

Runnymede Borough CouncilCorporate Management CommitteeThursday, 20 June 2024 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors R King (Chair), L Gillham (Vice-Chair), A Berardi, MD Cressey, T Gracey, C Howorth, J Mavi, R Milstead, S Ringham, M Smith, P Snow and D Whyte.

In attendance: Councillors T Gates and I Mullens.

9 **Notification of Changes to Committee Membership**

There were none.

10 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2024 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

11 **Apologies for Absence**

There were none.

12 **Declarations of Interest**

Agenda item 13 – Appointment of Shareholder Non-Executive Director (Chair of the Board)

Councillor Milstead declared that he had a disclosable pecuniary interest and withdrew from the meeting during consideration of the item.

13 **Council Tax Support Review**

Changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme could only be made following a statutory consultation, during which residents, and key partners such as precept authorities and the voluntary sector, would be consulted. The financial impact on Runnymede and precept authorities, depending on which option was eventually implemented, could be significant.

The use of resources to undertake the statutory consultation, and whether this would outweigh the advantages of retaining the existing scheme, was suggested as a consideration for the Committee.

The possible advantages and disadvantages of each option, such as the ability to tailor the service to an individual's needs versus the impact on the staffing resources associated with operating the service, were mentioned as considerations for when this item was brought back to the Committee following the statutory consultation.

It was confirmed that for a household to qualify for the benefit set out in paragraph 2.17 of the officer's report, a qualifying individual would need to reside at the home address.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) A consultation, containing all of the options for changes to Runnymede's Council Tax Support Scheme, to begin in July 2024, with a view to agreeing a scheme for implementation from 1 April 2025.

- 2) Expenditure of £5,000 from existing budgets, to undertake the consultation exercise agreed in 1) above be agreed.
- 3) A further report, detailing the results of the consultation and proposals for the Council Tax Support Scheme, be provided to the Corporate Management Committee in November 2024.

14 **The Treatment of War Pensions in the Calculation of Housing Benefit**

The Committee was fully supportive of the proposal contained within the officer's report.

It was **resolved** that the Council be recommended to fully disregard war pensions income when calculating entitlement to Housing Benefit (in accordance with the arrangements set out in paragraph 5.4 of the officer's report).

15 **Corporate Debt Policy**

The proposed changes aimed to provide an efficient and cohesive approach to recovering debts. The ethical considerations, in particular an individual only having one point of contact regarding their debts, was an important element of the proposal. A single point of contact also made assessing an individual's eligibility to receive certain benefits or other support, with a view to alleviating some of the financial pressures that they were experiencing, more practical.

Where debt recovery was required, the use of a credit reference agency made assessing an individual's ability to make payments towards their debt more effective.

It was **resolved** that the Corporate Debt and Financial Inclusion Policy be agreed.

16 **Customer First Strategy**

Members highlighted that residents were often frustrated when navigating the services offered by district and borough councils, and the county council. It was confirmed that the effectiveness of the Council's signposting was regularly reviewed, with the intention of improving it where persistent issues were identified.

The operation of the proposed live chat feature for the website was discussed. The service would operate with a combination of automated responses and customer service adviser input, depending on the subject matter and whether queries were received during business hours.

The Committee was reassured that the ability for residents, particularly those who were not comfortable with online engagement, to make 'in person' or telephone enquiries, would remain. A number of departments also operated services within the community, or undertook home visits, where these were appropriate.

It was confirmed that the previously proposed 'citizens' panel' was the subject of a separate piece of work which would be brought to the Community Services Committee in due course.

It was **resolved** that the Customer First Strategy and associated action plan be agreed.

17 **Digital Transformation Strategy**

It was **resolved** that the Digital Transformation Strategy and associated action plan be agreed.

