

Runnymede Borough CouncilFull CouncilThursday, 7 December 2023 at 8.00 pm

Members of the Council present: Councillors S Saise-Marshall (Mayor), R Bromley (Deputy Mayor), A Balkan, T Burton, D Clarke, D Coen, MK Cressey, M Darby, R Davies, S Dennett, T Gates, E Gill, T Gracey, C Howorth, J Hulley, S Jenkins, A King, S Lewis, C Mann, J Mavi, M Nuti, N Prescott, S Ringham, M Singh, M Smith, P Snow, S Walsh, D Whyte, S Whyte, S Williams and M Willingale.

Members of the Council absent: Councillors A Berardi, MD Cressey, V Cunningham, J Furey, L Gillham, M Harnden, E Kettle, R King, I Mullens and J Wilson.

60 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor provided an update on the events and engagements that she had attended since the last Council, as well as upcoming events, encouraging nominations for the Runnymede Civic Awards.

61 Minutes

The minutes of the 19 October 2023 special meeting and 19 October 2023 ordinary meeting were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

62 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from councillors Berardi, MD Cressey, Cunningham, Furey, Gillham, Harnden, Kettle, R King, Mullens and Wilson.

63 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

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

There were no public questions or speaking.

65 Petitions

There were no petitions.

66 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 13

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

“A year ago at the 2022 December Corporate Management Committee it was identified that RBC needed to make savings of £5.2m by the end of March 2026 in order to deliver a balanced budget for the municipal year 2026/2027. Can I ask the Leader, why no progress been made by his Administration in identifying any of the required £5.2m savings?”

The Leader replied that a significant amount of work had been done to help inform the decisions over the next few years, and in preparing for budgets for 2024/25 focus had been

on allocating resource where it was needed.

Year on year underspend and earmarked reserves had been reviewed to ensure the Council was holding reserves in the most efficient way, whilst progress had been made in reviewing the establishment, ICT infrastructure, fleet, and the commissioning of contracts across professional services.

The Leader concluded that the revised Medium Term Financial Forecast would be presented to the following week's Corporate Management Committee, which would set out a plan to deliver a balanced budget over multiple years through a mixed package of savings, efficiencies and cost avoidance.

Councillor D. Whyte added that nothing had been received through committees or member working parties to crystallise any of those savings, and felt there was nervousness around the chamber, particularly in the context of the financial struggles of other authorities. Councillor D. Whyte went on to ask if there was a target date to identify the full £5.2m savings.

The Leader replied that no date had been set, but it would be identified as soon as possible and emphasised the positive financial position Runnymede was in compared to other local authorities, which was evident during a recent county-wide financial resilience review where Runnymede were close to leading the way in some areas, largely due to decisions taken over a prolonged period in relation to the investment strategy and decisions to regenerate and place shape in Addlestone and Egham town centres, which both provide income streams to help address current financial challenges.

Councillor S. Whyte emphasised the need to know about the overall financial position of the Council when needing to make any kind of financial decision, and sought reassurance that the Leader would brief all councillors on the financial position as soon as possible.

The Leader reiterated that the Medium Term Financial Forecast would be available as a part one item and encouraged all members to attend the meeting to understand the issues. The Leader encouraged the avoidance of alternative budgets requesting spend on additional uncoded items that had not gone through the appropriate budgetary process.

67 **Recommendations from Committees**

67a **Risk Appetite Statement 2024 - 2025 - recommendation from the Standards and Audit Committee**

At the November Standards & Audit Committee a thorough debate had resulted in consensus across the committee for the status of all but one of the thirteen risk categories, with 'commercial risk' the only category that remained outstanding and subject to Full Council agreement.

Whilst the full range of options was debated at Standards & Audit Committee, opting for minimal commercial risk had been ruled out due to the committee believing in the need for member input.

During the debate several members commented that an open approach and therefore embracing innovation being appealing, however in the context of inflation and the cost of living crisis innovation in this context should currently be avoided unless necessary.

Members voted on whether to adopt cautious or open for the commercial risk category, and voted by majority in favour of cautious.

Resolved that –

The overarching Risk Appetite Statement for 2024/25 and supporting risk appetite statements for each risk category was agreed.

