

Runnymede Borough CouncilFull CouncilThursday, 19 October 2023 at 7.35 pm

Members of the Council present: Councillors S Saise-Marshall (Mayor), R Bromley (Deputy Mayor), A Balkan, A Berardi, D Clarke, D Coen, MD Cressey, MK Cressey, V Cunningham, R Davies, S Dennett, T Gates, E Gill, L Gillham, T Gracey, M Harnden, C Howorth, J Hulley, S Jenkins, E Kettle, A King, R King, S Lewis, J Mavi, M Nuti, N Prescott, S Ringham, P Snow, S Walsh, D Whyte, S Whyte, S Williams, M Willingale and J Wilson.

Members of the Council absent: Councillors T Burton, M Darby, J Furey, C Mann, I Mullens, M Singh and M Smith.

45 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor provided an update on the events and engagements that she had attended since the last Council.

46 Minutes

The minutes of the 20 July 2023 Council were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

47 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Burton, Furey, Mann, Mullens, Singh and Smith.

48 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no public questions or speaking.

50 Petitions

There were no petitions.

51 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 13

a) Councillor Don Whyte asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“Over recent weeks the subject of refugees being housed in Runnymede has received a lot of attention on social media. It is a credit to the residents of Runnymede that so many residents have offered accommodation in their own homes to the people of Ukraine seeking refuge from their awful war. Runnymede Borough Council (RBC), to its credit, offered to provide accommodation to some refugee families from Syria and Afghanistan. Regrettably, recent social media posts have been quite vitriolic and there is, I believe, a public misconception about the number of refugees currently being housed by Runnymede Borough Council. Can I ask the Leader how many dwellings have RBC provided to Syrian and Afghan refugees over the last 5 years?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“Runnymede is a welcoming borough and this Council is proud to be supportive of people in need.

Under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, the Council accommodated six families in this area. Four of those Syrian families were accommodated in social housing provided by Runnymede, and two were supported to secure accommodation through the housing register with a Registered Provider.

To put that in context, this would usually represent considerably less than 2% of our annual housing register allocations when considering the number of allocations made in the past couple of complete financial years.

Under the Afghan Resettlement Schemes, the Council has supported 3 Afghan families to secure accommodation locally in the Private Rented Sector.

For completeness, I would add that in respect of the approximately 160 family groups of Ukrainian refugees who were anticipated to arrive locally:

- 47 have arrived and remain living with a Sponsor/Host.
- 48 households have secure private rented sector accommodation.
- 24 households have returned to Ukraine.
- 18 households have returned to another country.
- 13 households have moved on due to reasons “other” than those above.
- 10 households did not arrive in the area despite having successfully applied for a visa.

None of the Ukrainian cohort has applied to join the housing register and we have not provided any direct homelessness assistance with temporary accommodation. This is testament to the hosts locally and to the support provided by Runnymede and its partners to ensure local arrangements are manageable and people move on in a planned way.

The Council provides welfare support and advice tailored to individual households’ needs and has supported refugees in this area to access wider support services as may be required.”

Councillor D. Whyte asked how many families Runnymede had been asked to accommodate under the Afghan and Syrian resettlement schemes? The Leader said that the Council had not been requested to accommodate a specific number of people under the Afghan resettlement scheme, although it had provided homes for a number of larger families. Councillor Gracey was unable to provide information relating to Syrians as this scheme operated before he was elected.

Councillor R. King asked whether the Leader believed that councillors had to act responsibly and use appropriate language when referring to asylum seekers? The Leader re-emphasised that Runnymede was a welcoming Council and that it actively strived to be as such.

Councillor S. Whyte asked whether the Leader could provide details of the number of Syrian refugees the Council had been asked to accommodate after the meeting? The Leader said that he would do so.

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

“On the 13th of October 2022 members of Corporate Management Committee (CMC) were asked to approve the purchase of new vehicles for grounds maintenance, as this service was being brought back inhouse. While the delivery of services inhouse was welcome, I

raised serious concerns around the rushed purchase of fleet vehicles, with no consideration being given to lease them until full-service needs were known. At Environment and Sustainability Committee (ESC) on the 8th of June 2023, agenda item 13, paragraph 4.5, confirmed the Council's intention to sell those same two vehicles which were purchased fewer than 8 months before, despite the continued reassurance the Leader and the Chief Executive, at the time, gave CMC that all due diligence had been done around their purchase. Will the Leader confirm how much his administration lost of Runnymede taxpayers money on the resale of those vehicles and other equipment which was rushed to be purchased, who he has held responsible for this and whether the previous Chief Executive ever provided a full report, as he promised publicly when challenged, on this blunder and how processes in future would be changed to ensure this does not happen again?"

