

Item 11

The Standing Citizens' Panel for Surrey Heath

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL'S LOCAL COMMITTEE (SURREY HEATH)

8th December 2005

KEY ISSUE:

The report updates Members on the last meeting of the Standing Citizens' Panel for Surrey Heath.

SUMMARY:

On 27th October the Citizens' Panel met with Members, who were invited to discuss local issues.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Local Committee notes the report.

INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

1. The Standing Citizens Panel for Surrey Heath was set up following a meeting of the Local Committee on 17th July 2003. At this meeting, Members agreed that the Panel would be an innovative way to engage and consult with local people on local issues.

Notes from the Panel meeting on 27th October 2005.

Present:	Bob Hayes	David Gradwell	Keith Steel
	Ray Bates	Carol Brooke-Read	John Looby
	Rodney Bates	Sue Cartwright	Tim Price
	Paul Deach	James Osbourne	Shirley Covenny
	Diane Carol		

SCC officers present: Carolyn Rowe Jane Biscombe
SCC Members present: David Ivison Maurice Neighbour

- 1). Surrey County Council (SCC) is currently undergoing a business delivery review and has pressures for next year to save up to £50m. Panel members voiced concern for frontline services – which ones are at risk?

SCC needs to find savings of £50m to avoid large council tax rises.

The review will be concluded in December, this will coincide with SCC finding out the level of funding it will receive from the Government.

Members cannot comment on possible savings at present as they have not yet seen where they are identified to come from.

- 2). The Panel felt Council Tax rises have been too high in the past and that local people are fed up with constant rises.

Panel members noted that:

- The basis for funding allocation (Revenue Support Grant) from central government is changing, which is affecting Surrey and parts of the South East.
- 70% of SCC budget comes from the Government
- SCC should publicise this (Govt changes to funding, and the impact of this on the Council Tax bill.)
- Council Tax payers are not bothered why, just that there are continual rises. This is especially hard on older people. Politicians could expect a revolt.
- More funding comes with conditions on how this funding is spent – so there is less local discretion.
- Lots of Resident's Association's are represented here – we should persuade our RA members to write to the MP.
- Local people would be encouraged by and want to hear about the efforts made to lobby Government by SCC.

Members responded:

- Members would welcome action to promote this issue.
- SCC can be penalised for spending outside conditions. SCC Members asked Panel members to inform Michael Gove MP of their views. Mr Gove can be written to at:
Curzon House
Church Road
Windlesham
Surrey GU20 6BH
Or emailed at michael@michaelgove.com
- Individual letters to the MP would be more effective than a petition.
- The leader of SCC is lobbying parliament on this subject.

Panel members appreciated that it is hard to publicise difficult / sensitive negotiations but wanted to know if Member's allocations are likely to change. Members could not answer this at the present time. The budget was cut last year and the current review may impact on this. The County Council 's budget date is 07/02/06.

Council tax benefit is available for people on low incomes. This is paid by the Local Authority as a rebate on Council Tax bills. The maximum amount of benefit is 100%.

SCC can influence how the funds are worked out but some funds from budgets ring fenced so can't influence e.g. Schools.

- 3) Surrey County Council are active on SEERA (South East England Regional Assembly). The housing allocation for Surrey has been reduced significantly from 47,000 to 26,000.

Panel members were concerned that groups such as SEERA, are used by Government to cut SCC out of the loop on such negotiations. The South is taking unfair housing pressure. What can be done?

The Local Committee have had the South East Plan at the Local Committee. The Local Committee commented that housing can't be put in without the associated infrastructure. SCC Members continue to lobby and work with MPs & others such as GOSE (Government of the South East) to promote these issues.

4) Transport

There are issues with traffic exiting the Old Dean onto the A30. Panel members advocated better public transport in Surrey Heath to encourage people not to use their cars. SCC currently provides funds of about £7m to bus companies. Panel members asked SCC to bear in mind the whole economic cost of congestion. Public transport usage has risen by 17% on Route 1 and 40% up on Route 35

5) Planning and parking

Current guidelines are for 1 ½ parking spaces per flat. Can SCC do anything about this? This is not a law but a Government guideline. It was agreed that this was another issue to raise with Michael Gove MP

Local people are also converting their garages into rooms. Plus on some new developments garages just aren't big enough. (e.g Dettingen Park)

How do Members view the increased developments of flats?

- Not aesthetic
- Increases congestion
- But we need affordable housing

The definition of affordable needs to be looked at. Most developments are not "affordable" because the prices are just too high

6) Street lighting

There are 9,600 lighting columns in Surrey Heath
Local Committee has no budget for columns, funds come from grants only but the Local Committee puts aside £35,000 - 40,000 pa to replace columns
There is a 5 year PFI (Public Finance Initiative) programme from 2006 to replace columns

Lamps need to be left on all night for safety reasons so cannot be turned off to save electricity.

