

Runnymede Borough Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 16 JULY 2009

Supplementary Summons – Item 10 (ii) – Recommendations of Committees

Corporate Management Committee – 25 June 2009

a) Upgrade To Planning Information On The Council's Website

The Committee considered the method of upgrading the collecting, storing and presenting of planning applications on the Council's website and the costed options for carrying out the upgrade.

At its meeting on 1 April 2009, the Planning Committee had considered a report on the Runnymede Sustainable Community Strategy and the Planning Service, and, inter alia, approved an upgrade to the Council's web based planning information service in order to improve access to planning information for both public and other stakeholders. The Committee had noted that Recommendation 3 of the Killian-Prety report, which had been commissioned by the Government, had advised Local Planning Authorities that there was a need to improve access to planning information for both the public and other stakeholders. The web upgrade would also form a key part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) that would consider how the Council communicated with the local community and other stakeholders. The Planning Committee had noted that in order to achieve the improved access to planning related information, some additional funding would be required. The Planning Committee had agreed to recommend to the Corporate Management Committee the approval of a capital estimate for an upgrade to the Council's web based planning information system. Since that time, Officers had been able to secure reductions on the costs presented to the Planning Committee and the need for a data store and facilities to provide measurement on screen had also been identified.

The Committee noted a revised table of capital costs for the upgrade totalling £23,550, which had been presented to the IT Member Working Group, at its meeting on 26 May 2009. These capital costs would link Idoc's gazetteer to Planning and Building Control, link existing properties in Northgate to the gazetteer, provide storage of images and image linking, allow for an Oracle upgrade to 10G, a Planning and Building Control upgrade to software version 8.10 and an upgrade to the existing Planning Explorer, plus consultancy. £3,400 annual maintenance revenue costs would also be required, which could be met from existing budgets.

The Committee noted that funding would also have to be found to provide a data store so that images of the relevant documentation could be linked to the web site, which would show information produced by reports from the planning system database. There were two options available to the Council to achieve this linkage. One option was by using the Vignette Document Management System. This would provide an immediate link to the Document Management System (DMS). The second option would be to purchase the Northgate Image Store (NIS). As NIS had no security features, all images in the store would be visible to anyone with access to the web page and so all images requiring differential access would have to be stored in the alternate secure location, the DMS. The Northgate route would cost approximately an additional £20,000 and the Vignette route would cost an additional £30,000. However, following the Northgate route would mean operating with two copies of many images, one in IDM and the second in NIS. The lack of security and indexing facilities within IDM would mean that it would only be an interim solution, after which a DMS linkage would have to be made.

There were two solutions to providing facilities to provide measurement on-screen. The first solution was through the installation of software that was fully integrated with the web environment and provided all users, both local and on the internet, with the measurement facilities. A solution that would achieve this had been identified at a cost of £30,000. The alternative was to use relatively inexpensive but supported software which would be used by staff and visitors to the Civic Centre and to advise web users where they could download free tools that would allow them to carry out measurements on the pdf files surfaced on the Web. This solution could be achieved for an investment of less than £5,000. The public would be

provided with a basic measuring facility, but would have to refer to staff to confirm the accuracy of measurements, whereas with the fully integrated route this would not be the case. The integrated route achieved the objective of giving the public greater access to information and allowed them more easily to resolve questions from the information presented on the web site, but was substantially more expensive.

At its meeting on 26 May 2009, the IT Member Working Group had considered the various options available to deliver the software upgrade agreed by the Planning Committee. From a technical, security and efficiency point of view it considered that this was best achieved by immediately linking to the DMS through the Vignette data store (VIDM). This approach was also more compliant with the Council policy of maximising the use of corporate systems and holding single sets of images in a secure environment. In view of the large additional cost of providing a fully integrated system of measurement on screen for staff and visitors, the IT Member Working Group had recommended that this facility should be provided by using inexpensive but supported software for staff and free downloaded software for users of the website.

The Committee concurred with the recommendations of the IT Member Working Group. Although they would entail significant expenditure, implementing these measures would save Officer time and would improve the service offered to the public. As well as being recommended by the Government, this upgrade would meet Planning Department objectives and would assist in the forthcoming CAA assessment. There had also been pressure from members of the public for the Council's website planning information to be improved. It was noted that it would not be feasible for the Council to charge the public for these additional website facilities, as case law had shown that Councils should not charge for the provision of planning information.

