Exempt Information

18. REFERENCES FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE	30
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b) Confidential Information

(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 7 November 2002 (attached at Appendix 'A').

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 take no further action unless the item in which they have an interest becomes the subject of debate, in which event the Member must leave the room, or refrain from voting, as may be appropriate according to the nature of the interest.

5. ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER (CEO)

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee, December 2001, page 667, para 418)

The Annual Audit letter is presented by the District Audit Service and reports upon various aspects of corporate governance, performance management and financial regulatory issues.

The letter (attached at Appendix 'B'), is in a somewhat different format than previous years and is shorter, focusing on key areas. The District Auditor, Stephen Taylor and the Audit Manager for Runnymede, Hassan Rohimun, will be present to introduce their report and answer questions from Members of the Committee.

**(FOR INFORMATION)**

Background Papers

None.

6. INTERNAL AUDIT (BT)

(Ref: Minutes of Corporate Management Committee July 2002 page 316, para. 156)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of this report is to:**

- **provide information on the 2003/2004 internal audit plan;**
- **update Members of any internal control issues arising from the first part of this year's audit coverage; and**
- **consider the need for, and benefits of an Audit Committee (an overdue target from Internal Audit's Best Value Improvement Plan).**

2. Background Information

2.1 The Council's Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 26 June 1996 approved a bi-annual reporting process whereby the Council is provided with assurances about the scope and effectiveness of internal audit in June and November of each year.

2.2 The reports in November have been used to report the audit coverage proposed for the forthcoming financial year.

3. The Audit Planning Process

- 3.1 A copy of the 2003/2004 audit plan is reproduced at Appendix 'B1'. This document has been prepared by the Chief Internal Auditor following consultation with Chief Officers and the District Auditor.
- 3.2 The plan has been prepared in accordance with the current four year strategic plan (covering the period from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2004) and is based on the same strategic risk assessment methodology that applied in previous years.
- 3.3 In summary, the annual plan is split as follows:
- 243 days allocated to carrying out systems based audit work to provide assurance on the Council's internal controls,
  - 18.5 days allocated to assisting District Audit and assisting in the Council's year end accounting procedures.
  - 10 days for providing data, and completing Audit Commission pro formas to identify possible frauds,
  - 10 days contract audit,
  - 55.5 days reserve for unforeseen work, and providing a consultancy service,
  - 42 days computer audit.
- 3.4 Effective planning is one of the ways in which internal audit demonstrates the adequacy of its service, both internally, and to the District Auditor. A formal plan also provides a means by which actual coverage can be monitored and evaluated, and is a key element in securing and maintaining the Authority's Managed Audit status.
- 3.5 It was originally planned to spend 10.5 days on Benefits Subsidy work. However, a late amendment became necessary because the Audit Commission has instructed that this work now has to be carried out by the District Auditor. This time has therefore been added in to the contingency element of the plan.
- 3.6 The current year's audit plan (2002/2003) has been revised as a result of long-term sickness in the section and a vacant post for six weeks following the departure of the previous Senior Auditor (to take up employment with another Council). In order to achieve the audit coverage originally planned, it has been decided to bring in an additional contract auditor for 38 days and roll forward 7 audits to next year (representing 54 days work). These 54 days will be added to the workload outlined in paragraph 3.3, bringing the total number of days planned for 2003/04 to 432.
4. Adequacy of Internal Control including the Role of Internal Audit
- 4.1 The bulk of the work undertaken by the Internal Audit Section is systems audit (see paragraph 3.3). This involves an analysis of the controls and procedures that have been adopted in the area under review to establish that they secure the organisational outcomes that are required. The audits will assess the risks to which the Council is exposed and undertake tests to inform any conclusions. Recommendations are discussed with auditees prior to issuing a final report. A copy of every internal audit report is sent to the District Auditor.
- 4.2 There are 5 recommendations from audits undertaken in 2001/02 that have not yet been actioned by auditees. These are currently the subject of discussions and it is anticipated that the agreed actions will be implemented by the end of the financial year.
5. Reporting of audit reports/findings
- 5.1 One of the targets in the Best Value Review of Internal Audit (reported as a target to Corporate Management Committee on 8 November 2001) was to review reporting levels. The action required was to examine the need for reports to be issued to the Chief Executive Officer or to Members through the establishment of an Audit Committee.

- 5.2 Currently, Internal Audit issues reports to the Chief Officer responsible for the activity under review, and a copy of every report is issued to the Borough Treasurer. As already noted, all reports are also copied to District Audit.
- 5.3 Since these arrangements were established there has been an increased focus on corporate governance arrangements, mainly in the private sector, but this attention has also spilled over into the public sector. Indeed, the Council's corporate governance arrangements will be one of the elements that will be scored by the Audit Commission under the forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). The Audit Commission recently published a paper on the audit judgements that will be used in their scoring of the CPA and this indicates that the establishment of an Audit Committee (or a Committee discharging such functions) will score highly (the relevant extract is reproduced at Appendix 'B2'.)
- 5.4 In the light of these developments, it is proposed that in future:
- following each audit, audit reports will be issued to the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer (i.e. the Borough Secretary and Leisure Services Officer), in addition to the present circulation practice which includes the Borough Treasurer, District Auditor and Service Manager;
  - a periodic report on audit coverage, recommendations made and progress in implementing those recommendations, will be made to the Standards Committee.
- 5.5 In the past, reports to Committee have focused on audit coverage. Dealing additionally with matters arising from internal audit reports, reports on the overall control environment, reviewing compliance and an assessment of risk exposures, would cover the terms of reference normally reserved for a separate Audit Committee. Should the Committee agree, it is proposed to amend the detailed terms of reference of the Standards Committee when the constitution is reviewed in March with a view to these arrangements being put in place at the commencement of the new municipal year.

6. Access to documents

- 6.1 The difficulties that Internal Audit has experienced accessing documents over the last year has been reported to both the March and July meetings of this Committee. The inability to access all documents for one audit meant that the District Auditor had to complete this work (reference is made to this in the District Auditor's Management Letter). Fortunately, the problem accessing this documentation has now been resolved. The protocol for accessing documents to which reference was made in the July report has now been completed and is intended to avoid these uncertainties in the future.

**OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -**

**the terms of the reference of the Standards Committee be expanded to include the audit responsibilities identified in paragraph 5.5 with effect from the start of the 2003/04 Municipal Year.**

**(TO RECOMMEND)**

Background Papers

None stated

7. AIMS AND TARGETS – INTERIM PROGRESS REPORT (CEO)

Details of progress in respect of the adopted Aims and Targets for matters within the remit of this Committee during the period from 1 April to 30 September 2002 are attached at Appendix 'C'.

**(FOR INFORMATION)**

Background Papers

Leaders Position Statement 2001/2002

8. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – QUARTERLY UPDATE ON PROGRESS (CEO)

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on progress against the Best Value Performance Indicators for the period from 1 April to 30 September 2002, summarised at Appendix 'D'. The other policy committees will receive the relevant sections of the Appendix which relate to their specific service areas.

**(FOR INFORMATION)**

Background Papers

Best Value Performance Plan 2002/03.

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT/EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2004 – CONSULTATION PAPER (CEO)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of this report is to consider a Consultation Paper from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) which suggests that the Local Government elections scheduled for Tuesday 6 May 2004 should be held on the same day as the European Parliamentary election (Thursday 10 June 2004). The Government is seeking views on the practical issues that would arise from this change as well as observations on the option of weekend voting.**

1.2 **The ODPM requests responses by 31 January 2003.**

2. Background Information

2.1 Local Government elections are, with the exception of some recent pilot schemes, held on the first Thursday in May. Since Runnymede's inception in 1974 the Borough has never held a Local Government election on any day other than a Thursday. Even when the General Election/County Council Elections were delayed by the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001, the combined election was still held on a Thursday (7 June 2001).

2.2 It has been common practice in recent years to combine elections, so that County Council elections and U.K. Parliamentary elections have been held on the same day as the Borough elections.

2.3 However, the European Parliamentary election in 1999 was not combined with the Borough election. The Local Government election was held on Thursday 6 May (turnout 29%) and the European Parliamentary election was held on Thursday 10 June (turnout 24%). The current proposal from the ODPM would therefore see the Borough elections combined with a European election for the first time.

