

31.01.24

Dear Councillor

SUMMONS TO A MEETING OF THE FULL COUNCIL

I hereby summon you to attend the meeting of the Full Council to be held on **Thursday, 8 February 2024 at 7.30 pm. The meeting will be held at Council Chamber - Civic Centre.**



Andrew Pritchard
Chief Executive
01932 425500
Email: andrew.pritchard@runnymede.gov.uk

A G E N D A

1. **Mayor's Announcements**

2. **Minutes**

10 - 18

To confirm and sign, as a correct record, the minutes of the following meetings of the Council:

- 7 December 2023 (special meeting)
- 7 December 2023 (ordinary meeting)

3. **Apologies for Absence**

4. **Declarations of Interest**

If Members have an interest in an item, please complete a member interest form and email it to Democratic.Services@runnymede.gov.uk by 5pm on the day of the meeting. Members are advised to contact the Corporate Head of Law and Governance prior to the meeting if they wish to seek advice on a potential interest.

5. **Speaking or Questions from Members of the Public under Standing Order 12**

In pursuance of Standing Order 12.1, speaking or questions from members of the public are not permitted at this meeting.

6. **Petitions**

To receive any petitions from members of the Council under Standing Order 19.

7. **Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 13**

a) Question from Councillor Peter Snow to the Leader of the Council

“My question is with regard to the bad press we recently received from the Surrey Advertiser on the 5 January. The article related to a warning by Suzanne Clarke from the DLUHC which referred to a "Best Value Notice". Can the Leader please confirm whether the article was factual or not and how we have addressed the concerns that are now being raised by all Runnymede residents since the article was published. Specially can the Leader clarify whether the less than ONE percentage is correct or the figure of 4.1 % is the actual figure as recorded?”

8. **Notification of receipt of non-statutory Best Value Notice**

19 - 24

The receipt of the non-statutory Best Value Notice was also reported to the [Corporate Management Committee on 18 January 2024](#) and the [Standards and Audit Committee on 23 January 2024](#).

9. **Recommendations from Committees**

a) **Chertsey Town Centre Street Licensing - recommendation from the Environment and Sustainability Committee**

The report associated with this item was circulated to all members with the [agenda for the 11 January 2024 Environment and Sustainability Committee](#).

The recommendation of the Committee is to follow.

b) **RIPA Policy Annual Review - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

The report associated with this item was circulated to all members with the [agenda for the 18 January 2024 Corporate Management Committee](#).

The use of the Council's RIPA powers now had to be reported on annually. This opportunity had also been taken to refresh the Council's policy to ensure that it was compliant with the most recent guidance.

It was **resolved** that the Council be recommended to:

1. Note that the Council had not used its RIPA powers during the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023 and further note that such powers had not been used since 2011.
2. Adopt the proposed revised policy to govern the use of RIPA powers for the period 9 February 2024 to 7 February 2025.

c) **Housing Revenue Account Estimates - recommendation from the Housing Committee**

The report associated with this item was circulated to all members with the [agenda for the 10 January 2024 Housing Committee](#).

The Corporate Head of Finance outlined the Housing Revenue Account estimates for 2024/25. He explained the variances in the current financial year could be attributed to the Parkside scheme, central heating, the Decent Homes programmes and changes in the contributions into the Major Repairs reserve. This had led to an additional cost of £117,000 in the current year. This meant that the estimated HRA balance at the end of the year was expected to be £35.6 million compared to the £23.6 million originally forecast. This would reduce the following year as the programmes caught up.

The major works programme for the following year would total £9.3 million and would include major upgrades to central heating, kitchens and bathrooms, roofing and various other works that were required to comply with the Decent Homes Standard. There would therefore be insufficient funds in the Major Repairs Reserve the following year, which would require a further transfer from the HRA balances.

The next section on debt charges and depreciation was noted, with the next repayment of HRA loans in 2027 forecast to be met from a combination of set aside receipts and HRA reserve. It was also proposed to transfer £30,000 of HRA funds to top up the Discretionary Housing Payment pot for which Secretary of State permission would be sought.

Proposed fees, charges and rent levels for the following year were discussed. The Regulator for Social Housing has confirmed that the maximum rent increase limit allowable would revert to CPI + 1%. CPI in September was 6.7% meaning the Council can increase rent by up to 7.7%. This would be applied from April 2024, and would also apply to rents for mobile home pitches and the services charges paid by the Council's Independent Retirement tenants. Rents paid for properties bought under the shared ownership scheme would be subject to a 5.8% increase based on the November RPI + 0.5%.

It was **resolved** that the following be recommended to the Full Council:

1. The draft revenue estimates for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix A be approved as submitted, and that the Full Council be requested to make provisions accordingly.