The Leader responded in the following terms:

"I regret that I have to ask you for a little more patience in respect of a response. You are correct in highlighting that the previous Chief Executive was dealing with this matter. Regrettably a report was not prepared or handed over when he was required to take short notice leave due to a family emergency. As members will be aware, he ultimately did not return from that emergency leave prior to his retirement.

I have already spoken to the new Chief Executive about this issue and asked for a fresh investigation into the decisions that were taken with respect to the vehicles and equipment purchased to be undertaken.

At this stage, I have requested that investigation be undertaken – the outcome of which will be made available to members."

Councillor R. King asked whether residents would receive an apology, along with the officer responsible for reintegrating the service, for not receiving sufficient support? The Leader acknowledged that there had been challenges in transferring the grounds maintenance service back in-house. Now that the service was bedding in, it was reported that it was responding very quickly to residents' requests, often within 24 hours.

Councillor D. Whyte asked whether the Leader believed that greater scrutiny of the proposals at the outset would have prevented some of the issues that had been experienced? The Leader said it was difficult to comment on this before an investigation had taken place. He emphasised that Runnymede was a learning organisation which would look to learn any lessons that it could from the investigation.

Councillor Ringham asked whether the Chief Executive's investigation would consider whether there were any tax implications arising from the Council's choices around procuring new grounds maintenance vehicles? The Leader said identifying the most tax efficient approach to acquiring vehicles was not always clearcut, but that he was happy for the Chief Executive to review this as part of his investigation.

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

"Can the leader confirm at present, the number of residents who are on Runnymede's housing register, the numbers on each priority banding, the numbers for each household size and percentage who have been waiting in 6-month periods?"

The Leader responded in the following terms:

"Further to an earlier phone call with Councillor King, I have confirmed that the question as posed relates to a large amount of data which would not lend itself to a spoken response. A written response with all relevant data will therefore be provided to all members. In terms

of key points from that response I can confirm that as of 1 September 2023, we had 1,241 registered households on our register. Of those, over 40% had joined the register in the last 15 months. Beyond that stage the percentage of applications is relatively constant on a quarterly basis.”

There were no supplementary questions.

d) Councillor Eliza Kettle asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“Can the leader confirm the number of non-HRA properties the Council owns either directly through the General Fund or indirectly through its Company (RBCI) that are empty, the size of those units and the length of time they have remained unoccupied?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“Further to our messages earlier in the week, I have sought to respond to your question through the lens of relevant housing units, noting your question relates to non-HRA properties and those owned by RBCI.

Dealing with RBCI first, RBCI Ltd deals only with private rented sector housing. As at today we have two vacant super studio flats which have been on the market for 1 week, but with avid interest, and are therefore likely to go under offer imminently.

With regard to the General Fund; we have three 1 bedroomed flats available in Magna Square. They have been vacant since completion of the scheme in August 2022.

There are seven flats available in Addlestone One which have been vacant due to the cladding works. We are actively marketing these seven flats which comprise of 5 x 2 bedroomed flats, 1 x 3 bedroomed flat, and 1 x bedroomed flat.

In addition, Witley House is vacant. It comprises of 24 units which are a mixture of 1, 2 and 3 bedroomed flats. We are exploring the best options to market these apartments for sale in a way which will deliver the best return to the Council and its residents.

On a related note, I would like to take the opportunity to make Members aware that the Magna Square development was given the recognition of “highly commended” in the category for best residential development at the British Construction Industry Awards. All in all, this is a very positive news story for Runnymede and recognition that our strategy in respect of regeneration is being delivered in the right way.”

Councillor R. King asked the Leader what his response would be to people who want somewhere to live and who had no interest in the vessel by which the Council provided housing to them? The Leader said that every individual rightly aspired to have a good quality home, adding that Runnymede performed well in this regard, by providing a majority of those on the housing register with homes within 12-15 months through its current arrangements.

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

“Can the leader confirm a full Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) survey has been conducted across the whole of the Council’s estate, including its owned companies, and that no RAAC concrete has been found or that appropriate measures have been taken to make building safe and if RAAC has been found he will provide details of these measures to all Councillors within a week of this meeting?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“As issues have been specifically related to Aerated Concrete Planks used from the 1950’s to the 1980’s and highlighted in roofing deck construction, we have undertaken internal assessments as to the likelihood of these issues affecting Council properties.

Within Housing, we have two blocks of flats with a “flat roof” construction design. The first being Surrey Towers, which we know with certainty that the sub structure is not Aerated Concrete Planks. The next is Southam and Audley House (constructed in 1969). We are about to start a project on this block and will be able, when the raised platform is in place, to view the roof’s sub structure and ascertain the materials used. Should it be deemed that this block has a roof sub structure made of concrete, then a survey will be instructed. However, it is unlikely that this type of building material would have been used and it is most likely a timber sub structure.

