

Runnymede Borough CouncilCorporate Management CommitteeThursday, 23 November 2023 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors T Gracey (Chairman), C Howorth (Vice-Chair), MD Cressey, L Gillham, S Jenkins, M Nuti, S Ringham, P Snow, D Whyte, M Willingale, V Cunningham (In place of D Coen) and A King (In place of R King).

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors D Coen and R King.

In attendance: Councillors T Gates.

86 **Notification of Changes to Committee Membership**

Cllr V. Cunningham substituted for Cllr D. Coen and Cllr A. King substituted for Cllr R. King

87 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

88 **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

89 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest

90 **Reconsideration of the 25 May 2023 minutes**

The minutes of 25 May 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

91 **Recommendations from committees**

91a **Standards and Audit Committee - provision of internal audit services**

The Assistant Chief Executive outlined the referral from the Standards and Audit Committee and asked for a deferral in entering into a partnership with the named organisation to enable the Standards and Audit Committee to convene a special meeting in December with the named organisation. They would then report back to the Committee at a later meeting.

It was resolved that:

The decision to enter into a partnership with the named organisation be deferred until after a special meeting of the Standards & Audit Committee

91b **Environment and Sustainability Committee - Implications of climate change for Runnymede Borough Council**

The Planning Policy and Climate Change Manager outlined the referral from the Environment and Sustainability Committee and asked the Committee to consider recommending that Runnymede Borough Council declares a climate emergency.

Members stated that this motion was welcome, and thanked officers for their actions in creating a clear strategy to tackle climate change but expressed regret that this had not been declared sooner.

The Committee recommended to the Council that:

- 1. A Climate Emergency is declared in Runnymede in line with the wording recommended at paragraphs 5.16 to 5.18 of the report**

92 **Electric Vehicle Strategy**

The Planning Policy and Climate Change Strategy Manager outlined the Electric Vehicle Strategy.

A member raised concerns about the car club, a venture set up to enable residents to rent fuel-efficient, hybrid and electric vehicles. They believed that it was not publicised well and there were concerns that diesel cars were using the allocated parking spots. The Planning Policy and Climate Change Strategy Manager agreed to contact Enterprise to check the minutiae of the agreement.

Another member asked about provision for an electric vehicle strategy for staff of Runnymede Borough Council. They were assured that such provisions were in the corporate strategy and would begin in earnest when the new Corporate Head of HR began.

It was resolved that:

- 1. The Electric Vehicle Strategy for Runnymede Borough Council was endorsed.**

The Committee recommended to the Council that:

- 1. The Electric Vehicle Strategy be adopted with an implementation date of 14th December 2023**

93 **Draft Climate Change Action Plan**

The Senior Planning Policy Officer outlined the Draft Climate Change Action Plan and timeline for implementation.

Concerns were raised about the commencement of the consultation period before Christmas when the public have other priorities. It was suggested that January may be a more appropriate time when there are less distractions. However, it was agreed that consultation should start as soon as possible to ensure the policy was passed within the current financial year. The consultation period would therefore be extended from five weeks to six and a half weeks ending on Sunday 14th January 2024. This would give the public more time to submit their responses following the festive season. Whilst it was pointed out

that responses to consultations have typically ranged from single figures to a thousand depending on the topic, it was hoped that the extra time would mitigate this effect somewhat.

It was resolved that:

- 1. The draft Runnymede Borough Council Climate Change Action Plan was approved for public consultation for a period of six and a half weeks, to commence on Friday 1 December 2023.**

94 **Release of previously agreed funds to enable alteration to staffing structure in the Planning, Economy and Built Environment service**

The Corporate Head of Planning, Economy and the Built Environment outlined the report to alter the staffing structure in the Planning, Economy and Built Environment Service to enable job roles and salaries to better represent their current responsibilities.

It was resolved that:

- 1. A release of the sum of £9,844 from the £20,000 previously set aside at the CMC meeting of April 2023 to the Planning, Economy and Built Environment service for the purpose of upgrading a Career Grade Planner post to an Assistant Development Manager post**

95 **Reserve Forces Policy**

The Chief Executive outlined the Reserve Forces Policy. He firstly drew members' attention to the provisions on p.211 of the agenda and clarified that an administrative error had not allowed the fourth bullet to separate from the third, but that it was to 'ensure that reservists are not disadvantaged by their role as reservists.' He then stated that this policy was intended to allow the Council to pursue its ambition to secure a Gold Armed Forces Covenant Award. He stated that the Council's submission would be viewed more favourably by implementing the changes as suggested.

A member asked how many employees of Runnymede Borough Council serve in the Reserve. The Chief Executive stated that there was only one employee who, to their knowledge, was part of the reserve forces, although he emphasised that members of the reserves are not obliged, subject to a waiver system, to inform their employers. The Chief Executive also clarified that there was a special leave policy for employees who are part of other voluntary organisations.