It was further **resolved** that the proposed changes in rents and charges (including those for Housing General Fund services) for 2024/25, as set out in pages 47-49 of the Estimates, be approved to be effective either from the first rent week of April 2024, or 1 April 2024 as appropriate.

d) **Review of Local Council Tax Discounts - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

The report associated with this item was circulated to all members with the [agenda for the 14 December 2023 Corporate Management Committee](#).

The report was welcomed by Committee, some of whom expressed regret that it had not been forthcoming earlier. It was stressed that the approach

would entail a more compassionate and personalised approach to debt recovery, with more leeway for payment and additional support for care leavers, Ukrainian refugees and properties affected by flooding.

It was **resolved** that the following be recommended to the Council:

- 1) That with effect from 1 April 2024, the following discounts continue:
 - Care leavers
 - Ukrainian Refugees
 - Properties affected by flooding
- 2) That the Council Tax Discount for unoccupied and unfurnished dwellings be reduced from 100% for up to 3 months to 100% for up to 28 days (Class C of the Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012).
- 3) That with effect from 1 April 2025:
 - In accordance with Section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, the additional amount payable for Council Tax be increased from 50% to 100% for dwellings that are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than one year.
 - The additional amount of Council Tax to be increased from 50% to 200% for properties that are unoccupied and unfurnished for more than five years.
 - The additional amount of Council Tax be increased from 50% to 300% for properties that are unoccupied and unfurnished for more than ten years.

e) Medium Term Financial Strategy - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

The report associated with this item was circulated to all members with the [agenda for the 14 December 2023 Corporate Management Committee](#).

In picking out the salient points in the report, the Chief Executive highlighted that inflation pressures that resulted in a higher pay increase to staff last year were still in existence but revised figures gave confidence that a tapered reduction could now be put in place. However, it was stressed that the figure was the total budgeted figure from which the pay award would be funded and did not predetermine what that award would be. It also included work to change the salary banding in line with the national living wage coming into force in April 2024, however it was noted that this would be part of a broader review to decompress some of the grades and posts affected.

It was felt that the modest number of growth items were considered essential and unavoidable, whilst it was stressed that the c£1m taken out of the staffing budget was a technical accounting piece designed to ensure reconciliation between the HR and finance systems and was not the removal of any existing job posts. This would ensure that the council's resources were appropriately allocated.

A cautious approach had been taken to the savings identified, with only savings included that had a defined savings plan and were not subject to outside factors such as a democratic vote or contractual agreement.

The Leader confirmed to a member that webstreaming council meetings remained an aspirational growth item, but would be brought forward at the appropriate time to ensure it synchronises with work to the council chamber and ensures the best value for money.

A member highlighted that the report should be viewed in the wider context of the risk appetite recently agreed by full council, whilst another member felt that they could not support the MTFs, partly based on previous decisions on the Council's asset base, along with the perceived lack of security central government provides local government around rate reviews and funding settlements making it impossible for the council to provide the full range of services that residents require.

It was **resolved** that the Full Council be recommended to approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The Corporate Management Committee also **resolved** that:

1. The growth items as set out in Appendix 4 for approval and inclusion in the budget for 2024/25 be presented to the January Corporate Management Committee.
2. The Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) be authorised to enter into pay negotiations with staff and Union representatives within the total provision set out in the report.

f) 24/25 Budget - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

25 - 28

The report associated with this item was circulated to all members with the [agenda for the 18 January 2024 Corporate Management Committee](#).

Following the meeting of the Corporate Management Committee, where clarification was sought on car parking income, further information is attached.

The draft budget for 2024/25 had been developed, following the agreement of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Medium Term Financial Forecast at the previous Corporate Management Committee. The proposed budget also acknowledged other factors such as the Capital Strategy (considered as part of another agenda item at this meeting). The budget report sought to convey the scale of the financial challenges facing Runnymede Borough Council over the coming years, which could if left unaddressed, result in the expiration of the Council's balances during the 2028/29 financial year.

The main features of the budget were presented to the Committee. These features included the proposal to increase Council Tax by the maximum amount possible without needing to undertake a referendum, and the maintenance of a minimum level of reserves. Members' attention was drawn to the statutory statement of the Council's Chief Financial (s151) Officer, which provided commentary on the risks associated with the proposed budget.

The Committee discussed the proposals.

Some members felt that the proposed budget was pragmatic and made good progress towards addressing the budget deficit. It also maintained the Council's commitment to responding to climate change.

Some concern was expressed about the level of remuneration for staff, with particular reference to the recruitment and retention challenges being experienced by the Council. It was noted that the upcoming pay award would be subject to negotiations with the staff union.

It was stated that the car parking income discussed by the Environment and Sustainability Committee was not accurately reflected in the budget before the Committee. Officers agreed that the presentation of this element could be reviewed.

The inclusion of two years of growth for tree works was queried. It was noted that the growth covered additional works required while a full condition survey was being carried out, which would then inform the level of budget required in future years.