3. Report

3.1 The Consultation Paper was circulated under separate cover to all Members on Friday 15 November 2002. **Members are asked to bring it with them to the meeting.**

3.2 The Consultation Paper explains the steps that the Government is taking to overcome voter apathy and increase turnout. The Government considers that holding elections on different days has "a negative impact on turnout". It therefore suggests combining the two elections scheduled for 2004

3.3 The Government believes there are clear benefits in combining the elections:

- it will be more convenient for voters to have to visit the polling station once only;
- it will reduce costs incurred by local authorities, Returning Officers and political parties in distributing election material, contacting voters, canvassing and holding the polls themselves; and

- those responsible for voter awareness campaigns, particularly the Electoral Commission and local authorities, will be able to concentrate their efforts in increasing awareness of one single election day.

3.4 The Government then points out the obvious drawbacks :

- Councils will have to re-arrange their Annual Meetings.
- The Committee cycle may have to be re-arranged.
- Appointments to outside bodies and joint authorities would be delayed.
- Two separate counts will have to be held.

3.5 The Consultation Paper mentions Pilot Schemes briefly, but gives the distinct impression that the combined election will be spared such innovations. It then considers the more practical proposition of weekend voting.

3.6 It should be emphasised that the ODPM sees weekend voting as an addition to the traditional Thursday vote. The polling stations would be open on a Saturday or Sunday, and then again on the following Thursday. When this experiment was tried in Camden in 2002 only 1.1% of the 28.4% who voted actually did so at the weekend. Nevertheless, the ODPM sees the following advantages:-

- since most people have more leisure time at the weekend, electors would have more opportunity to come out and vote at an election;
- for the election to the European Parliament, it would mean the United Kingdom held elections, for at least one day, on the same day as most other Member States.

The obvious drawbacks are also stated:-

- possible practical difficulties in recruiting staff for two days rather than one, and in finding suitable accommodation;
- higher costs from weekend staffing;
- without first conducting pilots it would be difficult to know whether the benefits of a higher turnout which could result from weekend voting would be sufficient to outweigh the extra costs; and
- changes to the primary legislation governing European Parliamentary elections, as well as to local elections legislation, would be required.

3.7 The Consultation Paper then seeks views on five specific questions. These are set out below with suggested responses :-

Q1: Do you agree with our proposal to postpone local and Greater London Assembly elections in 2004 from 6 May 2004 to 10 June 2004, so that they are combined with the European Parliamentary elections?

*Answer: Given that U.K. Parliamentary elections are usually combined with Local Government elections, the concept of a combined election is not a problem. However, the Annual Council Meeting would have to be deferred and this would dislocate the standard Committee cycle. But this is not seen as a major problem, although it could result in some meetings being pushed into the holiday months of July and August.*

Q2: What practical issues do you foresee in combining most effectively local (and, where applicable, parish) elections with the European Parliamentary elections?

*Answer: The basic problem is that the ballot paper for the European Parliament is very different to any form of U.K. ballot paper. At European elections the elector is required to vote for a political party rather than an individual,*

*although individuals may also stand as well. Therefore, in 1999 Runnymede's voters had a choice of nine political parties and two individual candidates. The sheer size of the ballot paper is also confusing. Voters may become confused when they have one long ballot paper requiring them to vote for a for an individual candidate (Local Government). There will also be additional pressure on the Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks, not only through the sheer bulk of the papers, but in being asked to give advice. There is no doubt that the average British voter was confused by the 1999 European ballot. There is also a real danger that given two papers a large number of voters may decide to ignore one of them, possibly not even putting it in the ballot box, with resultant complications at the count.*

Q3: What practical issues do you foresee in combining most effectively the GLA elections with the European Parliamentary elections?

*Answer: Not an issue for Runnymede Borough Council.*

Q4: What action do you think should be taken to address these practical issues (whether by local authorities, the GLA, central Government or the Electoral Commission)?

*Answer: This is an open-ended question which is not easily answered. Possibly Government could issue an (updated) training pack, as it did in 1999, and ensure that finance is available to cover in-house training. There will also be a need for a national publicity campaign to educate the electorate. This was attempted in 1999.*

Q5: What is your view about the proposal to move elections to a weekend?

*Answer: This is fraught with difficulties. Firstly, contrary to what the ODPM might believe, it is not easy to recruit staff who are prepared to work in a Polling Station without a break (i.e. they are not permitted to leave the Station) for fifteen hours for a net hourly rate of around £8 for Presiding Officers and £4 for Poll Clerks (1999 European Election fees). They are also required to undertake duties before the election, e.g. attending training and briefing sessions, visiting the Polling Station the night before and as far as the Presiding Officer is concerned, getting the Ballot Box and Papers to the Count at close of Poll. This Council relies on the goodwill and public spirit of former employees, existing employees, and a pool of long-term associates (which diminishes as the years go by). It has proved very hard to recruit new blood, and often these new staff drop out at the last minute when they realise what the job entails. It would be even harder to find staff who are prepared to work at weekends, even if the fees were significantly increased. Some of this increase in fees would fall to be met by the Council. Moreover, many of the buildings which are used as Polling Stations (for example church premises) would not be available at weekends. Other commercial premises might have more lucrative bookings which they would not wish to abandon. In all cases property owners might be reluctant to disrupt their normal usage for two or possibly three days.*

*Moreover, it may be mistaken to assume that voters will be more prepared to vote at the weekend. Just because they are not working does not mean that they have nothing else to do. Indeed, many people find it more convenient to vote just before or after work.*

*Evidence published by the Electoral Commission, following last year's pilots suggests that turnout is influenced far more by local political activity and by local issues than by methods or times of voting.*

#### 4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 When combined Parliamentary/Local Government elections are held, the Government imposes a revised fee for election staff which is obviously always higher than that which the Local Authority would have paid for a sole Borough Council election. Even allowing for the additional hours of poll the increase is usually satisfactory. Additional monies are also paid to Counting staff. The Local Authority does not suffer any financial loss through these

arrangements and may actually make a small saving through a reduced contribution to the combined fee. The European Election fees paid in 1999 were more generous than the Local Government election fees paid in the same year, and there is every reason to believe that a combined election held on Thursday 10 June 2004 would produce enhanced fees which may be attractive to some staff.

- 4.2 However, if an election were to be held on a Sunday, the UK Government or the European Union (depending on which parliament is being elected) would have to substantially raise the fees payable. If recruitment proved difficult for a Sunday election and the Government/European Union were not prepared to raise their official fees then a financial burden would fall on any Local Authority which sought to increase the fees to facilitate recruitment. The Government/European Union would have to set realistic and attractive fees.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Officers are not opposed to the Council elections for 2004 being moved to coincide with the European election, if the ODPM feels that this would increase turnout. There are a number of practical difficulties, but these could be overcome with training, good preparation and an improved financial structure. However, Officers do not support the proposal for weekend elections given the current difficulty in recruiting casual staff for election duties, and the fact that some premises currently used as Polling Stations might not be available.

**OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -**

**the observations set out in paragraph 3.7 and 4 above, as amended or added to by Members, be conveyed to the ODPM as this Council's response to the Consultation Paper.**

**(TO RESOLVE)**

Background Papers

Letter from ODPM dated 28 October 2002

10. BEST VALUE - DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT SERVICES SCOPING AND CHALLENGE REPORT (BSLSO)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to consider a summary of the Scoping and Challenge exercise undertaken for the democratic support service comprising Legal and Committee services. The full Scoping and Challenge Report is attached at Appendix 'E'.**

2. Scope of the Service

- 2.1 The purpose of the Democratic Support functions is to:

- i) provide a full legal service to the Council including advising Councillors, Officers and Committees;
- ii) provide an efficient Committee administration service to the Council and Committees; and
- iii) supply comprehensive and prompt advice and support to elected Members to enable effective and lawful decision-making.

- 2.2 Democratic support covers a wide remit and includes the following: i) propriety advice, ii) corporate legal advice, iii) legal services, iv) agenda preparation, v) recording of proceedings at meetings of Committees, vi) drafting Action Sheets/decisions lists, vii) provision of Member Services, viii) provision of information on the democratic process to the public.

- 2.3 The Council has a continuing requirement for a propriety and corporate legal advice function and for the full range of legal services including litigation, conveyancing and advocacy. The

Committee system is a well established and convenient way of dealing with the range and number of decisions required of Local Government. Council Committees operate in accordance with a legal framework set out in Statute, case law and the Council Constitution. The core Committee and Legal functions of providing Members with information and advice in an appropriate manner to enable effective decision making, of recording decisions and upholding probity are fundamental to the administration of the Authority and are democratically required.