In terms of wall structures, much of our housing stock is traditional build, with a small amount being non-traditional. With traditional build, block work would have been used internally, but this construction material does not fall into the same category as is being discussed. The non-traditional buildings use a range of construction types, but none have used Aerated Concrete Planks.

A similar process has been undertaken to review our operational asset base and look at the construction materials used. These assets are of brick, timber or steel construction (or a mixture of) and it is unlikely that RAAC is present within these assets. Regular site inspections are carried out and any works that have been undertaken would have identified any defects within the structure. Further information will be captured as part of the planned condition surveys for all operation assets.

With regard to the investment property portfolio, we are not aware of RAAC existing, and whilst no surveys have recently been commissioned, this is because majority of our investment assets are on Full Repairing Insuring Leases whereby the tenant is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the building including the structure. In addition, modern methods of construction have been used in respect of recent development assets, namely Magna Square and Addlestone One, so we know that RAAC was not used in their construction.”

There were no supplementary questions.

f) Councillor Steve Ringham asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“On the 20th of April 2023 Corporate Management Committee (CMC) approved a Part 2 Item “Business plan covering Runnymede Borough Council’s Companies”, this was a document as confirmed in Part 1 minutes concerning the 5-year business plan of the companies which the Council owns. It owns these assets on behalf of Runnymede residents to seek an income to cover the loss of grant payments from central government since 2013, to cover the cost of providing the Council’s essential services. Would the Leader agree, at the heart of any good business plan, is a belief in accurate accounting, in transparency, in the efficient handling of business matters and other good practices such as policies which set out how to efficiently resolve disputes which may occur between clients and customers?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“I hope you’ll excuse the pedantry, but I personally think that accurate accounting and transparent corporate governance are the hallmarks of an Annual Report and the accompanying Financial Statements, rather than a business plan which I view as a more strategic, forward looking document.

To the heart of your question though, transparency is absolutely important which is why the

company's Board minutes along with the five year business plan which was approved by the Shareholders in April 2023 are published on our website."

Councillor Ringham asked whether the Leader felt that the Council's business plan for its companies was being delivered on, when many businesses were struggling with costs such as service charges? The Leader reminded members that the key aim of the Council's business plan was to regenerate the borough. He cited both the Addlestone One and Magna Square developments as examples of the Council's success in this regard, where the vast majority of residential units had been sold and new tenants were being found for commercial units.

Councillor Jenkins asked whether enough was being done to address residents' complaints about the Waitrose car park in Egham? The Leader said that as the leaseholder, Waitrose was responsible for the operation and maintenance of the car park, which made it difficult for the Council to intervene. He noted that Councillor Williams had been working to alleviate the issues being experienced.

g) Councillor Manu Singh was not present to ask his question.

52 **Recommendations from Committees**

52a **Carbon Baseline - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey), seconded (by Councillor Howorth) and **resolved** that the content of the Aether Ltd Council Estate and Area GHG Baseline report be noted.

52b **Equalities Objectives - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey), seconded (by Councillor Howorth) and **resolved** that the refreshed Equalities Objectives for the period 2023 – 2027 be adopted.

52c **Approach to Financial Sustainability - Savings, Income Generation and Efficiency Process - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey), seconded (by Councillor Willingale) and **resolved** that the amended approach for the identification and delivery of savings, income generation and efficiencies, as set out in the officer's report, be agreed.

52d **Calendar of committee meetings - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey), seconded (by Councillor Willingale) and **resolved** that the calendar of committee meetings for the 2024/25 municipal year be agreed.

52e **Amendments to the Constitution - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Howorth), seconded (by Councillor Willingale) and **resolved** that:

1. The minor amendments to the Council's urgency provisions (Standing Order 42) and the Contract Standing Orders be agreed, subject to the minor typographical error at 2.5a of the Contract Standing Orders being corrected.
2. 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 the report.

52f **Play Area Programme 2023/24 - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Howorth), seconded (by Councillor Lewis) and **resolved** that a revised capital estimate of £799,000, for the replacement plan involving the remaining locations set out in table 3 of the report, to be funded from the resources set out in table 2 (subject to any additional approvals required), be agreed.

52g **Housing Revenue Account Development 2 - recommendation from the Housing Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Nuti), seconded (by Councillor Hulley) and **resolved** that a supplementary revenue estimate, to be spread over the next 4 years for both projects to proceed from RIBA Stage 1 to 3, be agreed.

