

Runnymede Borough Council

Corporate Management Committee

Thursday, 21 November 2024 at 7.30pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors R King (Chair), L Gillham (Vice-Chair), T Gracey, C Howorth, S Jenkins, C Mann, R Milstead, M Nuti (In place of J Mavi), S Ringham, M Smith, P Snow and D Whyte.

80 **Notification of Changes to Committee Membership**

Councillor Nuti substituted for Councillor Mavi.

81 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2024 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

82 **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

83 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no apologies for absence.

84 **Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places**

The Committee reviewed the proposed polling districts and places, whilst noting that officers had sought to avoid using schools where a suitable alternative was available. The use of portacabins was not preferable for accessibility, logistical and cost related reasons. The availability of convenient nearby parking was also a consideration. It was confirmed that counting for wards in the Windsor and Maidenhead constituency would be carried out locally.

It was **resolved** that the parliamentary polling districts and polling places set out in appendix 1 of the officer's report be approved.

85 **Citizens' Panel**

The Committee reviewed the work that had taken place since the last update. It was suggested that the application form should be reviewed, to ensure that its language was accessible to as wide a range of residents as possible.

There was discussion about ways in which younger people could be engaged with, including whether the citizens' panel should eventually be accessible to 16 and 17 year olds. There was the suggestion of utilising other forms of engagement that were tailored to a younger audience. Previous attempts to engage with Surrey County Council on this matter were mentioned.

The report was noted.

86 **Shared Prosperity Fund Update**

The Committee reviewed the proposals and noted the update on the Shared Prosperity

Fund (SPF) project and funds that had been committed to date.

There was a debate about the proposal to refocus the money allocated for Guildford Street in Chertsey town centre. Some members felt that Chertsey town centre had received substantially less investment than Addlestone and Egham town centres, with a decline in the variety of retail establishments suggested to be as a result of this. Other members commented that they would support future investment in Chertsey, subject to it being affordable, consideration being given to the Council's receipt of a non-statutory best value notice, and the need to identify £4.1 million in revenue savings by 2027/28.

The proposal to remove the seating and planters in Guildford Street was challenged, following officer consideration of the ongoing maintenance cost. Queries were also raised about the climate change reasons given for the planters' removal.

The Council's grounds maintenance team was not in a position to take on additional maintenance tasks, and as such it was likely that the work would need to be contracted out. In any case, water would need to be transported to the site. It was confirmed that there had been some discussions with local businesses about whether they were able and willing to maintain the planters. There had however been relatively limited willingness from businesses to maintain planters that were not directly outside their premises. This approach was also not likely to be sustainable in the long term, which meant that the Council would need to be responsible for maintaining the planters. This was not considered a prudent approach in the financial climate. Some members felt that the Street Scene Team should be focusing on improving the maintenance of existing assets and street furniture, rather than adding additional items. A member also raised concerns about compatibility with Surrey's LCWIP proposals.

Other elements of public realm that some members felt had been neglected included the maintenance of existing seating and the York stone pavement. Many of the issues were however within the purview of Surrey County Council.

It was stated that the altered proposals would deliver new street furniture in a wider variety of locations, without attracting significant new revenue budget burdens. The unification of street furniture and lighting (i.e. painting these items black) was however welcomed by the committee.

Some members questioned whether the proposed investment in signage (part of the original scheme) was the best use of funding. A counterargument was made, that provided information on the value of wayfinding and the value of the tourist economy in Runnymede, which had stemmed from a professional report on Runnymede's visitor economy. It was also suggested that improved signage from key locations such as the station would highlight many of the things that Chertsey town centre had to offer, and therefore increase footfall and the visitor economy.

The perceived complexity of accessing grant funding for improving shopfronts was discussed. It was stated by some members that the financial commitment required from businesses was a barrier for some, however the officers responsible considered that the process had attracted a good response. It was noted that the Council could not compel businesses to change their shopfronts.

