

Runnymede Borough Council

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

17 November 2021 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors M Heath (Chairman), N King (Vice-Chairman), S Dennett, R King, S Lewis, J Olorenshaw, D Whyte, S Williams and M Willingale

Members of the Committee absent: Councillor D Clarke

Councillors C Howorth, I Mullens and S Whyte also attended

276 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 September 2021 were confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the addition of the following sentences to the minute on Climate Change: Councillor Mullens asked whether Runnymede Borough Council had set 2030 as the date for net zero. The Chairman answered that this Committee endorsed the Surrey County Council Strategy which set 2030.

277 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor D Clarke

278 Climate Change Presentation

Members received a presentation regarding Climate Change to give them an opportunity to make Officers aware of any issues which were of particular concern to residents and businesses for consideration for inclusion in the strategy. The presentation covered the following areas:

- RBC Climate Change Team – Recent Appointments
- Current Actions
- Parameters and constraints
- Climate Change Strategy Highlights
- Request for Members Input

Some Members expressed their anger and frustration that the promised strategy was essentially a scoping document and strongly felt that the strategy should have progressed further by this stage. The Chairman advised the Committee that Runnymede wanted a serious strategy whereby their aspirations were measurable and full consideration was given on what could actually be delivered. Scope 1, 2 and 3 was a way of categorising the different kinds of carbon emissions an organisation creates in its own operations, and in its wider value chain. The term first appeared in the Green House Gas (GHG) Protocol of 2001 and today, scopes were the basis for mandatory GHG reporting in the UK. Officers advised the Committee that regarding Scope 1 and 2 these were well defined. Scope 3 was not a mandatory requirement.

The Committee discussed in detail the possibilities of moving the Council's DSO fleet to more sustainable fuels for example, biofuel or hydrogen. Whilst Officers were receptive to this some constraints were highlighted which included the warranties of existing fleets becoming invalid if the fuel type was converted, damage to engines and difficulties in obtaining mechanics to maintain the converted fleet. The necessity for procuring future DSO fleet vehicles running on more sustainable fuels was noted.

The Committee was keen to move ahead with Scope 1 as soon as possible and wanted to look at setting up a community involvement/advisory group to facilitate public engagement in the Climate Change Strategy. With a report on actions/points and deliverables in this regard being presented to the next meeting of this Committee in January 2022.

The Committee was pleased to note that Phase 3 of the current car parking review would look at installing electric charging points in some of the Council car parks.

Regarding planning, Officers were asked by the Committee to explore the creation of a strategy to only allow Green properties to be approved through local planning procedures. Additionally, Officers were asked look at Green procurement via the Council's Constitution Member Working Party with feedback being brought back to the Committee as soon as practical thereafter. It was noted that an improved Green Infrastructure SPD in relation to planning was due to be considered at the next Planning Committee meeting on 24 November 2021.

The Chairman was thanked for her work locally in relation to Climate Change.

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL ON 9TH DECEMBER THAT –

Runnymede Borough Council sets target of 2030 to be net zero; and

The Committee also RESOLVED that-

A Community involvement/advisory group be set up to facilitate public engagement in the Climate Change Strategy with a report being brought to this Committee in January 2022 on key actions/points and deliverables

279 Annual review of car parking fees and charges in off street car parks and proposed change to restrictions at Aviator Park recreation ground car park

Members were advised that an annual review of car parking charges was undertaken in November each year for implementation in January.

Public car parks were an amenity provided by the Council for the convenience of the public. In shopping areas, they also encouraged and maintained the viability of businesses. The income from the car parking was expected to, at least, cover the cost of providing and maintaining the car parks.

Following the retirement of the Parking Services Manager in July 2021, Parking Services transferred to the Customer, Digital and Collection Services business centre and the Corporate Head had undertaken a full review of parking services in the Borough. The review was split into three main areas

- Phase 1 covered staffing and new ways of working
- Phase 2 covered replacement of the existing case management system to include self-service and paperless permits
- Phase 3 will cover maintaining and improving the Council's car parks including implementing Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) and Electric Charging (EVC) points.

Members received details of the Borough car parks in relation to the number of spaces and current charges. It was noted that car parking income also came from season tickets, contract parking permits and penalty charge notices.