52h **Grant Funding to Improve the Energy Efficiency of Council Homes - ECO4 - recommendation from the Housing Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Nuti), seconded (by Councillor Hulley) and **resolved** that the procurement of a contractor, to implement energy efficiency measures to 59 Council owned homes via the ECO4 programme, be agreed.

52i **Risk Management Framework 2023 - 2026 - recommendation from the Standards and Audit Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Hulley), seconded (by Councillor Malcolm Cressey) and **resolved** that:

1. The Risk Management Framework, as set out in Appendix 'A' of the Officer's report, be agreed.
2. A section on risk implications be made mandatory on all relevant reports to Committees to ensure that all risks and mitigatory measures were identified.

53 **Local Government Act 1972 - Section 85: Attendance Dispensation, Councillor John Furey**

It was proposed (by Councillor Snow), seconded (by Councillor Gracey) and **resolved** that:

1. The Council exercise its powers under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 by granting a dispensation to the attendance requirements for elected Members in respect of Councillor Furey's ill-health.
2. That the duration of Councillor Furey's dispensation be set at six months, to apply from 17 November 2023.

54 **Notices of Motion from Members of the Council under Standing Order 15**

Motion a) Disability Confident Leadership at Runnymede Borough Council

The proposed motion, as set out in the summons, was moved by Councillor Jenkins.

Councillor Williams seconded the proposed motion.

The proposed motion was debated by the Council.

The motion was **CARRIED**:

Motivation:

This motion is being brought forward to support the development of an inclusive and diverse workforce within Runnymede Borough Council and to support the Council's commitment to equality of opportunity.

This Council notes:

The Disability Confident scheme is a Government initiative designed to encourage employers to recruit and retain people with disabilities and those with long term health conditions. The Disability Confident scheme supports employers to make the most of the talents which people with disabilities can bring to the workplace.

There are 3 levels of Disability Confident, designed to support organisations as they move through the scheme. These are, Level 1 (Committed), Level 2 (Employer), Level 3 (Leader). Each level must be completed before moving on to the next.

A new member organisation can join the Disability Confident scheme at Level 1 if it agrees to the Disability Confident commitments and identifies at least one action that it will carry out to make a difference for people with disabilities.

The Disability Confident Commitments are:

- *Inclusive and accessible recruitment*
- *Communicating vacancies*
- *Offering an interview to people with disabilities if they meet the minimum job criteria*
- *Providing reasonable adjustments*
- *Supporting existing employees*

Once an organisation has achieved Level 1, it can progress to Level 2 of the scheme by completing a self-assessment. The self-assessment is based around two themes; 'getting the right people for your business' and 'keeping and developing your people'. Level 2 is achieved once the organisation confirms to the Department for Work and Pensions that it has completed the self-assessment, which will include evidence of existing good-practice as well as achievable follow-up actions where there are areas for development.

To progress to the highest level of the scheme and to become a Disability Confident Leader, an organisation must have its self-assessment validated by an external stakeholder. The organisation must also provide a short narrative to show how it is making good on its follow-up actions, confirm that it is employing people with disabilities and report on disability, mental health and wellbeing by referring to the Voluntary Reporting Framework.

A number of nearby organisations are Level 2 members of Disability Confident, including:

- *Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL)*
- *Proctor and Gamble UK (formerly based in Egham)*
- *Citizens Advice UK*

- *Epsom and Ewell, Reigate and Banstead, Surrey Heath, Tandridge, Waverley and Woking Councils.*

Other nearby organisations who have reached Level 3 include:

- *Animal and Plant Health Agency (based in Addlestone)*
- *Unum (based in Dorking)*

Runnymede Borough Council is currently a Level 1 (committed) employer.

As a Level 1 Disability Confident (Committed) employer, Runnymede Borough Council supports the five commitments of the scheme as described above. Working towards Level 2 and Level 3 will enable the Council to transform its commitments into evidence-driven action that will benefit its current workforce as well as future talent.

As part of the existing IT transformation programme, a new recruitment system will go live from April 2024 which should improve the process of identifying and supporting job candidates with disabilities. Once the new systems are in place, it should be possible for officers in the Human Resources department to complete the self-assessment and work towards the Level 2 threshold by September 2024, going on to implement the follow-up actions of the self-assessment and achieve Level 3 by June 2025.

Human Resources have identified a potential opportunity to create a National Graduate Scheme project funded by the existing apprenticeships salary budget to support the collection of evidence for the self-assessment. The trainee will work under the direction of the Recruitment Manager.

