

Runnymede Borough CouncilCORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE24 September 2020 at 7.30 p.m. via MS Teams

Members of the Committee present: Councillors N Prescott (Chairman), J Gracey (Vice-Chairman), A Alderson, I Chaudhri, D Cotty, L Gillham, M Heath, J Hulley, M Maddox, A Neathey, D Whyte and M Willingale.

Members of the Committee absent: None

Councillors M Adams, D Clarke, C Howorth, I Mullens, J Olorenshaw, R King, J Sohi and S Whyte also attended.

200 NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Group mentioned below had notified the Chief Executive of their wish that the change listed below be made to the membership of the Committee. The change was for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting and thereafter the Councillor removed would be reappointed.

Group	Remove from Membership	Appoint Instead
Labour and Co-operative	Councillor R King	Councillor A Neathey

The Chief Executive had given effect to this request in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

201 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillors A Alderson declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 11 on the agenda on Literary Institute, Egham – Proposed Lease as an Egham Ward Councillor and a member of the “@ the Lit” Working Group. He remained in the meeting, took part in the discussion and voted on this item.

Councillor I Mullens declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 on the agenda on Proposed Review of Runnymede’s Council Tax Support Scheme, as she was a volunteer for Runnymede and Spelthorne Citizens Advice Bureau. She remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion for this item.

Councillor I Mullens also declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 11 on the agenda on Literary Institute, Egham as an Egham Ward Councillor and a member of the “@ the lit” Working Group. She had advised and supported “@ the Lit” over the past year. She remained in the meeting for this item.

Councillor A Neathey informed the meeting that he was no longer a member of the “@ the Lit” Working Group. He had not been a member since January 2020. He remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and voted on this item.

202 BUDGET MONITORING UPDATE 2020

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

203 PROPOSED REVIEW OF RUNNYMEDE'S COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Committee considered a report reviewing Runnymede's Council Tax Support Scheme to ensure that it was up to date and relevant which sought to avoid an excessive financial burden on the general Council Tax payers and to provide a scheme that was fair and equitable to all sections of the community, kept pace with changes to Universal Credit and Housing Benefit and took into account the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee also considered an Addendum which contained revised recommendations, the comments of the meeting of the Housing Committee that had received the report for information at its meeting on 9 September 2020 and changes made to the report by Officers following that Housing Committee meeting. The report set out four options for the Committee to consider. The Committee agreed that whichever option it chose would apply for a further two years. There would then be a review by the Committee at the end of that two year period.

Option 1 would keep the scheme unchanged, Option 2 would keep the scheme unchanged and create a £50,000 discretionary hardship fund, Option 3 would allow flexibility in the application of the Minimum Income Floor for self-employed customers and Option 4 would re-introduce Council Tax Support for those in Bands F and G. The Government had granted Runnymede Borough Council £337,832 to deal with the impacts of coronavirus. The cost of the £50,000 discretionary hardship fund would be met by using part of this grant.

Officers recommended the adoption of Option 2 in these unprecedented times when there was a need to react quickly to provide support to the most vulnerable. It was noted that some other local authorities in Surrey had set up a hardship fund. At the meeting on 9 September 2020, some Housing Committee Members had preferred options 3 and 4 and had not supported Option 2 as they were concerned that the administration of the hardship fund would be carried out by officers exercising their discretion. However, most Members of the Corporate Management Committee supported Option 2 on the basis that it was the best option available for the next two years although some considered that it might not be a good long-term solution.

The discretionary hardship fund would commence in April 2021 and would be administered over two years and would be used to help those most in need due to the economic impact of coronavirus but were excluded from Council Tax Support or were receiving less than their full liability. It was agreed that when the Council reviewed the Council Tax Support Scheme and the discretionary hardship fund in two years' time it should receive an analysis of the discretionary hardship fund payments, showing which payments were made and which payments were not made and the reasons for these decisions. As the Committee had adopted Option 2, there was no need to undertake consultation with stakeholders on whether they would prefer Option 1, 3 or 4 as the scheme would be maintained in its current form.

It was agreed that Officers would arrange for the link to Council Tax Support on the Council's website to be made more prominent.

RESOLVED that -

- i) Option 2 in the report be adopted;**
- ii) a £50,000 discretionary hardship fund be approved to help those most in need utilising part of the Government grant received for dealing with the impacts of coronavirus; and**
- iii) as it has been decided to adopt Option 2 which means maintaining the scheme in its current form and creating the hardship fund referred to in resolution ii) above, no consultation with stakeholders be undertaken.**

204 DISCRETIONARY GRANT FUNDING: EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE POLICY

The Committee considered how a sum of £55,447 which had been allocated to Runnymede by Surrey County Council should be used. The Council had been allocated £55,447 by Surrey County Council out of a total of £788, 015 which had been granted by the Government to Surrey County Council to help those who were struggling to afford food and other essentials across the County of Surrey as a result of Covid-19.