It was recommended to the Council that:

- 1. The revised policy be adopted**

96 **Proposed Fees and Charges 24/25**

The Corporate Head of Finance outlined the context and proposed fees and charges for the financial year 2024/5.

It was resolved that:

- 1. The proposed fees and charges were approved to be effective from the dates within the appendix or as soon as practical thereafter.**

97 Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25

The Assistant Chief Executive outlined the context in which the Council Tax Scheme was proposed. She outlined the proposed scheme which would use universal credit data to assess entitlement, introduce a flat rate non-dependent deductions for claimants, and reduced the weekly entitlement from £10 to £5. This had the benefit of ensuring the team had greater capacity to process claimants, and more people were able to benefit from the scheme.

It was recommended that the current scheme be continued into the next financial year to allow for a full year's data to assess its effectiveness. This would ensure that should any amendments be required in the future, that they were based off of data from a full financial year.

Whilst members welcomed the reform, one member felt that they could not support the scheme as it did not go far enough to support the most vulnerable families. They stated that 62% of those who are eligible for support take it up, which meant that 38% do not, and asked if there were plans to create take up scheme to publicise the support available and encourage those who are eligible to take it up. The Assistant Chief Executive agreed to look into this with the Corporate Head of Customer, Digital and Collection Services upon her return.

The Assistant Chief Executive also clarified that it was not possible for residents to obtain 100% council tax relief, and that the amount of relief received was proportionate to a resident's income. She agreed to clarify what the maximum income for council tax relief was.

It was recommended to full Council that:

- 1. The Council Tax Support Scheme be continued for the 2024/25 financial year, including the provision to automatically apply legislative changes for the annual uprating of the prescribed applicable amounts for 2024/25 financial year as set by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).**

98 Review of Household Support Fund (Fourth Round)

The Assistant Chief Executive outlined the updates to the Household Support Fund to ensure a greater number of residents were able to benefit from the help available to them. Members welcomed the changes to the scheme that allowed more residents to benefit from the support available to them, especially the self-employed who were often ineligible for such schemes.

However, some members raised concerns that the new savings cap of £6,000 down from £10,000 and household income limit of £33,000 may exclude some previously eligible residents, and asked that the Assistant Chief Executive look into had these limits applied during the third round, how many residents would have been ineligible for support who had been able to claim support in the third round.

It was resolved that:

- 1. The amendments to the policy were approved to ensure the limited grant funding received benefits as many residents as possible during the remainder of the financial year**

99 **Treasury Management Report - Mid Year 2023/24**

The Corporate Head of Finance outlined the Treasury Management Report for the first six months of the financial year 2023-4. Members noted the contents of the report.

100 **Budget Monitoring Report - April 2023 to September 2023**

The Corporate Head of Finance outlined the budget monitoring report for the first six months of the financial year 2023-2024. He drew members' attention to the net expenditure, and the splitting out of finance spent via SO42 for greater transparency. HRA and General Fund spending was also outlined, which the Corporate Head of Finance believed, would allow the Council to make inroads into eliminating the £5.2 million budget gap.

A member raised concerns about the lack of progress towards the £5.2 million budget gap, stating that no progress had been made in the current financial year, and this would lead to the Council now having two years instead of three to balance its budget.

The Assistant Chief Executive and Leader explained that financial reviews were currently ongoing, which would lead to savings of almost £800,000 for the Council. These would be brought to the Service Reviews Member Working Party in January before being brought to the Committee at a later date.

Members also raised concerns about £23,000 being spent on tennis courts, with the Corporate Head of Community Services explaining that they were used for a variety of sports, and it was part of larger management works.

101 **To adopt a policy in respect of councillor surgeries and to approve funding to cover the cost of premises hired for councillor surgeries for the financial year 2023/24 and for the hiring of premises in which to conduct councillor surgeries for future financial years**

The Corporate Head of Law and Governance outlined the report for councillor surgeries brought to him by Cllrs R. King and D. Whyte. The Corporate Head of Law and Governance outlined that they had asked eleven of the surrounding councils for their councillor surgery policies. Out of the eleven areas queried, nine had responded stating that they did not reimburse councillors who held surgeries.

Cllr D. Whyte was invited to share his thoughts on the report as he and Cllr R. King had instigated it. He stated that he believed that councillors should have access to Council owned properties when carrying out their civic duties as a democratically elected councillor. He also clarified the third recommendation so that it read 'to recommend to Full Council that a growth bid be included in the budget for the financial year 2024/25 of £3k to cover the cost of councillors hiring premises to hold councillor surgeries' rather than the published £20k.