18 Website Accessibility Improvements

The Committee noted that this was an important piece of work, particularly with regard to website accessibility requirements placed upon councils.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The project proposals, to improve the accessibility and usability of the www.runnymede.gov.uk website, be noted.
- 2) The release of £10,000, from the Council's capital programme provisional scheme, to commence essential website improvements, be agreed.

19 Bookings System Project

The Committee was supportive of the proposal, which sought to modernise how the Council's assets were made available for public use. It was hoped that the ability to check venue availability and make payment at the point of enquiry would reduce the number of bookings lost to other venues.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The project proposals, to improve the Council's online and internal bookings management processes and systems, be noted.
- 2) A capital estimate in the sum of £25,000, to commence the bookings system development required in the Digital Platform, to be funded from the equipment replacement reserve, be agreed.

20 Annual Appointments to Outside Bodies

It was stated that the positions with Citizens Advice Runnymede and Spelthorne were for a member and a deputy. With this in mind, Councillor Mullens stated that she was happy to be considered for the deputy position.

Councillor Snow sought further information on Councillor Gahir's credentials in relation to the position on the Sir William Perkins Foundation. Following a discussion about Councillor Gahir's and Councillor Snow's candidacy for this position, Councillor Snow withdrew his nomination.

As there were more nominations for positions available with Voluntary Support North Surrey, the Committee discussed the candidacy of each individual before voting in accordance with Standing Order 39.6.

It was **resolved** that the following appointments be made, in accordance with the arrangements set out in the report:

Air Training Corps (no. 398 Squadron) Management Committee	Councillor Harnden
Armed Forces Champion	Councillor Saise-Marshall
Ashford and St Peter's NHS Trust	Councillor Williams

CARS (Runnymede and Spelthorne Citizens Advice)	Councillor Milstead (member) Councillor Mullens (deputy)
Chertsey Chamber of Commerce	Councillor Mavi Councillor Parry
Egham Chamber of Commerce	Councillor Mullens (member) Councillor Moudgil (deputy)
Egham Museum Trust	Councillor Harnden
Egham United Charity	Noted that the appointment made by the Trust
Fairoaks Airfield JCC	Councillor Mann (member) Councillor MK Cressey (deputy)
Frank Muir Memorial Field	Noted that the councillors for Thorpe Ward are appointed to the Trust
Henry Smith's Charity	Noted that Mrs Doreen Weavers, Ms E Bancroft and Mr D W Parr had been appointed by the charity.
Noise and Airspace Community Forum (NACF)	Councillor Berardi (member) Councillor Gates (deputy)
Parking and Traffic Regulations Outside London Adjudication Joint Committee and the Traffic Penalty Tribunal (PATROL)	Councillor MK Cressey
Runnymede Access Liaison Group (RALG)	Councillor Jenkins Councillor Harnden
Runnymede Open Awards Centre	No nominations.
Sir William Perkins's Foundation	Councillor Gahir
South East Employers	Councillor R King (member) Councillor Gillham (deputy)
South East England Councils	Councillor Gillham (member) Councillor R King (deputy)
Staines Shopmobility	Councillor Harnden (member) Councillor R King (deputy)
Strode's Foundation	Councillor Mann

Surrey Museums Partnership	Councillor Harnden (member) Councillor Ringham (deputy)
Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area Strategic Partnership Board	Councillor S Whyte (member) Councillor Ringham (deputy)
Virginia Water Community Association	Councillor Howorth Councillor Rowsell
Voluntary Support North Surrey	Councillor Clarke Councillor R King

21 **Appointment of Shareholder Non Executive Director (Chair of the Board)**

[Councillor Milstead left the meeting during consideration of this item.]

An external review of the governance arrangements for Runnymede's companies had been commissioned. The review would be brought to a future Corporate Management Committee, prior to the companies' AGMs taking place.

