

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

Thursday, 10 February 2022 at 7.30 pm

The Worshipful the Mayor (Councillor E Gill) in the chair.

Members of the Committee present: Councillors E Gill (Mayor), M Harnden (Deputy Mayor), M Adams, A Balkan, J Broadhead, R Bromley, T Burton, D Coen, D Cotty, M Cressey, J Furey, L Gillham, J Gracey, T Gracey, M Heath, J Hulley, N King, R King, M Maddox, I Mullens, M Nuti, N Prescott, P Snow, S Walsh, D Whyte, S Whyte, S Williams, M Willingale and J Wilson.

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors A Alderson, D Anderson-Bassey, D Clarke, S Dennett, R Edis, C Howorth, M Kusneraitis, S Lewis, S Mackay, C Mann, J Olorenshaw and J Sohi.

447 Mayor's Announcements

Council noted the Mayoral announcements.

448 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors A Alderson, D Clarke, S Dennett, R Edis, C Howorth, M Kusneraitis, S Lewis, C Mann, J Olorenshaw and J Sohi

449 Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

450 Petitions

No petitions were submitted by Members of the Council under Standing Order No 19

451 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 13

Cllr Mullens asked the Leader of the Council the following question under Standing Order No 13:

'The River Thames Scheme, originally proposed as a 3 - channel scheme, is now being developed as a 2-channel scheme, as the channel from Datchet to Bell Weir, Egham (Channel 1) that was due to be built to the north of Egham Town ward is no longer included in the design.

My question concerns the potential flood protection the River Thames Scheme might provide for Egham, in particular the difference in this protection under the original 3-channel scheme compared to the current 2-channel scheme.

Could the Leader please tell me

- (i) How many properties in Runnymede Borough were flooded in 2013/2014?*
- (ii) How many properties in Egham Town ward were flooded in 2013/2014?*
- (iii) How many of these properties, (in Runnymede, and separately in Egham Town), which flooded in 2013/2014, did the Environment Agency's model predict would have been protected from flooding by the original 3-channel scheme, (which included Channel 1), under river conditions similar to those*

- in 2013/2014?*
- (iv) *How many of these properties (in Runnymede, and separately in Egham Town), which flooded in 2013/2014, does the Environment Agency's model predict will be protected from flooding by the current 2-channel scheme (which excludes Channel 1), under river conditions similar to 2013/2014?*

In response the Leader of the Council said:

- (i) It is difficult to identify how many properties were affected by the 2013 / 14 floods as many home owners did not wish to declare that there houses were flooded or apply for grants because of concerns over future insurance. The reports subsequently identified 'flood areas' with data anonymised for similar reasons.

The Section 19 Flood Investigation Report: Runnymede 28 October 2015, published by Surrey County Council indicates that 4,090 homes were impacted

- (ii) The same report identifies that 4,000 properties in Egham and Thorpe were impacted

- (III & IV) Under the Planning Act 2008, Nationally Strategic Infrastructure Projects, including the River Thames Scheme, are subject to a Development Consent Order (DCO). The DCO application is a prescribed process comprising a period of Pre-Application Consultation before formal Application is made to the Secretary of State for permission to proceed.

The Pre-Application Consultation phase on the River Thames Scheme is expected to start shortly and is likely to take at least two years.

During the Pre-Application Consultation – all aspects of the environmental impact of the scheme will be consulted on by the Applicant (the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council) with the Statutory Consultees and members of the public. Runnymede Borough Council is a Statutory Consultee.

Information relating to design and efficacy of the scheme will be made available during the Consultation and Members concerns and questions will be presented during this process.

At present this information is not available.

Cllr Mullens asked that given the lack of information on the benefits of RTS whether the Leader of the Council thought it was too early to say that removal of one channel will make no significant difference to future flooding in Egham.

The Leader of the Council commented that extensive modelling had been done and with appropriate mitigation he understood that 2 channels should be just as effective as three channels.