- 2.4 The legal service is provided to Councillors, Senior Management and all levels within the Departments. The Committee Service is provided directly primarily to all Councillors, but also facilitates actions of other staff involved in reporting to Committee.
3. Current Provision of the Service
- 3.1 In common with other Authorities, the service is currently provided 'in-house' and is located centrally, with specialist legal advice and advocacy provided externally when required. This is not surprising in an activity which is one of the closest to the democratic process and corporate core.
- 3.2 The Challenge Review considered other methods of provision. However, it was considered that such a service is easier and cheaper to administer 'in house' from the centre.
- 3.3 No apparent external private providers exist for provision of the committee administration service. Other Local Authority Committee Sections would have the necessary expertise and may wish to seek external income, but would have to recruit more staff to do this. External providers would not be aware of the Runnymede quality culture, working practices and procedures. Officers could not trace any instances of Committee servicing being externalised.
- 3.4 Internally, the service departments could attempt to provide the committee administration service. Decentralisation of Committee services is uncommon and would have major implications for the Authority's Departmental and Management structure. In practice, such a service is easier to administer from the centre. A consistent approach can be brought to the servicing of each Committee and duplication of process is minimised. Staff are able to cover for each other and share information and best practice. Past practice, which has been supported by the Audit Commission, has shown that ideally Committee administration is located close to or alongside the legal function. Specialist advice is then readily available on the many legal and procedural points which can arise on the Committee reports. It is also easier to achieve a consistent approach on these matters and on the whole Agenda production process. For the legal services, a mix of 'in-house' and bought-in services ensures the flexibility necessary to respond to changing circumstances.

The Legal and Committee Sections have developed valuable working relationships in many areas, e.g. the Committee administration process, quasi-legal duties and licensing matters. Both Sections have a role to play in relation to the new ethical framework.

4. Challenge Exercise
- 4.1 The Challenge Exercise took place during October/November 2002. All Group Leaders, all Chief Officers and the Assistant Head of Leisure Services were interviewed individually. The main findings/suggestions and common themes arising from the Challenge Exercise were as follows:-
- a) Corporate Governance – health check.
  - b) When opportunities arise, review the range of duties undertaken by the Committee Section and work allocations of Officers to provide a more focussed service and identify those areas of non-core Council activities which receive a high level of support. For example, should quasi legal duties, tree preservation orders or the issue of bus passes be undertaken by the Committee Section? (A comparison with other local authority Committee Sections will be undertaken to ascertain the duties they perform). Pursuant to this, review the title of the Section to reflect the nature of duties performed.
  - c) Reduce Agenda printing requirement from May 2003 to achieve cost savings so that only Members of a Committee, Group Leaders and selected other Officers receive a hard copy Agenda. It is common in other Authorities for agendas to be sent only to

Committee Members. Currently Councillors receive all agendas regardless of Membership of Committees. At Runnymede on average 105 Agendas are printed for each meeting of Service Committees and these can consist of up to 200 pages. The current budget for printing of agenda/minutes is £26,000. A 50% reduction in hard copy would produce significant savings per annum and thereby contribute to the £1 million revenue reduction target. Members not on a Committee would be able to access the agenda electronically and could request a hard copy where needed for specific occasions. This could be linked to a more informative Agenda Index to assist Members.

- d) Investigate greater use of IT in the future to communicate with Members, e.g. electronic transmission of Agenda/Members Bulletin, creation of an Agenda archive on the website (Minutes are already on the website and the public part of Agendas are held on it until the day after a meeting) or the use of the Document Management System in future to improve service delivery. This could assist Members in becoming more effective in discharging their role and in this regard all Members should be encouraged to go 'on-line'.
- e) Review how a scheme of public participation at meetings might be implemented. (This is currently under consideration by the Local Government Act Member Working Group).
- f) Continue to monitor the levels and scope of legal activity and identify the resources necessary to provide the service. A case management system has recently been introduced to facilitate monitoring of the case load and progress on individual cases. Section 106 Agreements will be monitored on a regular basis.
- g) Review the level of provision of Member Services, including human resources, in conjunction with the proposed Civic Office re-provision.
- h) Review attendance of Legal Officers at Committee and implications thereof – it has been custom and practice for a legal representative to attend and give advice on law and procedure at meetings at Runnymede, although practice varies among other Authorities.

## 5. UNISON Views

5.1 Both the Legal and Committee Sections are central to the Council's function. The Runnymede branch of UNISON considers it essential for both service areas to be retained in-house, organised centrally and that existing staffing levels and the close working relationship between the two areas be maintained and developed.

5.2 The arguments for this include:

- the importance of maintaining a sound and cohesive knowledge base for the benefit of the sections themselves, and as such acting as a focal point for the other sections in the Council and for the Elected Members;
- In-house provision of Legal services and Committee administration is also cost effective and any change would have Council-wide resource implications at a time when savings are sought;
- Any form of outsourcing in either section would be detrimental to the provision of the service mainly because agency staff or consultants would not have local knowledge of circumstances or internal protocols and procedures; and
- Staff morale would suffer as a result of any outsourcing or reduction in staffing levels and Runnymede's existing retention and recruitment problems would be compounded.

## 6. The Next Stage of the Review

6.1 The next stage of the Review is the 'Compare' and 'Consult' stage. It is proposed to use comparative data from other Surrey Authorities and external providers of Legal Services.

Any relevant Best Value Performance Indicators or local performance indicators shall also be used.

**THE COMMITTEE IS ASKED TO :-**

- i) endorse the objectives of the Democratic Support Service identified in the Challenge report as reflecting the Council's aspirations for the provision of this Service;**
- ii) endorse the proposal to examine the following matters further during the remaining stages of the Review:-**
  - a) Corporate Governance – health check.**
  - b) Review the range of duties undertaken by the Committee Section and the work allocations of Officers to provide a more focussed service and identify those areas of non-core Council activities which receive a higher level of support;**
  - c) Reduce the Agenda printing requirement from May 2003 to achieve cost savings;**
  - d) Investigate greater use of IT in the future to communicate with Members;**
  - e) Review how a scheme of public participation at meetings might be implemented;**
  - f) Continue to monitor the levels and scope of legal activity and identify the resources necessary to provide the service;**
  - g) Review the level of provision of Member Services;**
  - h) Review the attendance of Legal Officers at Committee meetings and implications thereof;**
- iii) endorse the use of comparative data from other local authorities and use of national and local Best Value performance indicators for the Comparative element of the Review; and**
- iv) endorse the scope of this Review and the Challenge Phase.**

**(TO RESOLVE)**

Background Papers

None

11. IMPLEMENTING ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT STATEMENT (CEO)

**1 Purpose of Report**

**1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek endorsement of the latest Implementing Electronic Government Statement (IEG2) submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and to seek Members views on the relative priorities of the items included in that Statement.**

**1.2 This report, together with other relevant items on the Agenda, will also be presented to the meeting of the Review Board on 11 December in view of the Board's commitment to examine IT services.**

## 2 Background Information

2.1 The Government is committed to promoting continuous improvement in local government services through electronic service delivery (ESD) to achieve the target of 100% ESD capability by 2005. In order to assist Councils in achieving this target the Government has requested an "Implementing Electronic Government" (IEG) Statement from each authority so that success in moving towards this target can be monitored. The first of these Statements was submitted in June 2001. The second was required by 31 October 2002. Submission of a Statement the Government deemed satisfactory triggered the payment of a grant of £200,000 in 2002/03 to assist with the modernisation process. The same payment will be made in 2003/04 subject to receipt of a satisfactory IEG Statement.

## 3. Report

3.1 The IEG statement is intended to summarise the progress the Council has made over the last twelve months in implementing e-government, whilst reflecting the key elements of the draft national strategy for local e-government, [e-gov@local](mailto:e-gov@local). The Statement has also to describe the Council's rationale for the role it expects e-government to play in the wider drive to transform local authority organisation and service delivery for the benefit of all citizens and customers.

3.2 The Government has indicated that further grant monies are subject to satisfactory spending of the first grant made during the current year. A summary has been provided in the current Statement and this expenditure will be subject to the normal auditing processes.

3.3 The Government has stated that it expects local authorities to make IEG2 Statements accessible to all and to publish them on local websites. It is therefore proposed that the Statement be published on the Runnymede Online Web site on 13 December 2002, the day after its consideration by Full Council.

3.4 The IEG2 Statement submitted in October 2002 is attached at Appendix 'F'. It should be noted that this has been presented in the format requested by the Government in its guidelines for preparation of the Statement and provides all of the information requested. A number of minor drafting changes have been identified since the original submission to the ODPM and these are highlighted in the text. The Government has undertaken to provide feedback on the Statements by Christmas with scope for resubmission in the New Year if necessary.