It was **resolved** that Councillor Milstead be appointed as Non-Executive Director (Chair of the Board):

- 1) RBC Investments (Surrey) Ltd
- 2) RBC Services (Addlestone One) Ltd
- 3) RBC Heat Company Limited

22 **Appropriation of the residential property at St Ann's Hill**

The Committee was pleased that a long-term vacant property was being brought back into use. The property was currently in a lettable condition, having undergone a refurbishment shortly before it was vacated. The lease, when agreed with an occupier, would contain appropriate provisions addressing the issue of access and the use of the adjacent public open space.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The intention to appropriate the use of the Lodge at St Ann's Hill, from open space to the general fund, be formally advertised.
- 2) Any objections to the appropriation be reported to the Committee.
- 3) In the event of there being no objections to the appropriation, the appropriation process be completed without reporting back to the Committee, and that the Corporate Head of Law and Governance be authorised to prepare and sign a Memorandum of Appropriation to record the appropriation of the Lodge at St Ann's Hill to the general fund.
- 4) The changes to the Heads of Terms be agreed.

23 **Annual Treasury Management Report 2023/24**

The Committee was pleased to note that the Council's treasury management function had performed well again this year.

This report was for information only.

24 **Salix Public Sector Low Carbon Skills Fund Phase 5 Bid**

The Committee was pleased to note the positive environmental impact of this proposal.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) Details of the Council's submitted bid to the Public Sector Low Carbon Skills Fund Phase 5 for a total value of £255,700 be noted.
- 2) The procurement and agreement of contract terms if the Council is successful in securing funding through the Phase 5 Low Carbon Skills Fund be agreed.

25 **Treescape Funding Application - Tiny Forest**

The Committee welcomed the potential for increased tree cover, higher levels of carbon being absorbed locally, and progress being made towards the Council's climate change commitments. Community engagement was also another prospective benefit of hosting 'tiny forests'. The impact on existing resources, particularly with the ongoing maintenance required for 'tiny forests', was noted.

It was **resolved** that the Council proceed with the application process to the Treescapes Fund, working in partnership with Earthwatch Europe and Spelthorne Borough Council, subject to being able to withdraw from the process at a future point, with a final decision on being able to proceed to be taken following receipt of a further report to Committee in September 2024.

26 **Recommendation from Environment and Sustainability - Electric Vehicle Charging at Council Owned Car Parks**

The Committee was advised that surveys, to establish whether there was sufficient electrical capacity at various sites, were required before any charging infrastructure could be procured. Consideration would be given to whether faster or slower charging technology was required, depending on expected and maximum parking times available at each viable site.

It was **resolved** that a budget of £30,000, to be financed by the release of funds, be approved to undertake the works agreed by the Environment and Sustainability Committee.

27 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the remainder of the meeting during the consideration of the remaining matters 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 as set out in Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

28 **Recommendation from Environment & Sustainability - Procurement of Replacement Fleet Vehicles**

It was noted that the vehicles would not be purchased before charging infrastructure was in place.

It was **resolved** that a capital estimate for the purchase of two electric fleet vehicles, to be funded from the Equipment Replacement Reserve set up for this purpose, be approved.

29 **Recommendation from Community Services - Community Transport**

The Committee agreed that the proposals would result in a more resilient service for the borough's most vulnerable residents. It was also agreed that whilst the temporary move to HVO as a fuel for the borough's vehicles was welcomed, a transition to an electric fleet was an important milestone in the Council's Climate Change Strategy.

It was **resolved** that the recommendations, as set out in the exempt officer's report to the Community Services Committee on 12 June 2024, be approved.

30 **Request to incur greater sum of money on legal proceedings than permitted under delegated authority**

The Committee agreed that it was important to undertake enforcement action in cases where serious breaches of regulations were identified. This was particularly the case when it related to the safety of residents. The proposal set out in the officer's report was therefore supported.

It was **resolved** that authority be granted to incur further legal costs up to the amount set out in the officer's exempt report, to meet the legal costs associated with this matter, be agreed.

(The meeting ended at 10.02 pm.)

Chair