452 **Review and Replacement of Runnymede's Council Tax Discount Scheme for Empty Properties - Recommendation from Corporate Management Committee - 16 December 2021**

Council considered a recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee which had met on 20 January 2022 regarding review and Replacement of Runnymede's Council Tax Discount Scheme for Empty Properties.

Currently the Council gave a 100% Council Tax discount for empty dwellings for up to 3 months and charged an additional amount (or premium) for Council Tax of 50% for

dwellings empty for more than 2 years. If it chose to do so, the Council was able to reduce the time period for the 100% discount for empty dwellings from up to 3 months to up to 28 days and to increase the premium for Council Tax for dwellings empty for more than 2 years from 50% to 100%, for dwellings empty for more than 5 years from 50% to 200% and for dwellings empty for more than ten years from 50% to 300%.

A minority of Members of the Council considered that given the increasing pressures on housing within the Borough, reducing the time period for the 100% discount and introducing the new premiums would provide a greater incentive for owners of empty properties to bring them back into use in a timely manner which would be a positive development and make more effective use of housing stock. Additional revenue for Runnymede could also result if these changes were made which could potentially be used for services and environmental initiatives. An Amendment for an addition to the Motion was moved and seconded as follows:

iii) In accordance with section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 the additional amount payable for Council Tax for dwellings that are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than five and ten years to be increased from 50% to 200% and 300% respectively.

However, a majority of Members considered that the Council's policy on the time period for empty dwelling Council Tax discount and on the Council Tax premium for dwellings empty for more than two years should be unchanged for a number of reasons.

Members considered the financial implications of the changes on the Council, on other Preceptors who would benefit from any increase in tax (Surrey County Council and the PCC), and on those who might be liable for payment of the increased premiums. Members noted that the potential additional income for the Council should not be considered as the driver for these changes as the primary reason would be to encourage taxpayers to bring empty properties back into use. It was also noted that the income generated could not be accurately quantified due to the anticipated behavioural changes that might occur following the introduction of increased premiums.

It was suggested that other options be explored with Members to work with owners and landlords to encourage the bringing back into use of empty dwellings. Cllr Burton requested that the names of those voting on the Amendment be recorded and the voting was as follows:

For the Amendment (10): Councillors Burton, Cressey, Gill, Gillham, Harnden, R King, Mullens, S Whyte, D Whyte and Williams.

Against the Amendment (19): Councillors Adams, Balkan, Broadhead, Bromley, Coen, Cotty, Furey, J Gracey, T Gracey, Heath, Hulley, N King, Maddox, Nuti, Prescott, Snow, Walsh, Willingale and Wilson

Abstentions: 0

The Amendment was lost.

The original Motion was then put to the vote and it was-

Resolved that-

- i) the Council Tax discount for unoccupied and substantially unfurnished dwellings be retained at 100% for up to 3 months (Class C of the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England)**

(Amendment) Regulations 2012); and

- ii) in accordance with Section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 the additional amount payable for Council Tax for dwellings that are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than two years be retained at 50%.**

453 Housing Revenue Account Estimates for 2022/23

Council considered a recommendation from the Housing Committee which had met on 12 January 2022 on the HRA Estimates 2022/23.

The Chairman of Housing Committee moved the Estimates for approval which represented a major investment in the Council's Housing service, subject to a correction regarding the transfer of £235,000 from the Major Repairs budget previously approved (of £9,055,000) to fund the following specific work streams where costs were to be incurred during 2022/23, namely Disabled adaptations (£200,000), Communal decorations (£27,000) and Rolling repairs (£8,000)

This did not represent a change in the overall approved budgets or constitute a request for additional funds, but would ensure each of these budget lines was clearly identified.

RESOLVED that –

Budgetary provision for the draft HRA revenue estimates, as corrected, for 2022/23 be approved.

454 2022/23 Treasury Management Strategy, Annual Investment Strategy, Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision Statement - Recommendation from Corporate Management Committee of 20 January 2022

Council considered a recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee which had met on 20 January 2022 regarding the 2022/23 Treasury Management Strategy, Annual Investment Strategy, Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision Statement.

The Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee had concurred with the recommendations, but also recommended that Member training on treasury management be held every two years. Council was supportive of the training initiative and it was-

RESOLVED that -

- i) the proposed Treasury Management Strategy as set out in the report encompassing the Annual Investment Strategy as reported, be approved;**
- ii) the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators for 2022/23, as reported, be approved;**
- iii) the authorised limit for external borrowing by the Council in 2022/23, be set at £720,710,000 (this being the statutory limit determined under Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003);**
- iv) the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement for 2022/23 be agreed as follows: -
The Council will use the asset life method as its main method for calculating MRP.**

In normal circumstances, MRP will be set aside from the date of acquisition. However, in relation to capital expenditure on property purchases and/or development, we will start setting aside an MRP provision from the date that the asset becomes operational and/or revenue income is generated;and

v) Member training on treasury management be held every two years

455 Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2025/26 - Recommendation from Corporate Management Committee of 20 January 2022

Council considered a recommendation from Corporate Management Committee which had met on 20 January 2022 on the proposed Capital Strategy and General Fund Capital Programme 2022/23 to 2025/26.

RESOLVED that –

the Capital Strategy and the Capital Programme, as reported, be approved;

456 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25 and Budget and Council Tax 2022/23

Council considered recommendations from the Corporate Management Committee which had met on 16 December 2021 and 20 January 2022 regarding the Budget and Council Tax for 2022/23 and an Addendum circulated on the day of the meeting.

The Leader pointed out that the recommendations i) and iii) from Corporate Management Committee on 16 December had been initially superceded by the recommendations from that Committee on 20 January 2022, but had now been further amended as per the addendum and set out below. Recommendation ii) relating to the Band D Council Tax had also been amended as set out on the Addendum. The amended recommendations had been included into the consolidated Budget paper circulated on the day of the meeting which also included the additional information concerning the precepts to be levied by Surrey County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey, which had not been available when the Corporate Management Committee had met

The report to CMC on 20 January included an updated General Fund Summary for the Council's Revenue Budget following the announcement of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2022/23. The indicative Settlement figures included additional grants to the Council, in respect of the extension of New Homes Bonus, a new Services Grant, and continuation of the Lower Tier Services Grant for a further year. In light of these anticipated additional funds, the Committee had agreed to recommend an increase to the transfer to the Property Repairs and Renewals Reserve of £595,000 in order to protect the significant income stream arising from commercial property holdings. Consequently, the Committee also recommended the amended budget for 2021/22 and 2022/23, and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, as amended for this change and some other minor adjustments.

On 7th February, the Final Local Government Finance Settlement figures were announced and included a minor reduction in grant funding from that previously reported, of £36,335.

A Revised General Fund Summary for both the 2022/23 Budget and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy were now presented, which reflected this change in funding and a subsequent increase in use of balances in order to maintain a balanced budget. The Summary was further amended to reflect a £4.96 increase in Runnymede's share of the Council Tax, which was within the permissible limits before triggering a referendum and marginally below the £5 increase recommended by Corporate Management Committee at

its meeting of 16 December 2021. This minor change facilitated the calculation of each Council Tax band which were set in proportion to the average band D tax level.

The Leader of the Council summarised the key points in the Budget and the MTFs and commended them to the Council. This was duly seconded. The Band D equivalent increase in the Council tax for 2022/23 would be £4.96. The total bill for a Runnymede tax payer in a Band D property would be £2,101.51 taking into account the increased precepts from Surrey County Council and Police Commissioner. Of the total bill only £179.55 related to the Runnymede element. The Council Tax would still be the lowest in Surrey.

The Leader commented that local government finances continued to be challenged on a number of fronts, but the Council continued to invest in its services without cuts to front line services.

Unlike many Councils, Runnymede continued to invest in its area, with an estimated capital programme for 2022/23 of over £40m, funded by a mix of earmarked reserves, grants and contributions, capital receipts from asset disposals and the prudent use of borrowing.