The Council Believes that:

- *Working towards Level 2 and Level 3 of Disability Confident will enable Runnymede Borough Council to lead the way in Surrey as the only Level 3 local authority within the county.*
- *Developing RBC's participation in the Disability Confident scheme will help change attitudes, behaviours and cultures affecting residents with physical and/or hidden disabilities.*
- *Working towards Level 2 and Level 3 of the scheme will ensure RBC draws from the widest possible talent pool across all of its departments and service areas. It will also support employee morale and commitment across the Council by demonstrating fair treatment.*
- *Working towards the highest level of the Disability Confident scheme is an opportunity to practically demonstrate RBC's commitment to equality of opportunity.*
- *Completing the self-assessment and implementing evidence-based follow up actions will help to improve the efficiency, transparency and fairness of RBC's recruitment processes to the benefit of all involved.*

The Council resolves to ask the Corporate Management Committee to consider:

- 1) *The possibility of achieving Level 2 of the Disability Confident scheme by September 2024 and Level 3 by June 2025.*

- 2) *Whether it should receive an annual report about RBC's actions as a member of the Disability Confident scheme and its progress in reaching Level 2 and 3 of the scheme.*
- 3) *Whether officers in the Marketing and Communications team are able to promote RBC's participation in the Disability Confident scheme on social media, in future newsletters to residents and on the relevant pages of the Council website.*

Motion b) Proposed Plan to House Asylum Seekers in Syward Place

The proposed motion, as set out in the summons, was moved by Councillor Mavi.

Councillor Willingale seconded the proposed motion.

Councillor R. King proposed (seconded by Councillor D. Whyte) that the proposed motion be amended to read:

"This Council Notes:

Runnymede Council is proud of its ongoing efforts to support refugees and asylum seekers, and believes that, those fleeing war and persecution, as set out by the UNHCR as recognised refugees, deserve stable and suitable accommodation and support to establish their lives in the U.K.

That Runnymede presently employs 3 member of staff, till the 31st of March 2024, to assist with the Ukrainian Resettlement program, who have been essential at helping those fleeing the devastation brought to their Country by Putin's illegal and abhorrent invasion of Ukraine. These Officers have been essential in helping provide stable and suitable accommodation and support to Ukrainian Nationals to establish their lives in the U.K and be welcomed into our Community.

Any proposals for accommodation sites in future, for those with settled status or awaiting a decision of their asylum, must deliver this in a sustainable way, without detriment to the local community, support their integration into communities and ensure local services are properly resourced. It must also be mindful of burden sharing given the scale of the issue in the most recent data published.

It is believed that the Council received notification from the Home Office and the Government of its previous intentions to house 296 asylum seekers in Syward Place, in Chertsey and change usage of the site, which is presently being constructed, to facilitate housing these asylum seekers who have not received settled status. The Council had not received any other data as far as has been presented to all Members, of the demographics of these persons, their health, educational or other priority needs.

The Council had yet to take an agreed policy on this proposal by means of a vote at a Service Committee or at Full Council, and several Members, outside the Leader and Chairs of Committees, have expressed concern they did not receive communication from Officers directly about this Government proposal for Chertsey, in line with the agreed policies within Runnymede's Constitution, as set out in "Instruction To Staff On Informing And Consulting Members" page 93 of the 2023 amended Constitution.

Data published by the House of Commons Library on the 12th of September 2023, showed Runnymede Borough Council had supported 4 asylum seekers with accommodation in the first half of 2023, this is compared to an average of 121 per authority across the other 10 Districts and Boroughs in Surrey and 325 applicants, as an average, across the 361 authorities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In August 2023 Home Office figures showed in the first half of 2023 175,457 people were

awaiting an initial decision on their claim for asylum. This figure stood at 40,000 at the last quarter of 2019.

Over 45,000 asylum seekers arrived on “Small boats” in 2022. Only 1% of these 45,000 have received a decision by the Home Office and the Government. Without this decision the claimants are unable to work, have no statutory recourse to support or be assessed for resettlement or removal.

Since December 2022, the most recent figures released by the Government detail that the Home Office is processing 2,061 Asylum cases per month.

To note the survey conducted by Chertsey Councillors and their Political Party and that the Council as a public body needs to engage with residents formally and in a Politically impartial manner to record resident’s views, so this could be used in future formal responses to the Home Secretary.

That at this time Runnymede Borough Council has not been asked by the Home Secretary directly to house claimants which have not been assessed and their application for asylum processed under the resettlement program, as this is for cases where asylum has been granted and it would be expected, as with the Ukrainian resettlement program, appropriate Central Government funding would be provided to facilitate this.

That as of the 18th of October, it is believed that from a social media post from Runnymede and Weybridge’s MP, that the Home Office and the Government have chosen not to proceed with their initial plans to use Syward Place as a dispersal location.