Whilst it was clarified that such surgeries incurred costs in terms of overtime and clean up to the Council, it was also pointed out that some areas of the borough did not have access to Council-owned buildings and thus, councillors had to pay out of pocket for them. This potentially caused a financial barrier to people wishing to become councillors. Whilst it was accepted that some councillors now held online surgeries for their residents which held no charge, other members believed that some residents were unable to access these and thus, the Council should provide physical surgeries to enable all residents to access their councillors should they wish.

It was also emphasised that members were paid an allowance to enable them to carry out their duties and negate any potential financial barriers. It was therefore plausible and reasonable to expect councillors to use this allowance to pay for surgeries. Indeed, it was clarified that there were no legal requirements for councillors to spend their allowance in any particular way, and this would be a possible avenue.

However, other councillors raised concerns about personal safety in the holding of surgeries, and discussion veered towards local government advice for councillor safety.

Cllr A. King asked for a named vote on the three recommendations, with the third recommendation being amended from £20k to £3k as amended by Cllr D. Whyte. Voting was as follows:

In favour (5) – Councillors Gillham, Jenkins, A. King, Ringham, D. Whyte

Against (6) – Councillors Gracey, Howorth, Cunningham, Nuti, Snow, Willingale.

(Cllr M. D. Cressey had left the meeting at 21.14 and was not present for the vote)

The recommendation was not passed.

102 **Minor amendment to the Constitution - recommendation from the Constitution Member Working Party**

The Corporate Head of Law and Governance outlined a minor amendment to the Constitution that would allow for a Standing Council Tax Setting Committee to be established. They clarified that its only function would be to approve the appropriate council tax setting motion, and this would only happen should the relevant precept authority have not provided the figures required to set the Council Tax by the date when Runnymede Borough Council holds its Council Tax setting meeting.

It was resolved that:

- 1. The Corporate Head of Legal and Governance be delegated authority to make further necessary amendments to the Constitution, to give effect to the amendments proposed in this report.**

It was recommended to Council that:

- 1. A standing Council Tax Setting Committee be approved.**

103 **S042 - Urgent Action**

103a **1028 - To report urgent action taken regarding a virement of money from the Planning Policy budget to the Climate Change budget to underpin the production of Heat Decarbonisation Plans for the Hythe Community Centre and Manor Farm Day Centre and other technical information to underpin a funding bid for round 3c of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme**

In response to a member's question, it was clarified that the lateness of the SO42 in coming to committee was due to an oversight which led it to miss the October Corporate Management Committee.

103b **1029 - To report urgent action taken regarding business rates pooling 2024/25**

The SO42 was noted.

104 **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.

105 **Recommendations from committees**

105a **Community Services Committee - Procurement of Digital Alarms**

The Corporate Head of Community Services outlined the referral to upgrade the Careline equipment in Runnymede and Surrey Heath to digital alarms. This would cover both the refresh of digital equipment for residents to ensure connectivity and connectivity, and the digitalisation of Safer Runnymede as the monitoring centre.

A member asked for clarification why this referral was in part two when there was no budgetary information in the report. The Corporate Head of Law and Governance clarified that the item was placed into part two to enable members to discuss more thoroughly items, but agreed to look into alternatives such as putting parts of reports into a part two appendix to allow greater transparency.

It was recommended to Council that:

- 1. A supplementary capital estimate in the sum reported to the Community Services Committee for the purchase and installation of digital community alarm equipment be funded from the Better Care Fund over the next year.**
- 2. Approval was given to enter into a procurement process for the purchase of digital community alarm equipment on behalf of both Runnymede and Surrey Heath Borough Councils up to a potential total value in the sum reported to Community Services Committee.**

105b **Environment and Sustainability Committee - Environmental Services and GIS restructure incorporating Environmental Health and Licensing, Engineering, Green Spaces, Grounds Maintenance, and Street Naming and Numbering**

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

The Corporate Head of Law and Governance clarified that the item had been deferred to December's meeting.

106 **Building Compliance**

The Assistance Chief Executive outlined the need for remedial works. This would be part of a wider package of works to ensure building compliance.

Several members voiced their disappointment that the Civic Centre required significant refurbishment after fifteen years, when such a building should last at least thirty years. It was suggested that the original BREEAM contract be consulted to see what the terms

were, and if the current repairs meant that the terms of the contract had been breached. There then followed significant debate around the breadth and remit of a BREEAM contract. It was agreed that the Corporate Head of Law and Governance would consult the original BREEAM contract to see if the repairs had breached it.

It was resolved that:

- 1. A capital estimate was approved for the compliance works at the Civic Centre.**

- 2. A supplementary revenue estimate was approved for the compliance works at the Civic Centre.**

- 3. The release of the figure specified in the report was approved from the Property Repairs and Renewals Reserve to fund the works set out above. Committee to approve the compliant procurements of the contracts identified within this report.**

(The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.)

Chairman