The Council's commercial income streams delivered some £7.8m of income to the Council, which allowed the Council to maintain its services at current levels. The Budget also supported extensive partnership arrangements with key local stakeholders and other local Councils, ensuring that the best use was made of our assets and that new models of service delivery were explored and implemented where appropriate. (For example, the budget included the additional expected income of joining the Surrey Business Rates Pool which allowed it to retain an additional proportion of business rates that would otherwise be paid to central government).

The Budget took account of risk, for example to its commercial property income, by ensuring suitable levels of earmarked reserves were maintained to ensure that properties were maintained, and income maximised, and so that temporary reductions in income could be managed. The budget recommended that an additional sum be placed in these specific reserves at this time.

Alongside earmarked reserves that had been set up to manage known risks or future commitments, the Council held a robust general fund reserve, in excess of the minimum amount recommended in the Medium-Term Financial strategy. This was a prudent approach to take given the current economic climate and the uncertainty of future government funding levels.

The budget would support the Council's new corporate strategy as it comes forward, and detailed action plans would be developed and costed, to ensure that scarce resources were directed towards priorities. The Council fostered a robust project management methodology so that business cases could be developed and monitored where additional resources were required.

In addition to the practical support that the Council had been providing for those affected by the pandemic, such as administration of numerous business grant support schemes, Test and Trace support payments, Household Support grant and support for energy price increases, this budget continued to deliver support to those needing assistance through its many community services, and through Council Tax support and Discretionary Housing Payments, for example.

An Amendment was put forward by Cllr R King to amend the Budget in key areas such as community services, environmental services, Housing and HR. Cllr King read out the various components of his Amendment.

Some Members of the majority group commented that as the Amendment was detailed and produced at short notice it was not possible to fully consider it and that earlier engagement

on the Amendment would have assisted its consideration.

Cllr R King stated that all the components of his alternative Budget, except for the Green Bond Officer proposal, had previously been raised by him in Committees or Member Working Parties.

The Amendment was supported by some of the other minority group Members who hoped that some of the suggestions made by Cllr King would be taken forward in the future.

A Member suggested that, in future, detailed amendments and, in particular, any Amendment proposing an alternative budget should be circulated in advance to assist informed debate thereon and asked that a procedure for advance notice of amendments at Full Council be considered by the Constitution MWP.

Some Members of the minority groups asked that greater engagement be held with them on various corporate issues and that they be given the opportunity to have input thereon at an earlier stage.

Some concern was expressed by a Member that direct debit payers would not receive the £150 rebate under the Government's Council Tax rebate scheme until month 10 of the next financial year. The Leader of the Council responded that this was a central Government scheme and payments were expected to commence in April, subject to receipt of the detailed guidance from Government.

A named vote was requested by Cllr R King on his Alternative Budget and the voting was as follows:

For (7): Councillors Burton, Gillham, R King, Mullens, D Whyte, S Whyte and Williams

Against (21): Councillors Adams, Balkan, Broadhead, Bromley, Coen, Cotty, Cressey, Furey, Gill, J Gracey, T Gracey, Heath, Hulley, N King, Maddox, Nuti, Prescott, Snow, Walsh, Willingale and Wilson

Abstention (1): Councillor Harnden

The Amendment was declared to be lost.

In accordance with Standing Order 25.2, a named vote was then taken on the Motion to approve the original Budget and increase the Council Tax, and the voting was as follows:

For (23): Councillors Adams, Balkan, Broadhead, Bromley, Coen, Cotty, Cressey, Furey, Gill, Gillham, J Gracey, T Gracey, Harnden, Heath, Hulley, N King, Maddox, Nuti, Prescott, Snow, Walsh, Willingale and Wilson

Against (6): Councillors Burton, R King, Mullens, D Whyte, S Whyte and Williams

Abstentions (0)

The Motion to increase the Council Tax and approve the Budget was passed and it was

RESOLVED that –

- i) the Runnymede Borough Council Tax be increased by £4.96 (Band D equivalent) for 2022/23;**