This Council resolves to:

To record formally that Runnymede Borough Council does not support the Government’s previous plan to house 296 asylum seekers in a single site at Syward Place or in any future plan for housing on a single site, such as Syward Place. This is due to the concerns around pressures on local services, impact on community cohesion, resource implications yet to be identified to Runnymede Council services and the welfare impact on those waiting for the Home Office to process their application given those resources and service constraints.

For all members to be provided with a copy of the formal response this Council made, and which should have been provided at the time of submission, to the Government and the Home Secretary when this proposal became known.

To call on the Chief Executive to contact the Home Office to ask for an official response on Syward Place, so Runnymede can understand whether the Home Office plans to change or completely scrap any plans to house Asylum Seekers in that dwelling or whether it’s intentions are now to move those Asylum Seekers elsewhere in Surrey, the UK or the Borough, and for the Home Office’s response to be provided to all members.

To call on the Leader to write a letter to the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman which is open to be signed by all group leaders, expressing this Council’s dismay around the unacceptable impact the backlog in processing asylum cases is having on individuals involved, the effect on communities like Chertsey who may face these housing proposals again in the future, who may be forced to house highly vulnerable individuals without a recourse to public funds and ability for Councils to respond to the needs of existing residents without sufficient increases in funding.

To call on the Leader to write a letter to the Leader of Surrey, seeking information how the education authority intends to respond to the potential need for language classes and other adult education courses for potential asylum seekers if the Government was to push forward with another proposal like this.

To ask the Corporate Management Committee to review the potential impact on welfare, support, and wider Council Services if the Government was to push forward with another proposal like this.

To ask the Community Services Committee to review the potential impact on local GP and health services if the Government was to push forward with another proposal like this.”

The proposed amended motion was debated by the Council.

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

For the amendment (14)

Councillors Berardi, Davies, Gates, Gill, Gillham, Harnden, Jenkins, Kettle, A. King, R. King, Ringham, D. Whyte, S. Whyte and Williams.

Against the amendment (20)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Clarke, Coen, M.D. Cressey, M.K. Cressey, Cunningham, Dennett, Gracey, Howorth, Hulley, Lewis, Mavi, Nuti, Prescott, Snow, Walsh, Willingale and Wilson.

Abstentions (0)

The proposed amendment **FELL**.

Councillor Gracey proposed (seconded by Councillor Willingale) that the final sentence of the proposed motion be amended to read:

“However the Council resolves to engage constructively with the Home Office to consider suitable alternative options within the borough for this accommodation.”.

The proposed amended motion was debated by the Council.

Councillors Gracey and Willingale withdrew the proposed amendment in accordance with Standing Order 17.11.

Councillor D. Whyte proposed (seconded by R. King) that further consideration of the motion be deferred to a future meeting of the Council. It was confirmed that there was no provision within the Constitution to defer the consideration of motions, and as such, this proposal was not permissible.

Following the conclusion of the debate on this item, the proposed substantive motion was put to the vote. A named vote was requested on the proposed substantive motion and the voting was as follows:

For the substantive motion (20)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Clarke, Coen, M.D. Cressey, M.K. Cressey, Cunningham, Dennett, Gracey, Howorth, Hulley, Lewis, Mavi, Nuti, Prescott, Snow, Walsh, Willingale and Wilson.

Against the substantive motion (1)

Councillor Berardi.

Abstentions (13)

Councillors Davies, Gates, Gill, Gillham, Harnden, Jenkins, Kettle, A. King, R. King, Ringham, D. Whyte, S. Whyte and Williams.

The substantive motion was **CARRIED**:

This Council is proud of our ongoing efforts to support refugees and asylum seekers, and believes that:

- *those fleeing war and persecution deserve stable and suitable accommodation and support to establish their lives in the U.K.;*
- *integration into communities is key to this, and;*
- *any proposals for accommodation sites must deliver this in a sustainable way, without detriment to the local community.*

Consequently, further to engagement with Chertsey residents who have clearly set out their concerns through resident surveys, this Council resolves that it does not support plans for the accommodation of 296 asylum seekers in Syward Place that will place unmanageable pressure on services and affordable housing in the Borough and does not guarantee access to services that those incoming would duly require on resettlement.

However the Council resolves to engage constructively with the Home Office to consider suitable alternative options within the borough for this accommodation in support of the Government's resettlement programme.

The substantive motion was determined by the Council, without reference to a committee, in accordance with Standing Order 15.6(b)(ii).

Motion c) Members to receive timely communication of Planning Enforcement notices, Planning Appeals raised and Planning Inspectorate Appeal decisions

The proposed motion, as set out in the summons, was moved by Councillor S. Whyte.