The delivery window for the SPF programme was time limited and any plans needed to be affordable and deliverable within the time allowed. Additionally, projects, including the revisions to this scheme, needed to be agreed with the ministry.

It was confirmed that other sources of funding would potentially be available in the future, such as the neighbourhood proportion of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Members were encouraged to stimulate debate in their wards about local priorities with

regards the CIL.

The cost of the abortive work undertaken on the Guildford Road planter and seating scheme was queried, with a counterargument made setting out that it would not be a good use of public funds if Runnymede installed assets, that later proved incompatible with Surrey's LCWIP scheme.

It was **resolved** that:

1. The progress on the delivery of the SPF Investment plan, as detailed in sections 2 and 3 of the officer's report, be noted.
2. The projects (as set out in section 2 of the officer's report), to refocus an element of the money previously allocated to improve the public realm in Guildford Street in Chertsey, to provide wider public realm benefits, be approved.
3. Authority be delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive (Place) in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Corporate Management Committee, to make necessary adjustments to the amounts allocated to projects set out in section 2 of the officer's report, to ensure that money be utilised effectively by the funding cutoff date.

## 87 **Corporate Management Proposed Fees and Charges**

The Committee reviewed the proposed fees and charges for services within its area of responsibility.

It was **resolved** that the proposed fees and charges, as set out in Appendix 'A' of the officer's report be approved, to be effective from the dates within the appendix, or as soon as practicable, thereafter.

## 88 **2024-25 Mid Year Treasury Management Report**

It was confirmed that should the impact of IFRS 9 require the creation of a new earmarked reserve, this would be a decision for the Committee while the potential redemption of individual funds would be undertaken by officers as part of normal treasury management activities.

The report was noted.

## 89 **Q2 Investment Property Report**

The Committee discussed the metrics used in the report, in particular KPI 11. KPI 11 was seen as a less valuable statistic by some members as it compared the value of the asset at present red book valuations with the present revenue stream. The most relevant metrics were stated by some members as being KPI 6 (Difference in Capital Values, annually) and KPI 7 (Difference in Capital Values, since purchase) on capital values. New metrics needed to be agreed by the committee. Some members challenged this, saying that KPI 11 was a useful metric, as it provided information in the event of asset disposal. Other members responded to by saying this did not form a core part of the consideration for disposal which needed to review the present revenue of the assets, red book value at present, whether the asset was bought through borrowing, present holding costs, and the wider impact on service delivery. It was confirmed for members that KPI 11 did not include any works, fees or other incidental costs. Officers would continue to develop the KPIs for presentation in future reports.

Further possible metrics were discussed with the need for some to be included in an exempt report being noted. Suggestions included noting the outstanding debt recorded

against each property, and the income that had been received from each asset. Caution was however urged by some members due to the properties being purchased as part of a 50 year strategy. The Committee sought reassurances that all necessary due diligence activities were carried out prior to purchasing assets, and it was noted that committee reports relating to specific purchases provided this information.

There was discussion around the Council's ability to manage its portfolio of investment properties, in the context of the non-statutory best value notice and an updated prudential code. This made disposing of some properties challenging due to the Council's reliance on their contribution to the revenue budget. Some members also asked for consideration to be given to the holding costs and any reduction in interest paid on debt if borrowing was reduced following potential future sales.

The Council's efforts to engage constructively with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government were lauded.

The report was noted.

## 90 **Q2 Budget Monitoring Report**

The Committee reviewed the report.

A commitment was given to notify the committee on completion of property disposals agreed by the committee. Some members expressed concern this had not happened sooner in respect of Witley House. It was stated this delay was to ensure the matter progressed to completion before notification was provided to members.

The report was noted.

## 91 **Runnymede Welfare Support Policies**

The Committee reviewed the proposed policies.

It was noted that new data analysis tools had been acquired, to enable officers to identify repeat claimants. This would allow officers to review cases and identify whether claimants were not claiming other benefits they were entitled to.