Light faults should be reported to SCC on 08456 099 099.

They can also be reported on the SCC website at :

www.surreycc.gov.uk/env/hews/hews.nsf/AtoZRTF?OpenForm

Members of the Panel had experience that this worked well.

Generic Highway enquiries can be e-mailed to

surreyheath.highways@surreycc.gov.uk.

Mailing individual people is not recommended as the person may not be in the office; whereas the generic address gets accessed every day and distributed as required.

For response times, SCC strive to achieve the following **once the detail has been passed to the Contractor**.

Street Lighting 'No Light' or 'On Days' faults	Initial attendance within a maximum of 3 working days
Illuminated Traffic Signs 'No Light' or 'On Days' faults	Initial attendance within a maximum of 2 working days
Illuminated Traffic Bollard 'No Light' faults	Initial attendance within a maximum of 2 working days
Street Lighting emergency	Initial attendance within a maximum of 2 hours
Illuminated Traffic Sign emergency	Initial attendance within a maximum of 2 hours
Illuminated Traffic Bollard emergency	Initial attendance within a maximum of 2 hours
Dirty Traffic sign	Initial attendance within a maximum of 2 working days
Regulatory Traffic Sign twisted to face wrong way	Initial attendance within a maximum of 2 hours
Defect in Road or Footway (pavement) - High Risk	Initial attendance within a maximum of 1 hour
Defect in Road or Footway (pavement) - Low Risk	Initial attendance within a maximum of 24 hours

7) Additional Questions

Panel Members were invited to ask questions in advance, the questions and responses are detailed in the Annex to this report.

CONSULTATION

6. The Panel is a consultative group of local representatives. The notes in this report reflect the views of Panel members.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7. None

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

8. The issue of planning and associated parking spaces was one of the main issues discussed.

CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9. Information gained on crime and disorder issues will continue to contribute to the Local Partnerships Teams work on the Safer Surrey Heath group and it's associated sub-groups.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

10. The Panel is representative of the Surrey Heath Community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Local Committee notes the report.

LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER: Jane Biscombe

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

1. The budget for next year and Council tax.
2. Local Area Agreement and how it affects Surrey Heath

Local Area Agreements are a new contract between central and local government to deliver the priorities of local people. In cities, towns and rural areas, we want to see shared goals delivered through strong local leadership and effective support from Whitehall. We aim to minimise bureaucracy and maximise delivery. This will achieve, greater efficiencies for local authorities and their partners giving them the freedom to work in a 'joined up' way to meet the challenges that localities face, in dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour, adverse public health trends, and the long-term economic and social well-being of our communities.

In Surrey Heath the LAA is being mainstreamed through the Community Planning process and the Community Safety Strategy.

The LAA has four areas:

1. *Children and young people*
 2. *Safer and Stronger Communities*
 3. *Healthier Communities and Older People*
 4. *Economic Development and Enterprise*
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3. Improving road capacity in Camberley, especially the Meadows roundabout and going north from the Meadows to the A329M - how do we get SHBC working with SCC and the neighbouring authorities so that something actually happens;

Surrey has recently produced a provisional second Local Transportation Plan and set out its objectives and strategies for tackling congestion. With regard to 'The Meadows' then additional capacity is not easily achievable given the current restraints although some benefits may be gained in future from initiatives within the Yorktown Strategy, most notably the proposed A30 link road. Additionally, funding will continue to be sought through development to undertake the strategic review of transportation movements in the Camberley Area. There is currently no programme for commencement of this and is largely dependant on the decision to redevelopment of Camberley Town Centre.

With regard to Authorities working together then this already happens at many levels on a vast range of initiatives. Surrey would lead on the review of transportation movements and coordinate any cross boundary issues'.

4. Improving rail links from the Farnborough main line, through Camberley, Ascot and up to Heathrow, now that Terminal 5 is well on the way. This would take some load off the M3 and A30.

Increased services along the Bagshot-Camberley-Frimley were introduced last year taking the service from hourly to half-hourly . The service is now much better. There are still no throughrains to London, a fact which Surrey has been drawing to the attention of Network Rail, DfT Rail and bidders for the new franchise which will be re-let from Spring 2007. No other initiatives in the pipeline in the short-term as we're now in the period of what is known as 'franchise blight' when train operators become increasingly reluctant to do non-essential works as they might shortly have to surrender the franchise and therefore not see a return on their investment.

