

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Members of the Overview Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of telecommunications masts.

1.2 The terms of reference of the review were:

To understand the planning freedoms Mobile Telecommunications providers have;

to review current sites of Telecommunication Masts in the borough;

to review Gravesham Borough Council's policy on telecommunication equipment located on Gravesham Borough Council owned property.

1.3 The context in which the review was undertaken was to investigate the constraints the planning department has in respect of permitting or refusing telecommunications masts and to consider the need for the siting of more masts with the emergence of 3G mobile phone systems.

1.4 Three evidence gathering sessions were held. The first session held on 5 August 2004, was with Mr J Lee, a senior planner who deals with all telecommunication mast planning applications within the borough. The second session was held on 28 September 2004 with Ms N Davies, Council Liaison Manager from the Mobile Operators Association (MOA) together with representatives from four of the mobile operators. The third session was held on 4 November 2004 with Dr M Clark, Public Relations, National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB).

Evidence was also collected from a questionnaire published on Gravesham Borough Council's website and in the Council's magazine 'Your Borough' that each household in the borough receives.

1.5 Conclusions and Recommendations: -

1.5.1 Members of the public have real concerns over the perceived health risks associated with mobile 'phone masts and many feel that these concerns are being ignored.

1.5.2 The public currently feel disengaged from the planning process for the mobile operators despite their agreement to adhere to the 10 commitments to best siting practice.

1.5.3 Evidence so far suggests that there is no general risk to the health of people living near base stations although it is advisable that a precautionary approach be taken until further research can be carried out.

1.5.4 The emissions produced by the handsets and their proximity to the caller's head are far greater than any emissions that would be received from a mast and this is exacerbated when a mobile 'phone user is situated some distance away from a base station, as the handset itself will have to emit more radiation because it has to work harder to pick up a signal.

- 1.5.5 In most cases local planning authorities have very little power to enable them to refuse the siting of a mast. It is recommended that Cabinet makes representations to government that applications for the siting of telecommunications masts should be dealt with on their individual merits, in the same way as all other planning applications, without any special concessions.
- 1.5.6 The banning of masts from KCC land has increased the number of controversial sites chosen by telecommunications companies. It would, therefore, appear to be helpful for KCC to remove its blanket ban on the siting of masts on its land and, instead, to evaluate each application for a mast on a case by case basis. KCC is invited to explore with the Overview Scrutiny Committee the practical implications of lifting the ban.