The Committee agreed that £50,000 of the Council's allocation from Surrey County Council should be set aside and used as part of a Discretionary Grant Funding Emergency Assistance Policy. The Committee considered and approved a Discretionary Grant Funding Emergency Assistance Policy and agreed that officers should start administering the scheme as quickly as possible. The Committee noted an Equality Screening form. A full Equality Impact Assessment was not considered necessary as it was expected that the Policy would have a positive impact on Runnymede's most vulnerable residents.

The Council already had a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) policy and a Council Tax Hardship (CTH) policy that supported residents with housing and Council Tax costs. The Government had also introduced a "new burdens fund" to support working age claimants with a payment of £150 towards their Council Tax. However, there were many families that did not qualify for either Housing Benefit, Universal Credit or Council Tax Support and had also not qualified for any of the other Government support packages. They now faced extreme hardship and were unable to meet their day to day living expenses. The Discretionary Grant funding Emergency Assistance money would be used predominantly to assist those families with the cost of food and other essentials, but it would also supplement both the DHP and CTH policies where it was appropriate to do so.

During the pandemic, Runnymede Foodbank had been very successful in supporting vulnerable families who had been unable to buy food and other essential items. The Committee agreed that the remainder of the Council's grant, £5,447, should be allocated to the Runnymede Foodbank. However, Members reported that the Foodbank had obtained food through donations rather than purchasing the food. Therefore, the Committee agreed that the sum of £5,447 be allocated to the Runnymede Foodbank subject to the requirement that it be used for the purchase of food within 12 months of the allocation being made.

It was noted that one of the main ways in which residents would be informed that they might be eligible for this emergency assistance would be through being advised by Council staff. It was also noted that this emergency assistance would be given a prominent position on the Council's website. It was agreed that officers would provide Members with a briefing that would advise Members how to respond to members of the public who enquired about this discretionary grant funding.

RESOLVED that -

- i) £5,447 of the grant funding from Surrey County Council be allocated to the Runnymede Foodbank subject to the condition at resolution iii) below and the remainder (£50,000) be set aside and used as part of the Policy referred to at resolution ii) below;**
- ii) the Runnymede Borough Council Discretionary Grant Funding : Emergency Assistance Policy attached at Appendix 'F' to the agenda be approved and officers start administering the scheme as quickly as possible; and**
- iii) the sum of £5,447 referred to at resolution i) above be allocated subject to the requirement that it be used for the purchase of food within 12 months of the allocation being made.**

205 EGHAM GATEWAY WEST – NAMING AND COLOUR BRANDING OF THE RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

The Committee agreed to defer this item for further consultation on the naming of the residential buildings and on alternative names for Egham Gateway West. A report would be submitted to the Committee's next meeting.

206 REOPENING HIGH STREETS SAFELY FUND

The Committee considered an action plan and an application expressing interest in drawing down European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding that the Council had submitted to the Government in order to have access to £78,590 of ERDF grant funding. The Council had been allocated £78,590 ERDF grant funding to support the safe reopening of high streets and other commercial areas that had been temporarily closed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Delegated authority was sought to allow officers to approve and sign the Grant Funding Agreement and make applications for reimbursement to draw down the ERDF grant.

The Committee welcomed this funding which was subject to strict criteria which set out the purposes for which it could be used and the purposes for which it could not be used. There were no clawback clauses attached to the funding. There was a penalty if Councils did not adhere to the strict requirements but Officers would work closely with the Government's Account Manager for this grant funding in order to stay within the rules. The Council's expenditure would be audited and the grant period ran from June 2020 to March 2021 after which all temporary changes made to high streets had to cease.

It was proposed currently that the Council would spend approximately £15,500 of this grant which was well below the £78,950 total allocated sum to the Council. Current spend to date had been £2,190. It was noted that logos would need to be displayed where appropriate in order for the Council to be able to draw down the grant.

This funding could not be used for Covid-19 enforcement marshals. It was agreed that a Member would be advised whether any funding would be made available to the Council for Covid-19 enforcement marshals.

RESOLVED that –

delegated authority be given to Officers to approve and sign the Grant Funding Agreement and make applications for reimbursement to draw down ERDF grant.

207 RECRUITMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS – MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

The Committee considered a report seeking authority to proceed with the recruitment of individuals to discharge the function of Independent Person in relation to the operation of the Council's Member Code of Conduct and provide assistance in the event that disciplinary action was taken against the Council's three statutory officers.