67b Implications of Climate Change for Runnymede Borough Council - Corporate Management Committee

In moving the recommendation the Leader acknowledged that the report had been a long time coming, with the initial motion on the subject tabled in 2019, adding that delays were largely down to the pandemic absorbing officer time and resources, as well as the focus of the climate change member working party being on the delivery of the climate change strategy that formed an integral part of the corporate business plan.

The Leader added the development of the climate change strategy and objective of bring a net zero council by 2030 and net zero borough by 2050 meant that confidence could be placed in the plans developed and Runnymede was in a position to declare a climate emergency as per wording in the report.

Several members commented on the time taken to bring about the report, and sought reassurance that sufficient funding and resources would be in place in next year's budget to further the claims of the climate change strategy. The Leader reiterated how critical the climate change strategy was to the overall corporate business plan and confirmed measures would be in place to ensure it was suitably funded and resourced in future years.

Resolved that –

A Climate Emergency was declared in Runnymede in line with the wording recommended at paragraphs 5.16 to 5.18 of the report

67c Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

The Leader welcomed the fact that the council delivered on everything from the previous Council Tax Support Scheme, with a reduction in processing time enabling the creation of the administration of the Household Support Fund. The recommendation sought to continue with the current scheme whilst building up data to allow for further recommendations or amendments for 2025/26.

The scheme received unanimous backing, however there was a claim that the scheme did not go far enough, with many residents believed not to be claiming for what they were entitled to, whilst praise was given to Cllr Mullens for her efforts to reduce the minimum weekly entitlement from £10 to £5 for all working age groups.

Resolved that –

The Council Tax Support Scheme to 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).

67d Electric Vehicle Strategy - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

The Electric Vehicle strategy formed an important component of the climate change strategy and the Leader praised the cross-party collaboration of the climate change member working party, as well as the insight of Cllr Berardi into the EV market.

Resolved that –

The Electric Vehicle Strategy was adopted with an implementation date of 14 December 2023.

67e Reserve Forces Policy - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

The recommendation sought to advance the Council beyond gold standard accreditation as a high quality defence veteran employer, providing paid leave for staff who choose to be adult cadet volunteers, providing important opportunities for young people.

Council welcomed the recommendation, with several members speaking of their own positive personal experiences with uniformed youth organisations in their younger days.

Resolved that –

The Reserve Forces Policy was adopted.

67f Minor Amendment to the Constitution - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

The proposed amendment was a minor technical modification that would enable the convening of a special council tax setting committee in the event that the relevant precept authority had not provided the figures required to set the Council Tax by the date when Runnymede Borough Council holds its Council Tax setting meeting.

Resolved that –

A Standing Council Tax Committee was approved.

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

On introducing the published motion Cllr Jenkins sought to make a small alteration to one of the proposed resolutions, which received the consent of both the Mayor and Cllr Gates as seconder.

Adopting a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit in Runnymede

Motivation:

This motion is being brought forward to encourage local developers to go above and beyond towards building energy efficient, zero carbon homes that will reduce overall Borough emissions and contribute towards tackling the climate crisis.

This council notes:

Due to uncertainty around the Government's policy direction, the decision was made at Planning Committee in June 2023 to pause the review of the Runnymede Local Plan until the new plan making regime is introduced. This is not expected to take place until late 2024 at the earliest and it could take a further 30 months from there to introduce a new Local Plan.

In May 2023, it was reported that the Earth is likely to break the key temperature limit of 1.5C between now and 2027 as a result of human activity (see note 1).

Therefore an urgent need exists to promote and actively encourage sustainable development that supersedes the speed at which any new Local Plan can be implemented.

Adopting a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit enables interim measures to be put in place to encourage energy efficient, zero carbon developments whilst underpinning the core principles of the existing Local Plan until it can be reviewed. It also provides Councillors with an opportunity to put the knowledge gained from recent Carbon Literacy training into action, by encouraging developers to build zero carbon homes and to retrofit existing properties, thereby reducing overall Borough emissions.

Cotswold District Council, in collaboration with West Oxfordshire District Council and Forest of Dean District Council worked with leading technical experts from Etude, the Passivhaus Trust, Levitt Bernstein and Elementa Consulting to produce a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit template (see note 2). The template provides best practice guidance for small-to-medium sized builders, architects and developers to deliver new-build net zero homes or retrofits of existing homes.