### **OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that –**

- i) the contents of the amended Implementing Electronic Government Statement attached at Appendix 'F' be endorsed; and**
- ii) guidance be provided by the Committee as to the relative priorities to be applied in adopting the e-government modernising agenda set out in the Statement.**

### **(TO RECOMMEND)**

#### Background Papers

None stated

## 12. MATCHING IT SUPPORT TO CHANGING REQUIREMENTS (CEO)

### 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report identifies an area of vulnerability in IT support that places the Council at risk of losing essential IT services for longer than is necessary in the event of computer failure, recommends steps to be taken to ameliorate the problem in the short term and identifies the work to be done to provide a long term solution.

1.2 This report, together with other relevant items on the Agenda, will also be presented to the meeting of the Review Board on 11 December in view of the Board's commitment to examine IT services.

## 2. Background Information

- 2.1 Before the introduction of a written computer strategy in 1991 the Council was part of a group of 4 authorities sharing ICL mainframe facilities. During 1990, in response to dissatisfaction with the service being received, the former Resources/IT Sub-Committee formulated a new strategy based on the then emerging Open Systems and the growing use of networked personal computers (PCs). This provided for the running of systems on-site at Runnymede making extensive use of packaged software solutions.
- 2.2 This method of working remained in place until, as part of the Council's response to competitive tendering regulations in 1998, provision of the whole IT function was placed out to tender as part of a voluntary competitive tendering exercise. A lack of competition to supply these services persuaded the Council not to proceed with this approach and Members formed an Informal Working Group to re-examine the IT strategy and the delivery of IT. This group reported to the then Policy and Resources Committee which perceived a lack of investment in the infrastructure of the Council that would hinder the adoption of new, more efficient systems. A substantially reworked Information and Communications Strategy was produced that recognised the need for investment in the IT infrastructure of the Council and provided a regime for the necessary investment to take place.
- 2.3 More recently there has been a new element guiding the way in which services should be organised and delivered. This is the Government's target of turning the UK into one of the leading users of information technology in the world. Part of the way the Government is setting about achieving this aim is to set ambitious targets for the electronic delivery of Government services at all levels. 31 December 2005 has been set as the date by which all tiers of government, including local government, shall be able to offer a range of service delivery channels that fully utilise the emerging information technologies.
- 2.4 The Council has already prepared an Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) Statement that was accepted by the former Department of Trade, Local Government and the Regions. The new Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has taken over IEG responsibilities. An updated IEG statement (IEG2) was submitted in October, subject to the endorsement of Members at this meeting.
- 2.5 The new strategy has achieved its primary objective, resulting in a transformation in computer usage within the Council. This is characterised by:
- e-mail moving from being a means of communication employed mostly within the IT section to the preferred means of communication for many, if not most, staff internally within the Council and externally with the outside world. This has already yielded staff savings in secretarial and word processing resources.
  - the Geographic Information System (GIS) reaching the stage when a high proportion of the properties within the Borough have been captured and the system can start to be used as a production tool. This is already the case for Local Land Charges and Development Control processes.
  - the Council's embarkation on an ambitious programme of introducing a corporate document management system (DMS) with workflow that will be deployed in all parts of the organisation. This will rapidly start reducing the large volumes of relatively inaccessible paper files and lay the basis for the electronic delivery of a wide range of information, both internally within the Council and externally, interacting with businesses, other arms of government and the public sector and the public themselves.
  - the use of the World Wide Web (Web), which has become extensive allowing many staff instant access to information that would not have been readily available in the past
  - the Council utilising an extensive Internet Site, Runnymede Online, together with a corporate Intranet, a Councillor's Extranet and an Extranet of shared information with all other local authorities in Surrey

- The number of internal server based applications rising to a total of 37 systems.
- 2.6 These changes have not only involved a rapid growth in the quantum of IT support work to be carried out but has called for a completely new set of skills required to maintain systems at the high levels of availability required to deliver services. These changes and growth have to date been contained within existing IT staffing resources except in the case of the Web and Intranet projects. In this area 2 full time equivalent posts were created to carry out the work. Support for the telephone system was moved to the IT department in 2000, accompanied by a transfer of 10 hours per week from the Borough Secretary's department.
3. Services Supported at Present and in the Future
- 3.1 The IT department has responsibility for a wide range of activities (detailed in Appendix 'G'). The means of delivering services varies from complete externalisation of the function to a comprehensive in-house provision.
- 3.2 The actual systems supported have grown rapidly in number, size and complexity over the past four years. A full list of the systems currently in use, and the involvement of the different staff in IT and suppliers in maintaining these systems, has been considered by the Informal Members Working Group on IT. In all 37 distinct systems are accessed through a network of 20 data switches by 350 staff located mainly in the Civic Offices but also in remote locations such as the Chertsey Depot, Egham Sports Centre and the Chertsey Museum and a number of staff working remotely.
- 3.3 A number of changes to the IT infrastructure in the Council have taken place in the past four years so that these different levels of IT usage can be accommodated. Most notably:
- the number of PC's in use has doubled in the past four years to 350; this allows the overwhelming majority of staff to access facilities which are appropriate to their job;
  - a number of systems have been put in place to provide access to the Internet and the Surrey Extranet and to secure internal systems from internal and external unauthorized access or attack. The Council now manages two firewalls (Borderware), a virus protections server (Trend Interscan), a network monitoring server (Computer Associates eTrust) and a relay server (Linux based) managing contact with the external world;
  - the Geographic Information System (GIS) is being enhanced to fully satisfy the requirements of the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) and to allow the Land Charges Section to move to level 3 usage of the National Land Information Services (NLIS). Access to the Ordinance Survey (OS) map base and associated data sets captured within the GIS is being prepared so that it can be fully accessible to all staff on the Intranet and the Gazetteer prepared so that it will be the core of a truly corporate property addressing system;
  - the four Web sites referred to above have been built and are maintained on a daily basis with updated information being loaded on the day of receipt. The Internet is evolving from a predominantly information providing site to an interactive database driven site that can be used extensively with interactive forms. The Intranet is being revised with a view to the content being kept up to date by service delivery departments directly rather than through a central point and as a means of access to production systems through the browser interface with, of course, the provision of adequate security;
  - the corporate Document Management and Workflow system (Tower) is being installed on a phased basis to allow all appropriate material to be held in images and freely exchanged within the Council subject to appropriate security restrictions;
  - The number of servers has risen rapidly to accommodate these activities and at present stands at the 37 production servers referred to above. The network in place to support these activities has grown in terms of the number of devices, bandwidth and complexity. 15 Cisco and 5 Intel switches support a gigabit fibre backbone with individual servers connected to the network by 100/1000 links and desktop computers and printers connected by 100mb network cards (NICs);

- 3.4 In line with the Government's strategy to make all government, including local authority, services available electronically by 31 December 2005 the Council has embarked on a programme of identifying the way this target can be achieved and in identifying the resources that will have to be committed to hit this target. At the heart of this programme is:
- the rollout of DMS which will reach fruition in 2006,
  - upgrading GIS so that it becomes BS7666 compliant (the British Standard for a Property Gazetteer) and allows Land Charges to move to NLIS level 3,
  - opening new access channels for the public to the Council. Some of these channels will be through the Internet site, either from Runnymede Online or through the Surrey Online portal, others through greater use of the telephone system or by use of the revised means of access provided in the new Civic Offices. At a minimum, residents and businesses within Runnymede will be able to carry out all financial transactions with the Council through one of these new channels if they wish. Similarly requests for service and other communications with the Council will be made possible by new means utilising the new information technologies.
- 3.5 A further opportunity for the Council to re-engineer its method of service delivery and change the nature of contact with the public is the proposed move to new Civic Offices. This presents both an opportunity and a challenge in terms of IT provision. An opportunity in that the constraints inherent in the present building (constructed before a fully electronic office was seriously contemplated) can be removed and a challenge in that to take full advantage of the opportunities available will call for radical changes in working practices that have the potential of making service delivery more customer focused and tailored to the needs of each individual.