Councillor Willingale seconded the proposed motion.

The proposed motion was debated by the Council.

The motion was **CARRIED**:

Motivation:

This motion is being brought forward by the Runnymede Liberal Democrat Group to ensure that all Members receive timely communications from RBC Planning Officers about key actions affecting the borough including Planning Enforcement Notices, Planning Appeals Raised and Planning Inspectorate decisions on Appeals.

In recent months there has been a report in the media about an enforcement notice issued by this Council on a high profile planning application, which had neither been communicated to all members, nor to ward councillors.

The results of Planning Appeals were previously communicated on a regular basis until the end of 2021 but stopped without any formal agreement from Members.

The Council notes:

1. *This Council aspires to be open and transparent wherever possible.*
2. *It is recognised that people learn by example.*
3. *All Members are more effective when properly informed.*
4. *Planning Committee members can make more informed decisions with the knowledge of previous cases.*
5. *It is important that members are properly informed, in order that they can communicate effectively with residents, to whom they are accountable.*

*The Council **resolves** that the Planning Committee be asked to consider the feasibility of informing members within five working days of each Planning Enforcement notice being issued, all Planning Appeals raised and all Planning Appeal decisions.*

Motion d) The proposed removal of Day Travelcards by the Mayor of London

Councillor Balkan moved the following altered motion in accordance with Standing Order 17.10:

This Council notes:

- *The proposed removal of Day Travelcards by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, for those travelling into and throughout London. This will result in Surrey residents having to buy separate rail and London transport service tickets. Currently, Day Travelcards provide unlimited travel on Transport for London (TfL) services, including the London Underground, Bus, Tram, Docklands Light Railway, London Overground and Elizabeth line, and National Rail services in London. They can also be used to obtain a one third reduction in River Services fares. The proposals to remove Day Travelcards constitute an unfair, unacceptable and expensive levy on our residents who wish or need to travel to London.*
- *The proposals have deliberately targeted the removal of the Day Travelcard as a method to generate additional income for TfL. It is anticipated by the Mayor's own consultation that the withdrawal of Day Travelcards will result in rail operators ceasing to sell Zone 1-6 Travelcards. This will add barriers and travel friction to journeys to London – running counter to evidence that passenger journeys and the use of public transport are enhanced by improving integrated ticketing not reducing it. No regard is given in the proposals for the potential loss of revenue to the London economy that may be caused by the increase in travel costs as Runnymede residents risk being priced out of the nation's capital. Employers, retail and leisure businesses, theatres and many others may see a reduction in revenue as residents reduce their time and/or expenditure in London.*
- *That transport planning and integrated ticketing, bus and rail, in Runnymede is a strategic function of Surrey County Council. This motion therefore is a direct copy in support of the cross-party motion on the 10th of October 2023 at Surrey's full Council which was past unanimously by all groups.*

This Council resolves to:

1. *Demand that London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, immediately withdraws his proposals for the removal of Day Travelcards.*
2. *Request that the Leader of the Council writes to Sadiq Khan informing him of this*

resolution of Runnymede Borough Council, the discriminatory nature of his proposal, the impact on Runnymede residents, the negative impact on the economy of London and therefore the need to abandon plans to remove Day Travelcards.

3. *Ensure the Leader joins the Leader of Surrey County Council, in writing to the Secretary of State for Transport urging him to intervene in this matter and he requests to be part of the joint meeting with Surrey County Council, TfL and DfT, to include in those negotiations' extension of zone 6 to areas of Surrey bordering London to increase Surrey residents' direct access to contactless TfL fares and so cheaper train travel.*

Councillor Clarke seconded the proposed altered motion.

The proposed altered motion was debated by the Council.

The altered motion was **CARRIED**.

The altered motion was determined by the Council, without reference to a committee, in accordance with Standing Order 15.6(b)(ii).

Motion e) Rogue Landlords

The proposed motion, as set out in the summons, was moved by Councillor R. King.

Councillor Kettle seconded the proposed motion.

