

Runnymede Borough Council

Full Council

Thursday, 8 December 2022 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Council present: Councillors M Harnden (Mayor), S Saise-Marshall (Deputy Mayor), A Balkan, A Berardi, R Bromley, T Burton, D Cotty, V Cunningham, M Darby, R Davies, S Dennett, E Gill, L Gillham, J Gracey, T Gracey, M Heath, C Howorth, J Hulley, S Jenkins, A King, R King, S Lewis, C Mann, I Mullens, M Nuti, J Olorenshaw, N Prescott, S Ringham, S Walsh, S Whyte, S Williams and M Willingale.

Members of the Council absent: Councillors J Broadhead, D Clarke, D Coen, M Cressey, J Furey, N King, P Snow, D Whyte and J Wilson.

382 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor provided an update on the events and engagements that she had attended since the last Council. Councillors were wished a happy and restful Christmas and New Year.

383 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 October 2022 were confirmed and signed as a correct record, subject to amending motion 4 on item 298 (keeping Runnymede and Surrey frack free) to include the outcome of the vote i.e. "The motion was lost".

384 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors J. Broadhead, D. Clarke, D. Coen, M. Cressy, J. Furey, N. King, D. Whyte and J. Wilson.

385 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

386 Speaking or Questions from Members of the Public under Standing Order 12

a) Aileen Owen Davies, a local resident, asked the following question:

"Tree planting and increasing vegetation is now being undertaken around the country. Surrey has just committed to 57,500 new trees this year.

What policies and targets has Runnymede committed to?"

The Leader of the Council replied in the following terms:

"Runnymede Borough Council has now approved its Corporate Plan. A central element of that is our Climate Change Strategy. In line with that strategy, our Environment and Sustainability Committee has now approved our Sustainable Planting Policy, with all future planting to be in line with the principles set out within that policy.

These principles include amongst others:

1. Planting to be planned to encourage biodiversity and support for native wildlife;
2. Maximising the use of native species with near native species being used to lengthen the flowering season, and;
3. The re-naturalisation and development of wildflower meadows where appropriate.

In respect of targets for planting, we have not yet adopted any target and that is deliberate. I believe that centrally imposed targets are an inefficient mechanism for delivering the outcomes we need and want locally. Look at central targets for Housing to see how well they work.

Instead, as a stated part of our policy, we look to encourage and support local community initiatives, including those of residents' groups and businesses who wish to participate within their local communities. As an example, I have supported residents with tree planting on public land at two locations within Woodham and Row Town over this last planting season. I am aware of similar work by numerous other councillors as well.

To help local initiatives we will, subject to approval of the budget, be undertaking a survey of all our trees starting in 2023. We estimate that there are 35,000 trees in Runnymede, many of which are in good condition. Some will however need support or removal to ensure the safety of residents and visitors to the borough. Where trees have to be removed we plan to reinstate at alternative suitable locations. Once this work is completed we will know how many trees we have and how much land we have available for further planting and we will look to develop a separate tree strategy in line with the planting principles I mentioned earlier."

Aileen Owen Davies asked, as a supplementary question, whether there would be targets for replacing lost trees. The Leader reiterated his earlier comments about target setting, adding that a tree survey needed to be carried out before policy development on the replacement of lost trees took place.

b) Deb Long, a local resident, asked the following question:

"An integral part of the Council's Climate Change strategy is to convene a Citizens Panel to regularly consult with stakeholders to exchange updates on the community and councils actions and initiatives also to track the Council's progress to its Net Zero 2030 target and Runnymede's progress towards the national target of Net Zero 2050. When will this Citizen Panel be established and what is the process for participant selection?"

The Leader of the Council replied in the following terms:

"The Citizens' Panel is referenced in the Climate Change Strategy but it falls under our broader strategy to empower communities and support the work of the Council across all of our operating areas, including Climate Change.

Our intent is to recruit up to 900 residents who will be representative of the population as a whole by age, gender, ethnicity and location so that all parts of the borough (and all communities) are represented.

I would note that it is not a forum for exchanging information and views on climate change issues.

Other local authorities already operate such panels but this is a new initiative for Runnymede. To get it off the ground we need two things. Seed funding to begin to recruit and develop the panel and clear terms of reference to set out how the panel will be established and manage its work going forward.