RECOMMEND that -

- i) the Planning System be upgraded in order to provide the information required to achieve Place Shaping and Development Management, at a cost not exceeding £23,500;**
 - ii) the VIDM data store be purchased at a cost not exceeding £30,000, which will integrate with the DMS to link reports to images stored in the DMS, thus complying with the Council strategy of maximising the use of corporate systems and fulfilling best practice in data storage and retrieval;**
 - iii) the facility to take measurements from plans and maps for staff and visitors to the Civic Centre be provided using suitable software, at a cost not exceeding £5,000;**
 - iv) a capital estimate in the sum of £58,600 for these upgrades be taken from the provision for systems upgrades and development held in the capital programme; and**
 - v) a revenue estimate of £3,400 per annum be allocated for the additional maintenance costs, to be met from existing budgets.**
- b) Powers Of Councillors – Councillor Call For Action And Delegation To Ward Members

The Committee noted recently introduced provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement In Health Act 2007.

Authorities operating executive arrangements had now to make provision to enable any Member of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee to refer to the Committee any matter relevant to the functions of the Committee. This right also extended to other Members of the Council provided that the matter in question was a local government matter. This requirement did not apply to Runnymede as the Council operated alternative arrangements. However, Runnymede's Standing Orders already allowed any Member of a Committee to ask for a

particular matter to be included on the agenda, provided they gave written notice by 9.30 am on the 8th working day before the date of the meeting (to ensure that the public notice requirements could be met). This largely overlapped the rights given by the 'Councillor Call For Action'.

Under Section 236 of the Act, which had been brought into force with effect from 1 April, local authorities could authorise individual Members to discharge any function of the authority 'to the extent that the function is exercisable in relation to the ward for which the Member is elected'. If this power was implemented, a written record of any decisions had to be kept in the same way as full Committee decisions. The powers could be delegated to Ward Members generally, or to Members in specified wards, or to specified Members. Guidance published by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Improvement and Development Agency suggested that functions that could be delegated might include power to develop and oversee youth activities and facilities, powers to give grants to local groups, and powers to target particular local problems. In most cases it would be necessary to delegate a defined budget to Ward Members along with the substantive power. This would have to be met from existing resources, diminishing spending ability in other directions.

The Committee agreed that because the Council was an alternative arrangements authority and operated a traditional Committee structure, there was ample opportunity for the views of Ward Members to be taken into account in arriving at decisions. The Committee could therefore see no reason to delegate functions to Ward Members under the Act.

It was noted that the Local Government Legislation Member Working Group would be considering other Government initiatives at a future meeting.

RECOMMEND that -

no functions be delegated to Ward Members under Section 236 of the Local Government And Public Involvement In Health Act 2007.

c) Crime And Disorder Committee

The Committee considered how the requirements of Sections 19 to 21 of the Police and Justice Act might be met.

Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 required all District Councils (amongst others) to institute a Crime and Disorder Committee, with power to review or scrutinise decisions and action taken by responsible authorities in connection with their crime and disorder functions, and to make reports or recommendations about those functions. This section had been brought into force on 1 April 2009. If an individual Councillor was asked to consider a 'local crime and disorder matter' by a person living or working in their ward, the Councillor had to consider the matter and respond, saying what if any action he or she proposed to take, and might (but did not have to), refer the matter to the Crime and Disorder Committee. A 'local crime and disorder matter' meant a matter which concerned crime and disorder, or the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances, in their ward. The Crime and Disorder Committee had to consider any local crime and disorder matter referred to it by a Member of the Council, (whether or not in response to an approach made by a person living or working in the Councillor's ward), and might report and/or make recommendations to the Council.

The Crime and Disorder Committee could appoint Sub-Committees. The Council had to make arrangements to enable Members of the Committee or its Sub-Committees to place relevant matters on the agenda. The Crime and Disorder Committee could include people who were not Councillors, but they were not entitled to vote (except in the case of certain co-optees who had crime and disorder functions). The Crime and Disorder Committee might also require Members or Officers of the Council to attend to answer questions, and could invite other persons to attend. It had greater powers to compel attendance than other Committees and the Review Board when acting in a non-crime and disorder capacity. The Committee also had the power to require written information from certain authorities, persons or bodies. While Members or Officers had to attend if required, they did not have to answer questions that they would not have to answer in court proceedings. The usual requirements applied about publicity for

meetings and agendas and political balance and the Committee had to meet not less than once every 12 months.