#### 4. Framework for IT Service Delivery

- 4.1 The expansion to date has been carried out within the present framework of IT service delivery. This has 7 key aspects:
- i) Packaged solutions are the preferred means of providing applications to support service delivery with any tailoring to the package being carried out by the supplier.
  - ii) The Council retains control of the ICT (Information, Communications and Telephony) and related strategies and ensures that these form an integral part of the business objectives of the Authority.
  - iii) Maintenance of hardware and software is externalised with server maintenance being preferably supplied by the hardware manufacturer, desktop maintenance by a single company selected by a competitive process on a regular basis and software maintenance being supplied by the supplier of the software application.
  - iv) First line support and liaison with suppliers is handled internally.
  - v) The majority of training is externalised with the supplier of applications either providing the training to end-users or "training the trainers" who would be located in end-user departments, technical training supplied by external training specialists and in-house training provided for computer awareness, computer usage and the basics of core systems used by all, or the majority of staff, for instance Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook.
  - vi) Database Administration is provided in-house, supported by the database suppliers (ie Oracle and Microsoft) and the application suppliers as part of the maintenance contracts.
  - vii) First line network support is provided in-house with support contracts with specialist network supplier.

5. Staffing Levels

- 5.1 The IT staffing establishment is 8.7 full time equivalent staff, comprising 13 members of staff, 6 full and 7 part time. The formal structure can be seen in the chart at Appendix 'H'.
- 5.2 The Best Value Review carried out last year included a study comparing the way in which IT services were delivered in North West Surrey. Although it proved difficult to produce precise comparisons in all areas of activity due to a number of factors certain clear comparisons emerged:
- The number of operations staff in Runnymede is substantially lower than the other Councils although the same range of tasks are covered for the same number of systems.
  - Development application support staff was considerably lower than the other Councils in the area even though authorities such as Surrey Heath and Spelthorne no longer support a full housing function.
  - As far as Help Desk/user support staffing is concerned each of the Councils were generally on a similar level, although Woking had a slightly higher provision.
- 5.3 However, when the ratio of PC's per support staff is compared, the high number of PC's used in Runnymede in relation to the number of staff and the move to site PC's in other locations, such as facilities for the elderly and Councillor's homes, this leads to a considerably higher ratio than in any other of the Council's considered.

6. Specific Problem Areas

- 6.1 The major area of vulnerability that has been identified relates to the support for the key servers, databases and the network in the event of failure. Expertise in identifying problems to be reported to the supplier under the terms of a maintenance contract and carrying out emergency first aid on systems is highly concentrated in two members of staff, one of whom is now on maternity leave. Problems will be resolved by the Council's suppliers but there will be a delay before they can come on site and work on a problem when this is required. With hardware the delay is only 4 hours on key systems and next day on less essential items, but for applications such as Revenues and Benefits, Housing and the Financial Management System getting qualified staff on site to restore a system will take at least 48 hours and is not included as part of the support contract. In-house staff can restore the Council's most complex system, Revenues and Benefits in around 9 hours and can fix less critical problems immediately.
- 6.2 There are two key pressure points related to this vulnerability:
- The lack of backup in supporting databases is particularly acute when the Database Administrator and Network Manager is on leave, a training course or is absent due to sickness or is working on a time critical project such as the installation of a major new system. This is about to become particularly critical as the iWorld upgrade to Revenues and Benefits is now under way, the Document Management System is going live and the GIS and Land Charges systems are about to be substantially upgraded.
  - One key member of the Help Desk team is pregnant and another is on maternity leave. This represents two thirds of the Help Desk staff complement and presents a severe problem with continuity in the running of the Help Desk. The number of systems supported is very large for the size of the organisation and so the span of knowledge required takes some time to be acquired even for a well qualified recruit. There is also the uncertainty as to what staff resource will be available next year if and when one, or both, members of staff return full-time, part time or not at all.
- 6.3 In addition there is an anomaly in the present staffing structure and a further support issue:
- In one specific area a Job Description and salary within the Web team has not kept pace with changes. The Technician post is now being used for Web administration, including setting up and configuring Content Management and Database integration.

- Support for Councillors PC's and links to the Civic Offices cannot be carried out satisfactorily using the present staffing resource of 15 hours clerical time per week.

6.4 In the longer term, areas that will come under pressure are:

- The need for greater resilience and availability on key systems at the core of delivering information and services electronically. A growing number of staff now have a production computer application at the heart of their job. Every day lost in system availability translates into a large number of working days lost and leads to difficulties in clearing backlogs of work. This was clearly illustrated when systems were lost due to power problems last year and earlier this year. At present all systems have a single point of failure in that they run on a single server although of course a stand-by machine is available to be brought on site as part of the Council's disaster recovery contract.
- The Council is also increasingly reliant on corporate systems such as DMS, the Exchange Server (handling all the Council's e-mails) and the Firewalls. The latter two systems should be available for extended working hours with the minimum of down time. The availability and resilience of key databases already commissioned will become increasingly vital.
- The need to gather all information on a person or property together by "middleware" that extracts data from backend databases will increase. This will allow the information available to the service provider from the Council's own records to be comprehensive and accurately matched with the information with service delivery partners
- The increasing need to maximise reporting on the data. Not only will it become important to extract information in a portable format that can be shared with other service providers but it will be important to have the means of easily analysing the data already collected. With no in-house SQL expertise available this is slow, difficult and expensive at present.

## 7. Proposed Plan of Action

7.1 The following actions are proposed in order to alleviate the most pressing pressure points and help secure the Council's key systems. Action has been or should be taken in four areas to resolve this problem over the coming year.

- i) A help desk officer has been recruited to cover the period of maternity absence of the help desk supervisor. The cost is being met from the Council's normal provision for cover for staff on maternity leave and in point of fact there will be a slight saving. This action has already occurred and maternity cover is in place.
- ii) One of the Help Desk Assistants should be promoted to Help Desk Officer. This will provide continuity in support over the period of maternity leave and beyond as the Help Desk Assistant is knowledgeable on the workings of the Council and Council staff and has a working knowledge of the systems in use, their importance and the key end users associated with each system. The part time Help Desk Assistant post that this leaves vacant should be filled by recruitment of a temporary member of staff. Again this would be at nil additional cost to the Council as this member of staff would occupy the second maternity cover vacancy initially. Both members of staff on maternity leave have the right to return to their full time jobs when their maternity leave terminates. The proposed establishment details shown in Appendix 'I' and Exempt Appendix 1 therefore retain both full time posts. Until both members of staff going on maternity leave agree their working arrangements on returning to work the Help Desk staffing establishment would be increased by 1 FTE although the number in post would not increase. These changes will ensure the same level of cover is maintained over this difficult period of uncertainty.
- iii) It is proposed that two posts be created to provide additional support for database and network support so that this key activity is no longer reliant on one person. One of these posts would be aimed at a computer professional with some experience in

working with databases and/or networks who wishes to broaden their experience and gain suitable qualifications. It would therefore include a training element in the job description and the Council would enter a post entry training agreement with the successful applicant. The second post would be largely funded from a reorganisation of the work of the section as a whole. The increasingly critical database elements of maintenance and development of the Web sites would be moved to one of the database administrator and networks posts while the part time (14hours) Web Technician post would be deleted from the Web team provision.

- iv) The introduction of the new Financial Management System (FMS) next year will allow the way operations are carried out to be radically altered. It will be possible to move the tasks at present performed in the evenings either to the working day or immediately before or after normal working hours. By changing working practices it will be possible to consolidate the operation tasks into one part time post. It is proposed that the evening operations job has the hours redefined and the present day time operations hours be deleted saving some 18 hours. The day time post would require cover for leave, training and sickness and this would continue to be provided from the Help Desk establishment with the database administrator and network manager assistants as the second line of cover. In addition it is proposed that the hours assigned to support the telephone network be deleted and the responsibilities moved to the database administrators and network manager assistants saving a further 5 hours. These 37 hours of staff savings would be put towards funding the new database administrators and network manager assistant post.

7.2 The net effect of these changes will be to:

- a) reduce the Operations staff by 0.6 FTE,
- b) reduce the Web team by 0.4 FTE
- c) increase Database and Network Support by 2FTE
- d) increase Help Desk Support by 1FTE temporarily resulting in a net increase of 1 FTE (+1 FTE temporarily).

7.3 Comparison with other Authorities shows that the resource required to ensure that Councillors are up and running using computers at home is very high and requires a dedicated resource for at least the first year of operation. Experience shows that multiple on-site visits are the norm until the system settles down and Members without previous knowledge of using computers build up a level of expertise and confidence to assume a degree of self-sufficiency. This must be provided by a limited number of people who build up a knowledge of each Member and their requirements so that each particular problem is addressed in this initial period. A certain amount can be done with an effective training programme but it appears that a high support input in the early days is essential.

7.4 A separate report elsewhere on this Agenda therefore proposes that for a limited period of time a full time post be created with the prime responsibility of facilitating Councillors use of the PC's and lines provided.

