



Woking Borough Council and Surrey County Council working together

Local Committee for Woking 19 January 2005

KEY ISSUE:

The Borough Council has agreed to a motion seeking agreement with the Local Committee for working more closely together on a range of issues including Health, Well-being and Youth.

SUMMARY:

This report sets out the current thinking of the Borough Council on how a closer working relationship could be achieved and suggests the next steps to bring this about.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to:

- a) welcome the initiative of the Borough Council in seeking closer joint working with the Local Committee and authorise the Chairman, Vice Chairman and the Local Director to progress discussions regarding the areas of activity that could usefully and successfully be covered by joint arrangements;
- b) indicate a preference between the two structural models outlined in the report for achieving joint working; and
- c) receive a further report on the conclusion of these discussions.

1. Introduction

1.1 Councillor Goldenberg submitted the following motion to the Executive of the Borough Council in July, 2004 – “That the Executive, in consultation with Group Leaders, draw up a list of policy areas which could, in the interests of the Borough, be better dealt with by the Local Committee of Surrey County Council, provided that an appropriate number of Borough Councillors were full members thereof; and thereafter progress the concept with Surrey County Council, including the possibility of a budget delegated to the Local Committee by both authorities.”

1.2 The Borough Council’s Executive recommended the Borough Council to agree to the motion, which it duly did at the meeting held on 16th December, 2004. This report examines the implications of the proposal and what the next steps might be.

2. Local Committees

2.1 Surrey County Council’s local committee initiative was designed to make community involvement in decision-making easier, by making decisions closer to the community. The County Council provides services to 1.1 million people but not everyone wants the same things. It is clear that there are different needs in different places. Professional staff recognise and respond to those different needs in their everyday work but, in order to reflect local community needs, the County Council established local committees.

2.2 So far, local committees’ role is to make local decisions on highways and transportation issues in partnership with the Borough Council and to monitor the performance of other County Council services. It is possible that more services will report locally in future. They also provide a local view on countywide initiatives such as proposals for changing the schools admissions policy and, currently, the Waste Strategy. Finally, they try to harness County Council resources in support of local initiatives and plans in partnership with other bodies such as Primary Care Trusts, the Police, Voluntary Organisations and Borough Councils.

2.3 The County Council hopes that these partnerships can become more significant so that public and voluntary sector organisations can work increasingly closely together to provide integrated and complementary services. Locally, the interests of all these organisations are to improve the well being of people living and working in Woking, and with such closely aligned objectives, it surely makes sense to have closely aligned working.

2.4 In particular, it has long been the aspiration of the Woking Local Committee to find ways of providing integrated services for the people of Woking which bridge the divide between the tiers of local government organisation.

3. Policy Areas

3.1 The Borough Council's Executive, in considering Councillor Goldenberg's motion, identified Health, Well-being and Youth issues, including community use of school pitches, as areas which could be further explored for joint working. These objectives fit well with the priorities identified through the development of Community Strategy which includes a general aim of working more closely together to eliminate duplication and ensure that there are common goals as well as specific aims concerned with Health and Well-being. The area of Community Safety is already the subject of joint working through the Safer Working Partnership.

3.2 The Local Committee might want to add issues such as support for the voluntary and community sector, consideration of the direction to be taken by the Local Development Framework and the Leisure Services directed at young people in particular to the discussions.

4. Structural Considerations

4.1 There are several ways in which closer working could be achieved. The Borough Council's motion talks about using the Local Committee with Borough Council membership being extended from the highways and transportation aspects to include all of the policy areas that might be agreed for joint working. There are several advantages to this format including the track record that the local committee has established of co-operation between members of both authorities and an existing secretariat.

4.2 However, the local committee is a County Council body, subject to the County's policies and procedures and which must be chaired by a County Councillor. This may not be seen as an appropriate forum for a truly joint and equal partnership between the constituent authorities and the Borough Council may have difficulties in giving control over certain budgets to a County Council body. An alternative could be the creation of a joint committee under the Local Government Act with a remit to progress agreed policy areas or objectives. Such a joint committee could transact the highways and transportation business currently brought before the local committee as well as considering the areas that the Borough and County Council agree should be delegated to it. If this proposal were implemented, the local committee would remain to consider purely County Council issues such as performance monitoring, members' allocations and local responses to Countywide initiatives.

4.3 If a joint committee was favoured, the task of servicing the committee could be shared between Borough and County staff adding a further dimension to joint working.

4.4 The constitutional implications of expanding the local committee by including Borough Councillors as full members for a wider range of topics and extending the Committee's powers are that the County Council would need to agree to a variation in the orders of reference of the Committee and amend Standing Orders accordingly. If a Joint Committee was preferred, the Borough and County

Councils would similarly need to approve the formation and remit of such a Committee.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The prospect of better joint working with the Borough Council brings closer the realisation of the local committee's ambition for a properly joined-up approach to delivering at least some local government services to the people of Woking. Accordingly, the initiative from the Borough Council can be welcomed and Members and Officers authorised to begin discussions about the areas to which joint decision-making should apply and the mechanism through which it should be exercised.

5.2 These discussions would be aided by an expression of preference by the local committee between the structural models for achieving better integration and, for the reasons set out in this report, the Local Director would recommend the formation of a Joint Committee under the Local Government Act, 1972.

Report by: Mike Howes,	Local Director for Woking
LEAD/CONTACT OFFICER:	Mike Howes
TELEPHONE NUMBER:	01483 518093
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	Woking Borough Council papers

Version No: 1

Date:04.01.05

Initials: MH

No of annexes: 0

Annex 1 – Criteria for allocation

To be considered, projects must

- a. support the priorities of the Surrey Corporate Plan and Woking Community Strategy.
- b. be possible to implement within the time and budget, and offer value for money.

In choosing what to fund, the Local Committee aims for a portfolio which overall:

1. includes at least one comparatively large project of benefit to Woking;
2. benefits a variety of communities of interest (for example, young people, old people, ethnic minorities, disabled people), and different areas of Woking;
3. includes a mix of large and small projects, but not a lot of very small ones.

A large project that benefits a lot of people will take priority over a project that benefits only a few people.

Within this framework, projects are more likely to be funded if:

1. The funding is needed “one-off”.
2. The project will demonstrate its impact within 12 months.
3. The project will give long-term benefit.
4. The project is preventive in purpose.
5. The project targets more disadvantaged areas or communities.
6. Local Committee funding will unlock much more funding from other sources.
7. If small and local, the project has a significant impact on the quality of life of the people affected.