Independent persons were needed in respect of Member conduct matters and employment issues for senior officers. The involvement of such external persons brought a degree of impartiality to the two processes. In 2012 the Council had appointed two people to act as Independent Persons. In May 2019 one of these people had stood down from the role as they were becoming more involved in local politics. The Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to undertake a recruitment exercise to seek to recruit three people (2 Independent Persons and 1 Reserve Independent Person) which would increase the

number of Independent Persons the Council would have available to discharge this function.

The Committee approved the recruitment process set out in the report. The current allowance paid for an Independent Person was the same that the Council would pay if it had any co-opted members (currently £471 per annum) and the Committee agreed to retain the allowance at this level. In the event that the Council was successful in recruiting three people for these roles the cost would be approximately £1,500 per annum which would be met from existing resources.

RESOLVED that –

- i) the Monitoring Officer be authorised to advertise a vacancy for the appointment of 2 Independent Persons and 1 Reserve Independent Person;**
- ii) a panel comprising the Chairman and three other Members of the Standards and Audit Committee be set up to short-list and interview candidates, and to make a recommendation to Full Council for the appointment of 2 Independent Persons and 1 Reserve Independent Person; and**
- iii) the allowance to be paid for acting as an Independent Person be the same as the Council would pay a co-opted Member of the Council.**

208 LITERARY INSTITUTE, EGHAM – PROPOSED LEASE

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Committee considered a report proposing that the “@ the Lit” Trust, a Trusteeship to be formed, be granted a short term lease of a large part of the Literary Institute building in Egham to provide a centre for local community events, exhibitions, shows and any other use that promoted Egham as a destination. It was also proposed that “@the Lit” would work with Runnymede Borough Council and Surrey County Council to accommodate Egham Library within the building.

The Committee welcomed these proposals and considered that “@ the Lit” would provide a valuable addition to the facilities available in Egham town centre by creating a space for the local community to reconnect after long periods of isolation caused by Covid-19 and act as a centre for learning and engagement. Furthermore, “@ the Lit” would host exhibitions and workshops which would attract not only residents but also visitors to the town and increase the town’s tourism potential and Egham Library relocation would deliver an enhanced “community hub” provision for Egham town centre.

The Council had previously received offers for the rental of the whole of the ground floor of the building and the Committee noted the levels of rent that had been offered previously. Unfortunately with the current pandemic and a depression in the property market, this level of rent was no longer achievable. The Committee noted the financial implications of granting a lease to “@ the Lit” and agreed that the open market rental value associated with the lease in the sum reported be offset by the provision of 100% Rent Grant Aid and be accounted for accordingly in the Council’s budgets.

The Committee was satisfied that granting a lease to “@ the Lit” met the criteria for disposal of land for less than the best consideration that could reasonably be obtained as it would help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of its area. The break clause in the lease would allow the Council to make a periodic review of “@ the Lit” and either continue with the lease or terminate it as appropriate. The relocation of Egham Library would be the subject of discussion between the Leaders of Runnymede Borough Council and Surrey County Council and senior officers of both Councils. It was agreed that terms for the lease for the occupation of Egham Library be delegated to the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

RESOLVED that –

- i) the Trustees of “@ the Lit” be granted an internal repairing lease of the demise as set out in paragraph 4.2 of the report for a period of five years, subject to a mutual option allowing either party to end the lease at any time on 6 months’ notice on terms to be agreed by the Corporate Head of Law and Governance including the provisions set out in paragraph 4.2 of the report and resolution ii) below;**
- ii) “@ the Lit” to be responsible for the internal repairs of the premises and the Council to be responsible for ensuring that the building is wind and watertight and the engineering plant and services are maintained to a reasonable condition;**
- iii) the open market rental value associated with the lease in the sum reported be offset by the provision of 100% Rent Grant Aid and be accounted for accordingly in the Council’s budgets;**
- iv) “@ the Lit” work with Runnymede Borough Council and Surrey County Council Officers to accommodate the Egham library provision within the building to deliver an enhanced “community hub” provision for Egham town centre; and**
- v) terms for the lease for the occupation of Egham Library be delegated to the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee.**

209 BARBARA CLARK HOUSE REGENERATION PROJECT

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Committee considered a report containing details of the tendering process for the Barbara Clark House regeneration project on the former Ashdene site in Englefield Green.

It had been necessary to retender for the construction of the project for the reason outlined in the report. Following this second tender exercise, a preferred contractor had been identified and it was now proposed to proceed with the construction and appoint the preferred contractor. The estimated spend for the project and the risks associated with the project were noted. Having considered the information in the report, the Committee agreed that officers proceed with the construction of Barbara Clark House and appoint the preferred contractor.

It was agreed that further detail would be provided to a Member regarding the first tender for the project.

RESOLVED that -

Officers proceed with the construction of Barbara Clark House and appoint the preferred contractor following the tender exercise of the scheme.

(The meeting ended at 9.20 p.m.)

Chairman