7.5 Part of the longer term solution can be facilitated by technologically based assistance to IT staff and by further automation of computerised processes. This assistance should be provided in a number of ways:

- i) By providing swift problem definition to ensure the speedy initiation of problem resolution by systematically monitoring electronically all aspects of the functioning of the site. Second line support can be provided remotely. This is true of both the database administration and network management aspects of running the site.
- ii) Through Content Management as the volume of data being published on the various Web sites and its increasing volatility are already starting to make manual management of the content an onerous and unnecessarily staff intensive task. The adoption of a comprehensive content management solution will be required in the near future to ensure the quality of data forming the basis of decision making at acceptable levels of staff input.
- iii) Through a Customer Relationship Management based solution as the more the Council works in partnership with other service providers and decision making

comes to rely on information drawn from many sources within the Council, the more it will be necessary to have a system in place that quickly and efficiently extracts that information and presents it to the service provider in a way that is understandable and usable. This points to a CRM solution of some sort. The building blocks of the solution are being put in place with the provision of the DMS, GIS, Intranet and standards based back end databases. What will become necessary will be the intermediate software, the middleware, that will permit the required information to be delivered not only to the service providers but directly to the public in the correct circumstances.

- 7.6 However, in order to ensure the most effective method of support is being provided in the longer term the possibilities for new forms of working in association with other organisations should be revisited. The Council's methods of working and systems in operation have changed substantially since the externalisation exercise 4 years ago and so the areas that should be investigated again should include:
- Joint working with other Councils, most probably, but not necessarily, in Surrey for the provision and support of computer services. This joint work could be on a system by system basis, by the sharing of support resources be they internal or external, or by the pooling of IT resources in specific areas of activity.
  - the externalisation of all or a number of the IT functions.
  - Off-site location of some or all of the systems, including the use of ASP (Application Service Provider) services for key systems.
- 7.7 It is recognised that implementing any of these three solutions or combination of these solutions will involve some lead time before they could be fully implemented. In the case of sharing hardware or support this will involve synchronising the hardware platforms and support contracts with partners as these are substantially different at each of the Council's neighbours. Similarly mounting an externalisation exercise will, as was found on the last occasion, involve a considerable delay between starting work on the specification to completion of the selection process and commencement of the service.
- 7.8 It is proposed that work be started to examine the options and resource implications of these solutions. An outline proposal will be produced showing the various models of partnering with an external supplier or potential joint provision with one or more neighbouring authorities and the method of ascertaining the implications, costs and risks of pursuing each approach. This report will identify the costs of carrying out these investigations and the resources that will be needed.
8. Cost of Proposed Solutions
- 8.1 The detailed staffing costs and establishment changes associated with the proposed short term solution are tabulated in Appendix 'I' and Exempt Appendix '1'. The additional cost in the current financial year will be met from underspends in the IT staffing budgets.
- 8.2 In paragraph 7.1 (ii) reference was made to the need to make a supernumerary appointment in order to cover maternity leave. The tables in Exempt Appendix '1' show the full cost of the proposed staffing including this supernumerary appointment. While the supernumerary position remains on the establishment, this increases establishment costs by £58,000. However, if on their return from maternity leave, it is possible to reduce the establishment by removing the supernumerary position, this will result in a net increase in establishment of £30,000 over the present establishment, and this needs to be reflected in the 2003/04 Budget.
9. Conclusions
- 9.1 The changing pattern of working makes it essential that greater depth is provided in front line support for the major databases, servers and the network. This can be achieved in part by transferring staffing resources from operations and Web technician tasks and refocusing them on the database and networks. However an additional resource is required to ensure system downtime is measured in hours instead of days and thus minimise disruption within the Council when problems are experienced.

- 9.2 The short term disruption caused by two thirds of the Help Desk resource being absent on maternity leave can be ameliorated by providing maternity cover from a temporary member of staff and by internal staff development by promoting a junior member of staff to help desk support. This approach has the advantage of filling an immediate gap while at the same time providing continuity in the available knowledge of systems and the workings of the Council and in providing in-house staff development.
- 9.3 The introduction of the new Financial System at the end of the financial year will provide the opportunity of transferring resources from operations tasks to support for the growing number of databases and the more sophisticated network.
- 9.4 Greater efficiency can be gained by adopting more comprehensive database and network monitoring tools, by the use of content management software on the web sites and the adoption of CRM middleware. All three of these should be actively investigated.
- 9.5 The investment in support for Councillors has been too small and the definition of the service to be provided for Members insufficiently focussed. This should be addressed by a clear definition of a service exclusively for allowing Members to perform their council business electronically. This is the subject of a separate report on the Agenda.
- 9.6 Investigation into alternative means of providing IT support should be initiated and a further report presented to this Committee detailing the options for outsourcing all or part of the service or working in conjunction with other Councils.

**OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -**

- i) **the IT staffing establishment be amended by the deletion of the following posts;**
- a) **day time computer operator (p/t),**
  - b) **Web Technician (p/t)**
  - c) **computer operator (telephone support) (p/t)**
- and the creation of the following posts,**
- a) **Assistant Database Administrator and Network Manager(Oracle),**
  - b) **Assistant Database Administrator and Network Manager (SQL Server)**
  - c) **Help Desk Officer.**
- ii) **Content Management and Customer Relationship Management solutions be investigated with a view to identifying the extent of their value to the future workings of the Council and recommending suitable products for adoption; and**
- iii) **investigations into new forms of working to support IT be undertaken most notably, but not exclusively, in the areas of joint working with other Councils in the provision and support of computer services, the externalisation of all or a number of the IT functions and the off-site location of some or all of the systems including the use of ASP (Application Service Provider) services for key systems.**

**(TO RECOMMEND)**

Background Papers

None Stated

13. MEMBERS' COMPUTING FACILITIES (CEO)  
(Ref: Minutes of Executive Committee 16 May 2001, page 1729, para 878)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to summarise the present position as far as the provision of computers and internet lines to Councillors is concerned, and to seek approval both for a usage policy to be applied to all Members and different support arrangements for Councillors.**
- 1.2 **This report, together with other relevant items on the Agenda, will also be presented to the meeting of the Review Board on 11 December in view of the Board's commitment to examine IT services.**

2. Background Information

- 2.1 In the past 4 years since the reworking of the Information and Communications Strategy and the steady investment in the IT infrastructure of the Council the advantages of enabling Members to have full access to the Council's e-mail and intranet facilities have been becoming increasingly evident.
- 2.2 In 2000 the former Policy and Resources Committee decided to make a one off allowance of £750 available to Councillors to enable them to either upgrade or obtain computing facilities to allow them to carry out their duties more efficiently.
- 2.3 It was later decided that it would be more helpful for some Members to have the option of being given a computer instead of the one off allowance as this could be configured by the Council and would prevent Councillors with no experience of the computer industry being sold inappropriate equipment. 17 Members chose this option and were supplied with computers. One Councillor took neither the allowance or a computer.

3. Present Position

- 3.1 In May 2001 the former Executive Committee looked at the issue of computer facilities for Councillors again and from a range of options decided that the best way to provide Members with appropriate IT facilities was to embark on a programme that provided the following:
- a) the supply of an industry standard, Council owned computer for each Councillor;
  - b) the provision of a broadband internet connection, ADSL when available or ISDN, to allow Councillors to connect to the Council network; and
  - c) a series of training courses to equip Councillors with the knowledge necessary to make use of the facilities to be provided.
- 3.2 Appendix 'J' shows the present position with regard to implementing this programme. To date 10 Councillors are using a PC of their own supplied by the Council under the previous scheme, 13 Councillors are using a PC supplied by and owned by the Council and 19 Councillors have neither of these facilities.

4. Issues Arising

- 4.1 British Telecom (BT) has been the provider of the broadband lines to the Internet. The experience of both IT staff and many Members has not been positive as to the service received. BT has been unable to install the lines to the agreed timetable and has given Councillors many problems by arriving at the wrong time to do the work and not using the billing procedures agreed at the outset of the project. The Informal IT Members Working Group has considered this matter and the question of moving to a more responsive supplier is under consideration.
- 4.2 The usage to which the computers supplied by the Council in the current scheme (that is those machines in which the Council retains ownership) should be put was not made clear at the outset of this phase of the project. Under the previous scheme the computer became the Councillors property to be used in the way they thought most appropriate. This has led to machines performing many other functions apart from providing a Councillor with access to

e-mail and the Council's facilities. This has proved very difficult to support and it is now the Officers recommendation, supported by the Informal IT Working Group, that the machines supplied should be as standardised as possible with simple automated procedures for carrying out the basic tasks such as connecting to the internet, the VPN (Virtual Private Network – the hardware and software that allows Councillors to connect directly to the Councils own computers in a secure manner over the internet), their e-mail accounts and the Councillors Intranet. This has the great advantage of providing a facility that can be readily supported and allows those who wish to use the computer only to carry out their Council business and not learn more about computing to reach that position with the minimum of time spent on training.