In respect of the former we, submitted a bid for funding to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which included funding to initiate the Citizens Panel and in respect of the latter, officers are currently developing a report which will be coming forward in the New Year.”

Aileen Owen Davies asked, as a supplementary question, why constituting the Citizens’ Panel had taken a long time. The Leader said that developing such proposals rightly took time to do successfully and that the proposals had been agreed by Council on 20 October 2022.

387 **Petitions**

There were none.

388 **Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 13**

a) Councillor Carl Mann asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“Can we please have an update on the A320 Ottershaw roundabout and whether the HIF money is protected?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“With regard to the planning application for the A320 (RU.21/2018), reviewed on Wednesday 27 July 2022, Surrey County Council’s Planning and Regulatory Committee resolved:

That, subject to referral to the Secretary of State under paragraph 10 of the Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2021, and in the absence of any direction by the Secretary of State, to PERMIT subject to amended conditions and informatives agreed by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman and within these minutes, and the remaining unamended conditions and informatives set out within the report and update sheet.

I can confirm that, on 7 December 2022, we received an update stating that the Secretary of State will not be calling in the decision. This means that the scheme can go ahead in the New Year.

There will be a further round of public consultation held looking at landscaping, hardstanding and traffic management plans, with the outcome of this consultation informing the final conditions.

With regard to the Housing Infrastructure Fund, a general development agreement was signed by Surrey County Council and Homes England, with a side agreement signed by Surrey County Council and Runnymede Borough Council. The contents of the general development agreement are subject to a non-disclosure agreement.”

Councillor Hulley asked whether members for Ottershaw should be thanked for their work on this matter? The Leader agreed that they should.

b) Councillor Sylvia Whyte asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“Following the death of 2 year old Awaab Ishak, caused by mould in the family’s flat in Rochdale, the social housing regulator has ordered all landlords with more than 1,000 homes to report their most recent assessment of the extent of damp and mould hazards, the action they are taking to remedy them and to detail the process they have to identify

and deal promptly with damp and mould cases, when they are raised by tenants. Can the leader of the Council assure me that Runnymede Borough Council's housing stock is inspected regularly to ensure that tragedies like this will never happen in Runnymede?"

The Leader responded in the following terms:

"The death of Awaab Ishak is a tragedy.

As a landlord we take our responsibilities very seriously, and I wish to assure members and residents that we do have robust processes in place to address issues that arise within our properties, including problems with mould or damp.

In 2019 we commissioned a full stock condition survey on all our housing to ensure that we have comprehensive data on the condition of our properties. This is kept up to date by visiting at least 10% of our properties annually.

We also have contracts in place to ensure that resource is available to address issues if and when they arise. It is of course not possible to prevent issues occurring all of the time. As many property owners will attest to, leaks do happen and are not always immediately identifiable. However once a problem is identified we will work with tenants to resolve them quickly.

Close co-operation with our tenants is vital to achieve resolutions to issues. Runnymede's housing department is therefore investing in better systems and processes to further improve tenant engagement. Our new integrated systems mean residents will be able to report issues directly via the housing portal and see all information regarding their property and tenancy, including issues of repair and maintenance. This will avoid the need to raise issues with a third party, making the process for reporting issues quicker and easier for tenants.

To support this process Runnymede Borough Council visit or engage with all our properties annually in the course of our housing management functions and seek to proactively identify any concerns within our properties. We also undertake targeted tenancy audits focused on tenants who engage with us less proactively.

Our tenancy agreement places some obligations on our tenants. They "must tell us when a repair that is our responsibility needs to be done as soon as possible". In relation to mould and damp, tenants must also adequately ventilate properties – bathrooms in particular can develop mould and mildew if this does not happen.

Where incidents of mould or damp are reported we take an active approach by visiting the property to inspect the issue, provide advice and carry out remedial works where required. In serious cases tenants can be moved to temporary accommodation while this work is carried out.

The housing department is also committed to continuous development. Processes are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are enabling the best possible service, with updates to processes made when needed. Following the tragic death of Awaab Ishak the Chair of Housing Committee raised this issue with the Corporate Head of Housing, and officers have already been reviewing our processes. Officers have identified areas of possible improvement to enable swifter access to properties when an issue arises, and this will be taken through Housing Committee in line with due process."