The effect of the pandemic and the lock down significantly reduced car park use across the Borough. When considering the level of car parking charges Members would normally balance the costs of operating the car parks and the income for the Council with the impact on the viability and vitality of the town and neighbourhood centres in the Borough. The last year had been unprecedented and the economic recovery much slower than anticipated and with a fundamental change in people's working patterns, it was difficult to estimate the potential future income at this time. Therefore, Officers did not propose to increase charges for 2022/23 financial year but have a year of stability, supporting local businesses and encouraging the public back into the Borough's towns.

The Committee were fully supportive of this very logical approach. It was agreed that a period of stability was needed at this time. In relation to the review, the Committee was advised that a capital investment during the year 2022/23 would be needed, a report would be brought to this Committee for their consideration at that time.

The Committee had received a letter from the Egham Chamber of Commerce regarding various car parking proposals/suggestions for Egham. The Committee considered the contents of the letter along with the proposals/suggestions coming under this Committee's remit. The Runnymede Joint Committee would be responsible for considering the proposals in relation to on-street parking. Officers would respond fully to the Egham Chamber of Commerce's letter following the meeting.

Members were advised that the Parking Services team also carried out periodic reviews of the Council's free car parks alongside the car parking charges review. This normally took place every three to four years the last one was carried out in November 2016. At that time, this Committee resolved that there was no case for introducing charges to these car parks.

Since the last review it had recently come to the attention of the Corporate Head of Customer, Digital and Collection Services that the car park at Aviator Park Recreation Ground was being used by the public to park their vehicles whilst they were at work rather than visiting the park, which was the original intention of that car park. If they used other car parks within the town centre, they would have to pay for parking at around £7 a day depending on which car park they used. The current restrictions that applied in the Aviator Park Recreation Ground car park was that vehicles may wait for a maximum period of three hours and a return was prohibited within two hours. This car park had not been patrolled for many years as it was often difficult to prove the contraventions under the current parking restrictions, so resources had been targeted elsewhere. A consequence of this non-enforcement was that regular users of that car park had become complacent and continued to enjoy free parking for up to 6 hours a day. With the Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO)s now visiting the car park, PCN's had been issued which had resulted in several complaints from the owners of the vehicles who challenged the legality of the notices. Unfortunately, with no machines to capture the original time of the vehicle being parked, it was sometimes difficult to defend the notice.

Discussions with the Green Spaces team confirmed that users of the park rarely stayed for longer than two hours so by amending the parking restriction order to retain the current maximum waiting period of 3 hours but to increase the no return from 2 to 5 hours would not impact the current park users and would ensure that the car park continued to be kept available for use by the public for recreational purposes. This change would be achieved through an amendment to the Borough of Runnymede (Off-Street Parking Places) Order 2008 (as amended). There would be a minimal cost for these changes requiring improved signage and the installation of a machine.

RESOLVED that –

Car Park and permit charge levels remain unchanged for the next year to support residents and businesses following the Covid 19 pandemic; and

The Council advertises its intention to amend the Off-Street Parking Places Order in respect of the Aviator Park Recreation Ground Car Park to increase the period of no return from two to five hours to ensure the car park remains predominantly for the benefit of the Recreation Ground users

280 LGV driver retention and succession planning – waste management operations

The Committee was asked to approve an increase to the refuse and recycling budget.

It was reported that there was currently an estimated 100,000+ LGV and HGV (Class 2 and Class 1) vacant driver posts throughout the United Kingdom. The same problem also existed throughout Europe. In order to retain existing drivers and protect services Members were asked to approve the proposal for an annual payment of £3,000 to each of the Council's existing 15 drivers as a retention/market supplement payment. Additionally, further funding was sought to provide training to existing staff to cover the role of relief drivers, an increase to salaries to relief drivers when qualified and an increase in salary budget for the appointment of an Operations Manager for the waste and street scene budget.

Officers were pleased to report that throughout Covid 19, Runnymede was one of twenty-five authorities across the 345 England authorities who did not use resources from other departments, suspend collection services or use external contractors to supplement the existing workforce to ensure a continuation of service delivery. Currently throughout England, 48% of local authorities had reduced collections due to a shortage of drivers. Garden waste, food waste and recycling collections had all been affected. Waste collection in Runnymede was unique in that it required 100% staffing regardless of sickness or holidays. Until August 2021, the Council's Waste Management team were able to hire in relief drivers from agencies to cover holidays and sickness but due to the shortage of drivers nationally they now chose to work elsewhere due to higher rates of pay and full-time positions. Due to the age profile of the workforce, as well as the shortage of qualified relief drivers Officers were now looking to cover periods of holidays and sickness by developing their own staff to become relief drivers/loaders through external training. This would also aid succession planning.