The Corporate Management Committee noted that there was no reason why an existing Committee could not be the Crime and Disorder Committee, as long as it did not mix up its functions. When it was meeting as the Crime and Disorder Committee, it could only function as such. The Committee noted that whilst implementation of any new legislation carried at least an opportunity cost in terms of staff and Member time, the resource implications would be minimised if the Review Board, the Council's current Overview and Scrutiny Committee, was designated as the Crime and Disorder Committee, particularly if it met in that capacity on days when it was also meeting in its other capacity. The Committee agreed to recommend this as an appropriate course of action.

RECOMMEND that -

- i) the Review Board be designated as this Council's Crime and Disorder Committee; and**
- ii) the Director of Administration and Leisure be instructed to include provisions in the 2009 review of the Constitution (to be approved in due course) to give a suitable framework for operation of the Crime and Disorder Committee.**

Review Board – 9 July 2009

d) Annual Report Of Review Board 2008/2009

The Board considered a draft Annual Report for the Municipal Year 2008/09 in accordance with Sub-paragraph 6.03 (d) of the Council's Constitution which stated that Overview and Scrutiny Committees must report annually to a full Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate.

In terms of the Board's future work programme, it was agreed that Members should be encouraged to bring items forward and it was noted that if Members had items which they wished to discuss they should contact the Chairman, Vice-Chairman or Officers. The Board also considered that Members might meet informally to discuss potential items, and a suggestion was made for gravel extraction in Egham as a suitable topic. Members could also use the formal measures provided in the Council's constitution to have matters considered by the Review Board.

Regarding the items identified in the Report as ongoing, it was noted that Officers reported on these issues to other Council Committees and not just to the Review Board. For example, the question of Foundation Trust status for the Ashford and St Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust had been considered by the Corporate Management Committee, the masterplan for St Peter's Hospital was a matter for the Planning Committee and monitoring of air quality had been discussed by the Leisure and Environment Committee. The Board was updated on these and other issues periodically. Concerning the Sustainable Communities Act, the Corporate Management Committee had agreed to await the outcome of the first tranche of proposals, (the deadline for which was 31 July 2009) and had resolved that no further action be taken until the Government released figures for all central Government expenditure.

Concerning issues for discussion over the forthcoming year, the Board would be reviewing progress being made by the Council in achieving net revenue reduction targets and in meeting the challenges of the Council's financial position. A reference setting out the Board's concerns in this regard would be submitted to the next meeting of the Corporate Management Committee.

The Board also discussed a statement from the Leader of Surrey County Council which suggested a change of policy with regard to incineration, which would have an effect upon the Trumps Farm, Kitsmead Lane incinerator site. Previously Surrey County Council's policy preferred incineration, however, the recent statement seemed to indicate a move

towards recycling and away from incineration. The Board also registered its concern that the proposed residential development on the DERA former MOD site had been determined by a regional non-elected quango. It was agreed that these issues were more appropriately considered by the Planning Committee at this stage.

The Board considered that over the course of next year it should widen its consideration of the parking provision at St Peter's Hospital to take in progress which was being achieved by the Ashford and St Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust, (or Foundation Trust as it might in future become), with regard to a masterplan. By attending the Board and answering questions, Trust representatives had been able to note directly the concerns of Council Members and this had provided impetus to further action. A Member was pleased to report improved parking provision at Ashford Hospital. St Peter's Hospital had reduced the size of parking spaces which, while increasing the number of vehicles which could be accommodated, did make it more difficult to leave the car park because of lack of manoeuvring room.

A Member of the Board referred to the Local Government Association's view that Council Overview and Scrutiny Committees might be more appropriately chaired by one of the minority group Members on the Council. It was noted that this suggestion would need to be the subject of discussion amongst the political groups on the Council.

The Review Board's report for 2008/09 is attached.

RECOMMEND that –

- i) the report be received; and**
- ii) it be noted that items 5, 7, 8 and 11 in the Report have been satisfactorily concluded and that the other items in the Report remain ongoing.**