A query was raised about the report's commentary around the Council's assets, in particular the undesirability of disposing of them at a loss and the resultant impact on the Council's revenue budget in servicing the outstanding debt. The level of optimism around the performance of the Council in obtaining tenants for its assets was also questioned. It was noted that the Property and Assets Member Task Force was keeping the performance of the Council's assets under close review.

Clarification was provided around limiting the number of future growth items. Such items would only be considered if they were needed to support the delivery of an essential service or to fulfil the Council's strategic aims. The initial expectation was that internal savings would need to be identified and then transferred via a virement.

A named vote was requested on the proposed resolution, with the voting noted as follows:

For the resolution (7)

Councillors Gracey, Howorth, Coen, Cressey, Nuti, Snow and Willingale.

Against the resolution (2)

Councillors R. King and Ringham.

Abstentions (3)

Councillors Gates, Gillham and D. Whyte.

It was **resolved** that the Council be recommended to agree:

1. The Revised Budget for 2023/24 and Budget Estimates for 2024/25, as set out in the officer's report and at Appendix D.
2. An increase to the Band D Council Tax level of 2.99% (£5.53) from £184.92 to £190.45.

3. The maintenance of the minimum threshold for the General Fund Working Balance at £5m.
4. The transfers to and from reserves as set out in the officer's report.

The following was **noted** by the Committee:

1. The updated Medium-Term Financial Forecast at Appendix A.
2. The statement of the Chief Financial Officer at Appendix E.

Note: An alternative budget proposal (attached) has been received in accordance with Standing Order 17.9. Please note that alternative budget proposals must be proposed, seconded and debated in accordance with Standing Order 17 (Rules Of Debate For Council Meetings).

g) Council Tax Resolution

To follow.

h) Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

The report associated with this item was circulated to all members with the [agenda for the 18 January 2024 Corporate Management Committee](#).

The proposed Strategy had been prepared with consideration given to a number of recent regulatory changes, as set out in the officer's report. These included the requirements of various codes of practice, and the implications of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. Additionally, changes to the Minimum Revenue Provision guidance were anticipated in April 2024, following a lengthy series of consultations. There were also changes to the accounting treatment of lease arrangements arising from the transition to International Financial Reporting Standard 16 (IFRS16).

It was **resolved** that the Council be recommended to agree:

1. The proposed 2024/25 Treasury Management Strategy which also encompassed the Annual Investment Strategy.
2. The Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators for 2024/25.
3. That the Authorised Limit for external borrowing by the Council in 2024/25, be set at £723,443,000 (this being the statutory limit determined under Section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003).
4. The MRP Policy for 2024/25 as set out in paragraph 7.15 of the officer's report.

i) Capital and Investment Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28 - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

The report associated with this item was circulated to all members with the [agenda for the 18 January 2024 Corporate Management Committee](#). Members are reminded that Appendix B to the officer's report contains exempt information.

The key proposed changes to the policy were presented to the Committee. There was uncertainty around the level of government funding in future years, the recent receipt of a non-statutory Best Value Notice and the associated CIPFA report. These dictated the need for a moratorium on investment in new debt-funded assets.

It was reported that the availability of capital receipts was expected to become an issue in 2027. The Council would therefore need to identify new capital receipts around this time.

The new requirements in relation to leases were described to the committee.

Some members felt that the proposed strategy represented a prudent yet pragmatic approach. It was however hoped that some aspirational schemes would still be possible in the future, where funding permitted this.

Questions were asked about some elements of the strategy – it was reported that the proposed Addlestone One internet upgrade was only ever a provisional scheme in the previous strategy; and the sum allocated for replacement vehicles was for the lifespan of the strategy and not a single block purchase.

Disappointment was expressed over the removal of the borough's contribution to the Surrey traveller scheme.

A named vote was requested on the proposed resolution, with the voting noted as follows:

For the resolution (7)

Councillors Gracey, Howorth, Coen, Cressey, Nuti, Snow and Willingale.

Against the resolution (2)

Councillors R. King and Ringham.

Abstentions (3)

Councillors Gates, Gillham and D. Whyte.

It was **resolved** that the Council be recommended to agree, subject to the typographical error at paragraph 3.6 of the officer's report being corrected:

1. The Capital and Investment Strategy at Appendix 'A' and the Capital Programme at Exempt Appendix 'B'.
2. A moratorium on any new debt-funded asset investment in light of the requirements of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.
3. The "low value" limit for IFRS16 reporting purposes be set at £10,000, subject to the agreement of the external auditor.

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

To receive and consider any notices of motion from members of the Council under Standing Order 15.

No proposed motions have been received.

11. **Minority Group Priority Business**

To consider any item of minority group priority business registered under Standing Order 23. Any item of such business will be circulated separately with this summons.

No minority group priority business has been received.

12. **Press and Public to be Excluded by Resolution**

To consider any items so resolved at the meeting.