- 4.3 In order to clarify the basis on which the machine is being supplied, the operating procedures attached at Appendix 'K' have been prepared, the first relating to the use of the computer itself, the second to the use of the connections to the internet that are being provided. Security guidelines for insurance purposes are also attached, at Appendix 'M', for Members information.
- 4.4 This first period of installing and supporting the computers and lines has highlighted the support requirements of Councillors. To date two members of the IT Help Desk team have been working an additional 15 hours per week to support Councillors and get the facilities up and running. This level of support has been inadequate from two standpoints. Firstly the amount of time required to administer the installations was greater than had been anticipated. BT undertook to manage the installations from a list of names, addresses and telephone numbers but in practice a great deal of time has been spent by IT staff and Councillors trouble shooting the installations. Secondly the amount of support that should be provided in the first few weeks of an installation was underestimated. It is impossible to generalise on what those requirements are as each Councillor is coming to the use of the computer and line from a different standpoint with different requirements.
- 4.5 Liaison with other Councils which are ahead of Runnymede in this sort of provision confirms the view that a dedicated resource is required during the first 18 months of installation and usage. This should be a member of staff whose sole responsibility is dealing with all aspects of the Councillor's installations including assisting with discussions with suppliers, troubleshooting local installation problems, liaising with trainers to make the courses as appropriate as possible and working with Councillors to guide the Council in making the e-mail and intranet facilities fully available. A proposed Job Description for this post is shown in Appendix 'L'.
- 4.6 A comprehensive set of training courses have been run for Councillors at all times of the day ranging from sessions in the morning to a number of evening sessions. Take up of the places has been disappointing with a number of "no shows" and attendees cancelling at the last minute. However response from the evaluation forms would indicate that the course content was regarded as appropriate and useful although the Informal IT Members Working Group has been informed that this is not the case.

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 The full year costs of the proposed Councillor Support Officer post at band E amount to £25,084 including on costs. Additional work carried out by IT staff on Members behalf, and licences required exclusively for Councillors' use will cost an additional £5,000.
- 5.2 This expenditure can be met from existing budgets in the current financial year. However, no provision was made in the Revenue forecast for 2003/04. A budget of £30,000 will be required.

**OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -**

- i) the Computer and Printer Provision and Usage Policy and Internet Connections Policy attached at Appendix 'K' be approved and circulated to all Councillors;**
- ii) a post of Councillor Support Officer based on the job description shown at Appendix 'L' be created for a fixed term of 18 months and £30,000 be provided in the budget for this purpose; and**

- iii) **alternative Internet Services Providers be investigated with a view to identifying a provider more in sympathy with the Council's operation.**

**(TO RECOMMEND)**

Background Papers

None stated

14. SYSTEMS RESILIENCE (CEO)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the issues surrounding the support of Information Technology and Communications (ITC) for front line services and core administrative processes, to seek guidance as to the levels of service required for different groups of systems and to recommend immediate changes to improve resilience.**

1.2 **This report, together with other relevant items on the Agenda, will also be presented to the meeting of the Review Board on 11 December in view of the Board's commitment to examine IT services.**

2. Background Information

2.1 A number of factors are changing the role of Information Technology and Communications (ITC) within the Council:

- a) a greater proportion of the information individual staff require to carry out their duties is held in core computing systems so that they are dependent on immediate access to that system for key information;
- b) e-mail has replaced paper memos as a key means of communication between staff both between departments on a peer to peer basis and between line managers and their staff; and
- c) the public already access information on services through the Council's Web site. The move is imminent to have them perform business transactions with the Council by this means on an increasingly large scale. So, for instance, increasing numbers will make credit card payments from the site or request services.

2.2 It is becoming increasingly important that the amount of "down time" for certain key systems is minimised so that there is no disruption in service both to staff providing services and directly to the public themselves.

2.3 The issue of resilience is being kept separate in this report from disaster recovery. The Council already has a contract with Guardian to provide replacement servers in the event of hardware failure or denial of access to the Council's equipment. This report considers the steps that could be taken to minimise the "downtime" in situations where total replacement of the hardware is not the best solution.

3. Vulnerabilities

3.1 Systems can become unavailable for a number of reasons. High availability is achieved by providing an alternative method of operation when downtime would occur in a system configured with no high availability features. The major reasons for a system not being available are:

- i) Hardware faults - these are most likely to occur with parts of the hardware involving moving parts such as disks and tape drives but also occur with network cards and power supplies.
- ii) Operating System Faults – where the operating system becomes corrupted or compromised.

- iii) Application Software Faults – where there is a problem with the software itself preventing the users carrying out their tasks.
- iv) Backing up systems – as the size of the databases grow the use of traditional media such as tapes can take a significant period of time. Normally applications are supplied in a state that does not allow users to be changing data while a backup is in progress.
- v) System and application upgrades – changing the underlying operating system, database or upgrading the application requires a period of time with users unable to update the application.
- vi) Absence of the electrical supply to the systems.

#### 4. Present Position

4.1 For the purposes of this report systems are divided into 3 categories:

- i) Systems that are being used 24 hours per day, 7 days per week (24/7).
- ii) Systems that need to be always available during an extended working day but can be taken offline during a period of time from midnight to 6am (High Availability).
- iii) Systems that can have periods of planned down time during the working day without severely disrupting the work of the Council (Standard).

Details of the required availability of each system are attached at Appendix 'N'.

4.2 Cross-cutting this classification is the importance of the system in terms of the consequences of the system being unavailable. This can be looked at financially, for instance the cost of income not collected because of the unavailability of the Revenues and Benefits System can be quantified, or in terms of the consequences on service delivery, for instance if repairs to Council Houses cannot be managed due to the lack of the system or if, for instance, Safer Runnymede could not be contacted immediately to be informed of a major incident.

4.3 Problems with the electrical supply have been a major issue over the past 18 months. However, as reported earlier, remedial work has now been carried out to the wiring within the building and a stand-by generator with an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) made fully operational. The immediate work on addressing this issue has, therefore, already been carried out and a further report on overall electricity requirements is in preparation.

#### 5. Availability Requirements

##### *24/7*

5.1 Systems falling into this category are either those supporting the provision of a 24 hour per day service to the public, systems providing security on the network and on the servers protecting them from damage or intrusion and systems providing a direct service to the public on a 24/7 basis. In the first category are systems supporting Safer Runnymede most notably the telephone switchboard and the e-mail system. The Firewalls, virus checking and external access monitoring also fall into the category of systems required 24 hours per day. Lastly, the Web server is required to be available at all times as this is the service expected from the public.

##### *High Availability Systems*

5.2 The core systems for Revenues and Benefits, Housing and the Cash Receipting systems fall into this category as will Document Management when it is an integral part of the working of departments using these systems. Staff working with the public require information from these systems for the full working day and there are a number of processes that must be carried out when users of the system are not logged in. Each of these systems has information that is not available in any other form so that if the system is not available the transaction will have to be delayed or the service not provided.