Councillor Whyte asked whether the Council had any authority over housing associations operating within the borough. The Leader stated that whilst there was no authority over other housing providers, the Council was happy to share good practice with them.

Councillor Mullens asked whether private sector landlords could also benefit from the Council's willingness to share good practice. The Leader said that the Council was able to share good practice with private sector landlords.

Councillor J. Gracey sought to confirm whether there were any other arrangements in place to govern large scale landlords. It was reported that this was the responsibility of the Regulator of Social Housing.

c) Councillor Isabel Mullens asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

"Given that the original Climate Change Strategy approved by the Corporate Management Committee in April of this year included an Action Plan, and in order to give transparency to the council's actions and plans for carbon emission reductions, could the Leader of the Council ensure that this Climate Change Action Plan, or an up to date version of it, be published on the RBC website with high visibility alongside the council's Climate Change Strategy, as a matter of urgency?"

The Leader responded in the following terms:

"Further to the discussion in relation to the Corporate Plan at our last Council the climate change action plan, alongside the action plans for the other strategies within the Corporate Plan is currently being reviewed and refreshed to establish the prioritisation of actions which we will be delivering. In respect of the climate change action plan, a report setting out the recommended prioritisation will be prepared for the Corporate Management Committee in the New Year and published once agreed.

I would add that I intend for periodic reporting against our Corporate Plan actions to be a feature of the committee work plans going forward, in order to support the monitoring and scrutiny of our progress. This reporting, subject to any exemptions applying, will be made publicly available"

Councillor Mullens asked whether the Leader was aware that only Runnymede and one other Surrey district/borough did not currently publish their climate change action plans? The Leader stated that he was not aware of this.

Councillor Jenkins asked whether thought should be given to how the Council promoted the efforts it was making in tackling climate change. The Leader agreed with this suggestion.

d) Councillor Rhys Davies asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

"Is the Leader aware of the chronic delays this Council's housing department is facing in assessing medical and disability submissions forms from residents applying to our housing register, does he think waiting months for these forms to be reviewed and a decision taken is acceptable?"

The Leader replied in the following terms:

"It is unusual for an assessment not to be carried out within the 28 day target. These are submitted to an external organisation and require submission of a form and relevant supporting information.

Unfortunately it can take weeks or months between applicants raising issues of medical need to the submission of relevant data. This can be due to residents not knowing the right information to provide, or delays in obtaining relevant evidence from medical providers. The housing department are available to provide advice to tenants throughout this process.

Once a medical assessment is completed and an applicant is awarded priority, this is dated at the point that their medical information was submitted, so any delay in the assessment by the Council, or its third party assessors, is not reflected in their priority date.

All applications are screened and priority is always given to those that are urgent to ensure that no applicant will miss a rehousing opportunity due to a delay in the assessment.

While to date no concerns have been raised with myself or the Chair of the Housing Committee regarding systemic issues or delays in this service, if Councillors have evidence or concerns over this or any other aspect of the services we run, I would urge them to raise this with myself or the relevant committee chair.”

Councillor Davies asked whether it was possible to shorten the process? The Leader said that there were unavoidable constraints when information was required from third parties. The housing team would however continue to work as efficiently as possible.

Councillor R. King asked whether the Leader was aware of a particular case that was ongoing? The Leader stated that it was not appropriate to discuss specific cases in an open forum and offered to speak with Councillor King separately.

Councillor J. Gracey asked whether the Leader would be happy to involve the Chair of the Housing Committee in these discussions. The Leader confirmed that this should happen.

e) Councillor Robert King asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“Is the Leader aware that hundreds of residents, already struggling to get a GP appointment, have had a further blow with numerous GP practices in recent months withdrawing online app services, such as Livi, making it nearly impossible to get even a telephone or online appointment. What is Runnymede doing to lobby GP practices and Surrey Heartlands to reintroduce such services?”

The Leader replied in the following terms:

“We have sought clarity on this matter with the North West Surrey Health Alliance (NWSHA). Whilst NWSHA was ahead of the curve, before the pandemic when the original Livi contract was agreed, in terms of digital GP appointments etc, the pandemic created a demand for such services, across the Country. This necessitated Livi growing with the market and as a result, impacted their offer and cost. Consequently, NWSHA decided not to renew the contract with Livi, but to invest some of this funding into more face-to-face appointments, as well as in a new digital offer in the future.