Some members noted the concern around the reduction in funding being transferred from Surrey for the HSF monies which had already been received from Central Government. A verbal commitment was given to keep Runnymede's own scheme funding under review to support residents over the winter.

It was confirmed that the residents' support fund was being paid for using an underspend on the members' allowances scheme.

There was discussion about the complexity of the electronic processes that the Department for Work and Pensions required claimants to follow. Officers aimed to support as many residents as possible through these processes, although capacity to do this was frequently stretched.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The Household Support Fund eligibility criteria and policy for tranche 6 be approved, to ensure that the Council continue to provide as much support as possible to residents during the current cost of living crisis.
- 2) The eligibility criteria for a Runnymede Residents Support Fund, to ensure continued

support for residents when Household Support Fund funding had closed or been depleted, be approved.

- 3) A virement of £15,000 from the existing members' allowances budget, to fund the new Runnymede Residents Support Fund, be approved.

## 92 **Recommendation from Community Services - Future Council Meadow Management Policy**

The Committee noted the views of the Environment and Sustainability Committee, in particular a boost to biodiversity that a meadow management policy was expected to bring. The Committee emphasised the need to continue high quality engagement with residents, such as had happened with a volunteer group at Hare Hill.

It was **resolved** that in the event of an application for Stewardship/Sustainable Farming Incentive Funding being successful, a supplementary estimate of £8,000 per annum (for a period of three years (2024/25 – 2026/27)), for the co-ordination of enhancements of meadow sites and community participation activities, to be managed by the Open Space and Community Development team in Community Services, be approved.

## 93 **Q2 2024/5 Corporate KPIs**

The Committee reviewed the performance data provided as part of the officer's report.

The drivers behind the lower performance in measures ES1 (dry mixed recycling rate (paper, cans, glass, plastic) and ES4 (number of street cleansing reports (overflowing litterbins, overflowing dog bins, and general litter/detritus) were discussed. There was renewed effort, including a video of the chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee, to inform residents about what could and could not be recycled. Communications would also be carried out as part of the Council's Great Big Green Week activities. The Christmas period tended to experience a reduction in performance rates.

It was noted that a new Direct Services Operations Manager was due to start in January.

The report was noted.

## 94 **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.

## 95 **NEC Contract Review**

The Committee reviewed a proposal to agree a new contract for the provision of various back-office IT systems. The work that had gone into delivering a substantial level of savings for the Council were noted.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The proposals and savings (both cashable and avoidable spend), as part of a new ten-year contract, be noted.
- 2) The entering into a ten-year contract with the Council's existing IT supplier, for the amount stated in the officer's report, for the provision of the following back-office

systems, be approved:

- Housing
- Revenues and Benefits
- Electronic Document Management System
- Planning Applications
- Environmental Health and Licensing

- 3) A capital estimate, for the sum stated in the officer's report, to facilitate the implementation of the Assure Public Protection modules, be agreed (noting that this would utilise the existing Equipment Replacement Reserve provision in the Capital Programme).

96 **Recommendation from Community Services - Hare Hill SANG Infrastructure**

This item was withdrawn from the agenda, pending the receipt of a recommendation from the Community Services Committee.

97 **Recommendation from Environment & Sustainability Committee - Depot Options Appraisal**

The Committee reviewed proposals for works which aimed to ensure that operational services could continue to be delivered from the depot. The recommendation of the Environment and Sustainability Committee, which itself took account of the views of the staff based at the depot, was noted.

It was **resolved** that a capital estimate, for the sum detailed in the officer's report, to fund the Environment and Sustainability Committee's preferred option for works at the depot, be recommended for approval by the Council.

98 **Update on Legal Matters Affecting Council Owned Property**

The Committee considered a request for additional resource to continue to pursue an ongoing legal matter.

It was **resolved** that a supplementary revenue estimate, for the sum set out in the officer's report, to fund continued work in respect of the legal matter concerned, be approved.

(The meeting ended at 10.09 pm.)

Chair