The AirTrack base case is two trains per hour from Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell (possibly stopping at Ascot) to Heathrow, and two trains per hour from Guildford, Woking and

Chertsey to Heathrow, plus two trains per hour from Waterloo to Heathrow via Staines. These have been identified as the best business case, although lots of other routes have been considered, including Farnham, Aldershot, Camberley and Heathrow.

As the scheme has yet to have funding identified, and can't be built before 2011, it is not a practical proposition to push for additional or changes to these service patterns at this stage. I think the best way forward would be to try to ensure that the Reading to Heathrow service calls at Ascot, thus connecting with the half hourly Guildford, Aldershot, Camberley and Ascot service. Eventually it would be nice to carry out work at Ascot Station to make it more "interchange" friendly, but unfortunately it is not in Surrey!

5. Regarding the Street Lighting PFI Scheme. Several years ago I noticed that the street lights were rather shabby, rusting, paint peeling off, etc and I thought to myself that the next time the Council replaces the street lights, they should replace them with aluminum ones that at maintenance free. In the summer 2005 newsletter I read about the successful bid for funding from the central government to replace the street lights and have eagerly awaited their arrival in 2006.

Just recently, new lamp posts have been installed across the road on Queensway and also near the Lakeside Complex. Unbelievably, they have not replaced the old light with a new one, they have installed the new one along side of the old one!

What is even worse, in my opinion, is that the new street lights are just like the old ones, painted, not aluminum and will unfortunately need to be maintained. Perhaps these new street lights have nothing to do with the this PFI Scheme, I don't know, but I would like to know if consideration was given by the Council to purchasing aluminum light posts and if not, why. Wouldn't it be more prudent to spend the government money on more expensive maintenance free light posts rather than pay the money to a private company to maintain the old type light posts?

The project is progressing well; we are now down to 3 bidders. The project should start in late 2006 or early, although timing is dependant on negotiations.

The lighting replacement works currently in hand in Queensway and Wharf Road have no connection with the PFI project. Rather, they are annual replacements that we place a bid to County Hall for as a result of the previous year's annual maintenance check performed by our current contractor, RCS Ltd.

It is the practise to erect new lamp columns adjacent to the old ones whilst we await Southern Electric to transfer the underground electricity supply (Only Southern Electric can do this). As soon as the transfer of supply is complete, RCS Ltd will programme the removal of the old lamp column.

With regard to the material used, I regret that Aluminium - although an attractive proposition - does have the disadvantage of being rather more expensive to purchase than steel. It is appreciated that once painted, paint needs to be maintained; but we do not have the Capital budget to install Aluminium.

The other issue with painting lamp columns is that the County Council wishes to have a corporate identity. County policy dictates that lamp columns shall be painted 'Surrey Green' with some exceptions. During PFI, it may well be that a change in policy is driven by affordability, but it is suspected that 'Surrey Green' will still be required - albeit with alternative coatings than paint.

6. Strategy for Surrey should be discussed - especially in relation to the non-elected position of SEERA having greater influence.

The South East England Regional Assembly is the representative voice of the region. It comprises 112 members, including elected councillors nominated by the region's local authorities. There are also regional representatives chosen by the voluntary sector, environmental groups, faith communities, business and economic partnerships, education and cultural networks and town and parish councils. Each of the 74 Local Authorities in the SEEDA area is entitled to a seat. Social, environmental and economic partners in the region 'having an interest in the work of the RDA' will be allocated a total of 34 seats; these will cover,

- *The voluntary and community sector*
- *Business organisations*
- *Environmental interests*
- *Economic partnerships*
- *Higher education*
- *Further education*
- *Trades unions*
- *Culture, sports, arts, tourism*
- *Health*
- *Rural interests*

Consultation on the draft South East Plan closed at 5.00pm on Friday 15 April 2005. During the second half of 2005 local authorities in the South East will be consulting on detailed local elements of the Plan, including housing figures district by district.

www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan

7. Earlier this year SCC stated that funds had been allocated to rebuild the parapets, and to construct a much needed wooden pedestrian bridge alongside. We were assured that the work would be done in July/August. Recent enquiries led us to believe that these funds had been vired to another budget (Chertsey Bridge). Windlesham Parish Council has long pressed for a pedestrian bridge in Broadway Road because it is potentially very dangerous for pedestrians to pass between the parapets where the road is reduced to single width, and where there is no footway.

Fast moving vehicles can come into view and get to the bridge before pedestrians have a chance to reach the safety of the far side. There are many pedestrians who use this, the shortest, road link between Lightwater and Windlesham. Will funding be restored for 2006/07 and can we be assured that the project has sufficient priority for these funds to be safeguarded so that it can be implemented next summer?

So far as we are concerned, the replacement of the parapets is incidental and does not provide justification for delaying the comparatively low cost element of the separate wooden pedestrian bridge which was to be done concur.

Awaiting response.