Regarding the need to lobby, given that NHS partners already recognise the challenge across the system of meeting the demand for services via digital platforms, lobbying isn’t required. The Council is a partner member of the NWSHA and therefore does have the opportunity to ask questions of partners on matters such as these. Given that this is a workstream already in development, the Council will continue to support the work of the NWSHA, as opposed to directly lobbying for specific services.

I can confirm that the place leader for the NWSHA had agreed to supply a written briefing on the situation surrounding Livi and digital appointments. The initial briefing has now been provided and will be circulated to all members following this meeting.

The key changes being introduced in NWSHA, in response to patient feedback, are:

- Providing more face-to-face appointments in the evenings and at weekends through acute illness hubs, based at Ashford Hospital, St Peter’s Hospital and Woking Community Hospital. These appointments are available now and can be booked

via the patient's GP surgery (there is no walk-in facility for this service).

- Introducing a new service called Rapid Health that allows patients to directly book and manage their own appointments for a range of different practice services. In early 2023 Rapid Health will enable patients to initiate their own care for services such as first contact physiotherapy, immunisations, and cervical smears.

Whilst the Livi contract was due to end in November, its availability has been extended until March 2023 so that patients can continue to benefit from free video GP consultation services while the wider changes to accessing primary care services are embedded."

Councillor R. King asked whether there was more that the administration could do to support residents. The Leader said that Runnymede was not responsible for health services. It was however working with local health providers to develop partnership hubs in various locations, the first of which was intended to be situated in Egham Hythe.

Councillor Darby asked whether the Leader was aware of wider trends in NHS waiting times? The Leader stated that waiting times in all nations of the United Kingdom had gone up, principally due to the pandemic, and that this was not a party political matter.

Councillor Gillham asked whether there was anything that the Council could do to address the significant waiting time differences at various surgeries within the borough. The Leader urged Councillor Gillham to direct her concerns to NWSHA.

f) Councillor Abby King asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

"What is the Council doing to enhance street cleaning in Runnymede and is the Leader exploring a timetabling of streets, in collaboration with Surrey Highways after they carry out gully cleaning?"

The Leader replied in the following terms:

"Many councillors would sympathise with your remarks. As you will be aware, gullies and issues relating to blockages/flooding are the responsibility of Surrey County Council and their contractors. The frequency of these visits is therefore not something that we can adjust as part of our street cleaning operations. Surrey County Council have also taken the decision to bring additional services previously delivered by boroughs and districts back 'in-house'. Verge cutting and highways maintenance are some of the areas affected by this change in approach.

Within what we can control however, we are a learning organisation and our depot team is constantly looking at how it can enhance and optimise its operations. It will therefore continue to do this by working collaboratively for with Surrey County Council to deliver the best outcomes for our residents."

Councillor Gillham asked whether the Leader was aware of the discussions at a recent working group meeting around adjusting the Council's street cleaning rotas, and Runnymede's own services responding accordingly. The Leader said that a collaborative approach between senior managers at Surrey and Runnymede was taking place and would continue to do so.

389a Council Tax Support Scheme**Resolved that:**

The preferred option for a revised Runnymede Council Tax Support scheme, as set out in the report considered by the Corporate Management Committee on 24 November 2022, be adopted for implementation from 1 April 2023.

390 Notices of Motion from Members of the Council under Standing Order 15

The motion, as set out in the summons, was moved by Councillor R. King, subject to a referral being made to the Environment and Sustainability Committee.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Berardi.

The motion was debated by the Council.

A named vote was requested on the motion and the voting was as follows:

For the motion (12)

Councillors Berardi, Burton, Davies, Gill, Gillham, Jenkins, A. King, R. King, Mullens, Ringham, S. Whyte and Williams.

Against the motion (18)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Balkan, Bromley, Cotty, Cunningham, Darby, Dennett, J. Gracey, T. Gracey, Heath, Howorth, Hulley, Lewis, Nuti, Olorenshaw, Prescott, Walsh and Willingale.

Abstentions (2)

Councillors Harnden and Mann.

The motion was lost.

391 Minority Group Priority Business

There was none.

(The meeting ended at 8.39 pm.)

Chairman