Councillor Gates proposed (seconded by Councillor Kettle) that the proposed motion be amended to read:

This Council notes:

- *The important contribution the Private Rented Sector (PRS) makes to the provision of housing in the borough, with renters of private accommodation making up a significant proportion of occupants in Runnymede.*
- *Many private landlords renting out properties in Runnymede are good landlords who work in close partnership with the Council.*
- *However, this is not the case for all landlords and Runnymede Council should be fully committed to ensure that no private rented sector tenant is living in substandard accommodation. Everyone should live in a warm and dry home.*
- *A recent survey by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) showing that of those officers working on housing enforcement in the private rented sector, nine out of ten had encountered landlords engaging in harassment or illegal eviction, and 78% had dealt with landlords who persistently refuse to maintain their property to a safe condition.*
- *That rogue landlords can have a devastating impact on vulnerable tenants and the wider community and that extending and enforcing HMO licencing conditions can ensure high standards are maintained for PRS renters and other residents.*
- *The majority of HMO licenses prescribed under the 2018 order with 5 or more persons are in 3 wards, Egham Town, Englefield Green West and East. The research already conducted both by the Planning Committee in March 2023 on Article 4 Direction and currently underway in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee provides members with*

information about the impact that high volume and concentration of HMOs occupied by students can have on residents and the availability of housing for families with children, service families and other local people.

- *That the existing work program of Committees and the Council has not yet confirmed its support for an Article 4 direction or extending HMO licenses nor has this featured so far in any budget discussion which may be needed. Sufficient resources will be essential if the authority is to deliver potential material improvements to residents as suggested in the Committees mentioned above.*

*This Council **resolves** to request that:*

1. *The Environment and Sustainability Committee to consider whether the Council can do more to publicise successful legal action against landlords and lettings agents, which will act as a deterrent to bad landlords and raise awareness of landlords' duties and responsibilities.*
2. *The Environment and Sustainability Committee conduct a review on the Council's communication strategy to improve publicity to tenants of the PRS homes to improve their knowledge on their rights and responsibilities.*
3. *The Environment and Sustainability Committee to consider the feasibility of implementing a selective licensing scheme within the Egham Town and Englefield Green East and West Wards.*
4. *The Planning Committee to consider the feasibility of implementing an Article 4 directive within the Egham Town and Englefield Green East and West Wards further to agenda item 6 on March 23. With a decision to consider whether a public consultation should begin to ask residents their views specifically on the marginalisation and polarisation of local families, displacement of local families by transient student populations, impact on local services and potential environmental impacts of such HMO rentals such as dilapidated external facades, unkempt gardens and an increase in nuisance behaviour and ASB.*
5. *The Chair of Environment and Sustainability Committee calls on the UK Government, through a letter to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to push forward much delayed legislation to bring the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector as proposed in the Renters Reform white paper.*

The amendment was **CARRIED**.

The amended motion was debated by the Council.

The amended motion was **CARRIED**.

Motion f) Against water bills rise of £156 per year

The proposed motion, as set out in the summons, was moved by Councillor A. King, subject to the final paragraph being altered in accordance with Standing Order 17.10 to read:

- “3 To ask the Corporate Management Committee to review the Council's own support mechanism for the most vulnerable households should Ofwat and the government approve these plans and impact our residents in Runnymede and how these are best communicated to all residents.”

The proposed altered motion was seconded by Councillor Davies.

Further alterations were made in accordance with Standing Order 17.10:

- The fifth paragraph to read “Therefore any such increase should not be at the expense of citizens.”
- The penultimate paragraph to read “To recognise that water companies have historically had sufficient resources to carry out their duties.”

The altered motion was **CARRIED**:

This Council notes:

- *Water companies in England and Wales have proposed for bills to increase by £156 a year by 2030 to pay for upgrades and reduce sewage discharges.*
- *That many households would be unable to afford such an increase, and that it would hit many families still impacted by the Cost-of-Living Crisis.*
- *That under the proposals submitted to Ofwat charges will go up initially by an average of £84 in 2025 rising each year to £156 extra by 2030.*
- *That such increase are unacceptable and that Ofwat has previously acknowledged that water companies had received enough money to develop, build and maintain a sewage system capable of properly dealing with our sewage.*
- *Therefore any such increase should not be at the expense of citizens.*

This Council resolves:

1. *To call on the Leader to write a letter which is open to be signed by all group leaders to both Ofwat and our local MP stating this Council is against such water bills increase and calling on them both to take action to ensure unreasonable bill rises are scrapped.*
2. *To recognise that water companies have historically had sufficient resources to carry out their duties.*
3. *To ask the Corporate Management Committee to review the Council’s own support mechanism for the most vulnerable households should Ofwat approve these plans and impact our residents in Runnymede and how these are best communicated to all residents.*

Sections 1 and 2 in the resolution of the altered motion were determined by the Council, without reference to a committee, in accordance with Standing Order 15.6(b)(ii).

55 **Minority Group Priority Business**

This item of business was considered between agenda items 10e and 10f, in accordance with Standing Order 23.4.

Councillor R. King read the statement that had been published with the summons for the meeting.

56 **Press and Public to be Excluded by Resolution**

There was no exempt business.

(The meeting ended at 10.01 pm.)

Mayor