## *Standard Systems*

- 5.3 With all other systems loss of the application for a period of time, while clearly undesirable, does not have a major impact on services delivery or the financial transactions of the Council.
6. Options to provide greater resilience
- 6.1 A range of options are available from the running of parallel servers off-site with on-line replication of data through provision of backup servers on-site to the provision of servers with redundant components (eg doubling up on all key elements of the system such as power supplies, network cards etc). Each of these options has an associated cost.
- 6.2 *Hardware and operating software faults.*
- 6.2.1 A certain degree of resilience is already built into the servers used by the Council. On all the major servers the disks are configured so that in the event of a disk failure the server can carry on operating on the remaining disks until the faulty disk is replaced. Also network cards are duplicated so that the server can continue to operate if one network card fails. However the failure of other components can take the server out of action until a repair is effected. The next step in resilience is to provide a duplicate server that can carry on working when the first server fails. The servers can be configured using "clustering" software so that when one server fails the other takes over automatically. The cost of using clustering is a little more than double the cost of the initial server as two servers are required in addition to the clustering hardware/software.
- 6.2.2 The new systems being introduced separate the disk storage from the servers themselves. This helps with the costs of clustering the servers as resilience for the storage media becomes a separate issue.
- 6.2.3 The highest level of resilience can be achieved by running parallel servers off-site. Thus when a server fails an exact copy is available at a remote location and the service can be continued using this facility. Additional costs of these solutions involve the hardware and software to carry out on-line replication of data to the off-site machine, i.e. copying all the changes as they are made to the on-site server to the parallel machine as they happen so that in addition to a duplicate machine a data line to the remote location must be maintained.
- 6.3 *Application Problems*
- 6.3.1 With the Council's present policy of relying exclusively on packaged software maintained by the supplier, the extent to which downtime can be minimised depends a great deal on the nature of the support contract with the supplier. All maintenance contracts taken out by the Council allow for the severity of a fault to be assessed and where the system is unavailable the call takes the highest priority.
- 6.3.2 However, careful monitoring of the database and operating system can anticipate problems and minimise not only system failures but also performance problems. At present the databases are monitored manually. Use of a monitoring package such as Spotlight on Oracle and Spotlight on SQL Server can make system monitoring more efficient.
- 6.3.3 The cost of running Spotlight on Oracle on the Revenues and Benefits Server and Spotlight on SQL Server on the new Financial and DMS Systems would be £8,000 with revenue costs of £1,500 per annum.
- 6.3.4 The efficient operation of the network depends on the optimal running of the Microsoft Network and, in particular, Active Directory. Constant monitoring of Active Directory so as to anticipate problems and have them corrected will ensure minimal down time from this cause. As with the databases, monitoring software is available at a cost of £5,500.
- 6.4 *Security of the Network*
- 6.4.1 At present the Local Area Network is protected from outside intrusion by two firewalls, one protecting the leased line to the internet and the other the leased line to the County Council and the other Districts in Surrey. If either of these fails, the external links will be unavailable until the system is restored. A standby server with the firewall software loaded is kept ready

to be made operational should the main server fail. This is a lower specification machine that will be slower than the main server but will provide a level of cover.

- 6.4.2 At present exchanging firewall servers would have to be done manually and would involve changing cables from one machine to the other. This process could be fully automated by upgrading the Firewall software at a cost of £4,000.
- 6.4.3 All traffic through the firewall is virus checked through software provided by Trend Microsystems. Trend keep their virus checking software up-to-date to include new virus definitions by placing a new "pattern" file on their Web site as soon as the new checking routines are available. The anti-virus software server at Runnymede checks the Trend Web site every hour to see if a new "pattern" file is available and downloads and installs the new pattern file as soon as it is detected.
- 6.4.4 Anti-virus software is also installed on servers but at present not on all Personal Computers. In the past 12 months the number of viruses received from the Internet has risen from 2 or 3 a week to 4 or 5 a day. This level of activity increases the vulnerability on individual machines and so it is now thought prudent to load anti-virus software on all machines. This will cost £3,000 per annum.

## 6.5 *Backing-up Data*

- 6.5.1 In order to backup data the Council has a tape library with 2 drives and provision for 10 tapes. In addition a number of the servers have built in tape drives. All servers with volatile data are backed up nightly either with a full backup where the volume of data is low or a weekly full backup and nightly incremental backups. Software for the tape library allows databases to be backed up without the database being stopped.
- 6.5.2 For servers running 24/7 backups have to be carried out without stopping services. This is not a problem with the firewalls and anti-virus software but will become an issue if production servers become 24/7.
- 6.5.3 Use of individual tape drives is labour intensive and leads to a large number of tapes that have to be managed. Two options are available for making this process more efficient.
- 6.5.4 Firstly the use of the tape library could be extended by upgrading the tape library by increasing the number of drives and the total tape capacity at a cost of £30,000. All servers could then be backed up using the tape library.
- 6.5.5 A more comprehensive solution is to carry out all the backups off-site using a leased line. This obviates the need for local tape drives and all the management concerned with running the backup jobs overnight and organising the tapes including the off-site storage. This solution is more costly as, in addition to the leased lines, software is required to carry out the backups and manage its transmission through the leased line. The approximate cost of this approach is £40,000 per annum.

## 7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The Council is now highly dependant on a number of computer systems for the efficient operation of administrative services and for the direct provision of services to the public. The level of resilience is no longer appropriate for some of the key systems if the aim is to provide a continuous service for the whole working day and it is becoming increasingly important that systems maintaining security on the whole network be operational with the absolute minimum of down time.
- 7.2 In order to lessen the likelihood of system unavailability, software monitoring the Oracle and SQL server databases and the Windows network operating system should be installed as soon as possible. The level of virus protection should also be increased by the purchase of software to run on each PC.
- 7.3 A further investigation should take place with a view to determining the detailed costs of increasing the availability of the core systems by clustering major servers or providing off-site parallel servers. The proposal brought forward should identify the total costs and benefits for consideration by this Committee.

- 7.4 In order to gain the immediate benefits of the changes suggested above, and to recognise the risk to the Council of system loss or virus attack, Officers are of the opinion that the first 3 recommendations below should be actioned immediately. Item 4 would be the subject of a more protracted piece of work involving Members and the results of the recommendations would be implemented in the next financial year.
- 7.5 There is no provision in the capital programme for this expenditure. The costs associated with the first three recommendations will require a new budget of £16,500.

**OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -**

- i) software to monitor the operation of the Revenues and Benefits, Housing and DMS databases be purchased and installed at a total one-off cost of £8,000 and the revenue implications be noted;**
- ii) software to monitor the operation of the Windows operating system (Active Directory) be purchased and installed at a total one-off cost of £5,500 and the revenue implications be noted;**
- iii) anti-virus software be run on all PC's at a cost of £3,000 per annum;**
- iv) a capital budget of £16,500 be approved, to be financed from capital receipts or Government grant; and**
- v) the costs and benefits of increasing the resilience of key computer systems be investigated and a report on the matter prepared for this Committee and the Review Board.**

**(TO RESOLVE)**

Background Papers

None stated

15. DETERMINATION OF THE COUNCIL'S TAX BASE FOR 2003/04 (BT)

To recommend the Council's Tax base for the 2003/04 financial year, as set out in Appendix 'O'.

**(TO RECOMMEND)**

Background Papers

None stated

16. REFERENCE FROM LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE (BSLSO)

Abbey Fit (Formerly Abbeylands Sports Centre) BSLSO

(Ref: Minutes of Leisure and Environment Committee, March 2002, page 957, para. 656, and Council Minutes, April 2002, page 1092, para. 713)

At its meeting on 21 November 2002 the Leisure and Environment Committee approved draft Heads of Agreement as a basis on which to construct detailed documentation between Runnymede Council, The Jubilee High School Foundation and Surrey County Council, should this Council wish to proceed with a targeted investment in Abbey Fit Sports Centre. These draft Heads of Agreement are set out in full in the report considered by the Leisure and Environment Committee. Although Surrey County Council has already indicated its approval to the draft Heads of Agreement, a formal response is still awaited. Since most of the School Foundation members are new to the Sports Centre discussions, the Foundation has requested more time to consider the draft Heads of Agreement and their response is anticipated in a month's time.

At the March meeting of the Leisure and Environment Committee, Members requested that further research be conducted into the business plan for the Sports Centre extension proposals, before any capital expenditure was committed to this scheme. Officers have selected a suitable consultancy

firm through the tendering process, who will require 10 weeks to complete their brief. This work is estimated to cost in the order of £20,000.

An estimate of £5,000 was approved in March 2002 for an initial feasibility study and a provision of £20,000 for further research was also included in the revenue forecast pending its outcome. Only £2,000 of this original estimate was needed for the initial study and therefore a supplementary estimate of £17,000 is required. The Leisure and Environment Committee have accordingly requested this Committee to approve a supplementary estimate of £17,000 to fund the independent evaluation of the proposal and business plan for the proposed Sports Centre facilities. The consultants will not be appointed until the School Foundation and Surrey County Council have settled, in writing, the Heads of Agreement as a basis for a formal relationship with Runnymede Council.

**RECOMMENDATION OF THE LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE that-**

**a supplementary estimate in the sum of £17,000 be approved in order to fund the independent evaluation of the proposal and business plan, only to be expended when Heads of Agreement have been settled with the School Foundation and Surrey County Council to the satisfaction of the Leisure and Environment Committee Chairman.**

**(TO RESOLVE)**

Background Papers

None

17. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

**OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -**

**the press and public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following report under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the report in question would be likely to involve disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 9 of Part 1 of 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>para</u>
18.	REFERENCES FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE	9
b)	<u>Confidential Information</u>	

(No reports to be considered under this heading).