Additionally, in order to expand the promotion and improvement of recycling and waste collections across the Borough Officers proposed to appoint an Operations Manager. This post would further expand work in relation to promotion and improvement of recycling and waste collections as well as improving the recycling and contamination performance.

The Committee was fully supportive of this approach which was considered forward thinking and future proofed the service. The Committee was advised that agency staff were offered the option of applying for permanent positions with Runnymede Borough Council when they became available. There were currently 3 agency drivers and one vacancy. Members were keen for Officers to explore the possibility of recruiting younger people into the service by changing the image and asked Officers to bring a report to a future Committee in this regard. Praise was given to the DSO team which had continued to provide an excellent service throughout the pandemic.

RESOLVED that –

The additional funding detailed below be approved.

£57,825.00 pa for the existing 15 LGV refuse drivers as a retention/market supplement payment; and

£11,470.00 pa for the training of existing staff to cover the role of relief drivers; and

£53,205.68 for the increase in salaries once relief drivers were qualified, an increase for five members of staff from a Grade 4 Loader to a Grade 8 LGV Refuse Driver; and

£9,000 for the increase in the salary budget for the appointment of an Operations Manager for the waste and street scene budget; and

Corporate Management Committee be requested to approve a supplementary revenue estimate for the sum of £131,500.68 to cover total annual funding increase

281 Highways grass cutting and highway weed control arrangements 2022/23

The Committee was advised that during September 2021 Surrey County Council had confirmed their intent to continue the current delegated arrangement for highway verge cutting with Runnymede Borough Council until 31 March 2023. Surrey County Council paid Runnymede Borough Council £72,871.00 plus RPI to provide four grass cuts throughout urban areas and one highway weed control application. Runnymede Borough Council had previously resolved to supplement this by £53,129.00 per annum to top up the number of grass cuts to seven throughout the urban areas and two throughout the rural areas. Additionally, an increase of two highway weed control applications to maintain the verges to a good quality.

Members were also asked to approve the extension of the Council's existing agreement with Spelthorne Borough Council to deliver highway verge cutting until the end of March 2023 and approve Empire Ground Care, the current contractor for weed control to be engaged via a direct quote process for the 2022/23 season.

Members discussed the possibility of some grass verges being left to grow longer and using insect corridors to add biodiversity. Officers advised the Committee that there was a contact at Surrey County Council in this regard. Additionally, it was noted that Surrey County Council was currently running their 'Blue Campaign' which looked at increasing biodiversity in grass verges which Runnymede could express an interest in.

Regarding letting the verges grow longer it was noted that as the land belonged to Surrey County Council and Runnymede maintained the verges on their behalf, Surrey County Council would need to indicate they were happy with this approach. It was agreed that highway verges were not viable because of road safety. It was also agreed that this was a balancing exercise as often when the grass was left to grow longer some residents complained. The possibility of neighbourhood co-ordination along with Councillor input could however be explored.

RESOLVED that –

The current arrangement with Spelthorne Borough Council for highway verge maintenance be extended for a further period until 31 March 2023; and

The existing contractor for highway weed control – Empire Ground Care was engaged via a direct quote process to deliver weed control services during the 2022/23 season

282 **Fees and charges 2022/23**

The Committee's approval was sought for the proposed mix of statutory and discretionary fees and charges for those services falling under the remit of Environmental Services. The main fees and charges being increased related to; Trade waste disposal fees, Recycling, One off payments covering Trade, Refuse, Recycling and Green Waste, Street Cleansing-Graffiti Removal and Highways and Engineering.

Members were disappointed to note the increase of 13.4% for graffiti removal. Officers advised the Committee that the increase was in part due to an increase from the contractor and an increase in the cost of raw materials. Members were assured that no profit was made from the service and in the case of repeat offences the police were contacted. Councillor Howorth advised the Committee that Community Services were currently undertaking a review of anti-social behaviour.

RESOLVED that –

the proposed fees and charges for 2022/23 be approved, to be effective from the dates within the appendix or as soon as practical thereafter

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 10.46 pm)