The template is available under Creative Commons for any authority to adapt as they wish, to make it specific to the needs of their local area. One example of a local authority who has adapted the toolkit in this way includes Somerset Council (see note 3).

There are a number of ways that Runnymede Borough Council could adapt this template to suit the needs of our local area, such as by:

- Adding RBC branding and relevant images.
- Amending the introduction – setting out Runnymede’s climate goals, referring to existing planning policies and relevant planning guidance (e.g. Design SPD / Green and Blue Infrastructure SPD).
- Making minor changes throughout the document to reference Runnymede’s Climate Change Strategy / Action Plan / Local Plan.
- Introducing a couple of pages on ‘beyond energy’ issues – to consider wider sustainability issues such as sustainable transport and drainage, and gigabit capable connectivity (e.g. refer to Surrey County Council’s Healthy Streets guidance and Sustainable Drainage Systems guidance).

It is important to note that a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit does not constitute a Supplementary Planning Document and should be considered as a separate entity. However, if a developer can demonstrate that they have used the Toolkit to meet or exceed Local Plan energy policy requirements in a sustainable manner, and that their proposal therefore brings about climate change benefits, this would be a material consideration which would be weighed in the balance in deciding whether to grant planning permission.

The Council Believes that:

- Adopting a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit gives Runnymede Borough Council an opportunity to proactively encourage greater sustainability within the Borough, providing a framework which inspires developers to go beyond the bare minimum and to actively reduce emissions within their work.
- Adopting a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit will strongly encourage the introduction of

zero carbon new-build homes as well as increased retrofitting of existing properties.

- Adopting a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit provides the Council with a means of encouraging sustainable development across the Borough between now and the next Local Plan review.
- Adopting a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit will help to reduce a significant portion of overall Borough emissions by promoting greater energy efficiency.
- Adopting a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit falls into line with recommendations which arose from a recent study commissioned by officers on Climate Change policy options which could be pursued as part of a revised Local Plan.
- Adopting a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit will help Runnymede Borough Council to get a head start on implementing its upcoming Climate Change Action Plan, as the adoption of a toolkit is one of the goals listed on this plan (sub action 1.1.4).
- Adopting a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit could potentially be used to incentivise developers to meet the initial capital cost of providing heat pumps and improving cooling systems.

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

1. Asking officers in the Climate Change team to adapt the template [published under Creative Commons by Cotswold, West Oxfordshire and Forest of Dean Councils](#) to create a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit for the Borough of Runnymede, [and to continue considering other measures and tools that can be deployed alongside this to reduce carbon emissions between now and the next Local Plan review.](#)
2. Adopting the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit once a working draft has been scrutinised by the Climate Change Members Working Party.
3. Including the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit into the 2024/25 Climate Change Delivery Plan to ensure that the adopted document is promoted in a timely and effective manner to the local development community.

Note 1 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-65602293>

Note 2 - [How to achieve net zero carbon homes - Cotswold District Council](#)

Note 3 - <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/other-design-and-technical-guidance/net-zero-carbon-toolkit-in-somerset-west-and-taunton/>

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 (31):

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Burton, Clarke, Coen, MK Cressey, Darby, Davies, Dennett, Gates, E Gill, Gracey, Howorth, Hulley, Jenkins, A King, Lewis, Mann, Mavi, Nuti, Prescott, Ringham, Singh, Smith, Snow, Walsh, D Whyte, S Whyte, Williams, Willingale

Against (0):

-

Abstain (0):

-

The motion was carried.

69 Minority Group Priority Business

There was no minority group priority business.

70 Press and Public to be Excluded by Resolution

By resolution of full Council, 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 of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

71 Recommendations from Committees**71a Housing Revenue Account Development - recommendation from the Housing Committee**

Resolved that –

- 1. The budget and subsequent procurement of the first piece of land and the completed scheme in line with the planning approval (if obtained) and agreed specification was approved.**
- 2. The budget and subsequent procurement of the second piece of land and the completed scheme in line with the planning approval and agreed specification was approved.**
- 3. Funds from the total budget were approved to be utilised within the financial year 2023/24 to commence the legal process for each of the schemes, to be financed from HRA Reserves.**

71b Procurement of Digital Alarms - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

Resolved 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 was agreed.**
- 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.**

(The meeting ended at 9.13 pm.)

Mayor