- ii) £595,000 of the additional grant money received from the provisional Finance Settlement be transferred to the Property Repairs and Renewals Reserve be approved;
- iii) The revised Budget for 2021/22 and the Budget for 2022/23 as amended in light of the final Local Government Finance Settlement be approved;
- iv) The amended Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 to 2024/25 be approved; and
- v) Proposed Council Tax for 2022-23 be as set out below:
1. The Council Tax Base 2022/23 for the Council has been calculated as 34,524.0 in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012;
 2. That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2022/23 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - A £71,855,392.00 being the aggregate of the amount which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by major preceptors and parish councils.
 - B £65,656,607.80 being the aggregate of the amount which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act.
 - C £6,198,784.20 being the amount by which the aggregate at 2A above exceeds the aggregate at 2B above, calculated by this Council in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year.
 - D £179.55 being the amount at 2C above, divided by the Council tax base (item 1 above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B (1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts)
 - E £0.00 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act
 - F £179.55 being the amount at 2D above less the result given by dividing the amount at 2E above by the Council Tax base, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special item (Parish precept) relates.
 - G That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2022/23 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act as amended.

Valuation Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Runnymede Borough Council	119.70	139.65	159.60	179.55	219.45	259.35	299.25	359.10

Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 2F above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a valuation band 'D' calculated by the Council

in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

3. To note for the year 2022/23 Surrey County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Act for each of the categories of dwelling in the Council's area as shown below:

Valuation Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
County Council	1,084.26	1,264.97	1,445.68	1,626.39	1,987.81	2,349.23	2,710.65	3,252.78
Police & Crime Commissioner	197.05	229.89	262.73	295.57	361.25	426.93	492.62	591.14

4. That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts in 2 G and 3 above, the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, hereby sets the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2022/23 for each of the categories of dwellings:

Valuation Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Total Council Tax due	1,401.01	1,634.51	1,868.01	2,101.51	2,568.51	3,035.51	3,502.52	4,203.02

5. The Council has determined that its relevant basic amount of Council Tax for 2022/23 is not excessive in accordance with the principles approved under Section 52ZB of the Act.

As the billing authority, the Council has not been notified by a major precepting authority that its relevant basic amount of council tax for 2022/23 is excessive and therefore the billing authority is not required to hold a referendum in accordance with Section 52ZK of the Act.

- 6 The payment dates for the statutory ten monthly instalments scheme be set to run from 1 April 2022 to 1 January 2023 and The Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1992 allow customers to opt out of the ten monthly instalment scheme and request payment over a 12-month period. Where this is requested the Council authorises that the payment dates are to be on such a day in each month as is most efficient for administrative purposes.

Explanatory Note:

The following narrative provides some additional explanation of the figures contained within the formal resolution at section 2 above.

2 (a)	£71,855,392.00	This represents the gross expenditure of the Council
2 (b)	£65,656,607.80	This represents the total income to the Council, including Government support and share of any Council Tax surplus from prior years
2 (c)	£6,198,784.20	This represents the balance to be raised by Council Tax (including any Parish precepts)
2 (d)	£179.55	This represents the average Band D Council Tax for the year (including any Parish precepts)
2 (e)	£0.00	This represents the amount reapportioned to specific areas under special expenses or Parish precepts. There are no such charges for Runnymede Borough Council

2 (f)	£179.55	This represents the average Band D Council Tax excluding the amounts covered by special expenses or Parish precepts. As there are no such charges in Runnymede, the Band D amount remains the same as in 2(d)
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457 Notices of Motion from Members of the Council under Standing Order 15

No Notices of Motion had been submitted by Members of the Council under Standing Order 15.

458 Minority Group Priority Business

No items of Minority Group Priority Business had been registered under Standing Order 23.

459 Statement by the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council apologised to Full Council for failing to comply with the Members Code of Conduct by the use of inappropriate language at the July Full Council meeting. In apologising, the Leader stated that his language was not intentionally directed at anyone but that he had used the words in a general manner.

(The meeting ended at 9.08 pm.)

Mayor