

Runnymede Borough CouncilFull CouncilThursday, 25 April 2024 at 7.30 pm

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

**Former Councillors Barry Pitt and Chris Norman**

The Council observed one minute's silence in memory of former Councillors Barry Pitt and Chris Norman.

**97 Mayor's Announcements**

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

**98 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 February 2024 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

**99 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hulley.

**100 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no public questions.

**102 Petitions**

There were no petitions.

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

(a) Councillor Sam Jenkins asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

"At the previous Full Council, the Leader of the Council confirmed that RBC had been responsible for the planting of approximately 540 trees within the last twelve months. Please can the Leader confirm how many of these trees are still alive?"

The Leader replied in the following terms:

"In short, no. The assessment of last year's planting programme is not scheduled to be

carried out until June to ensure an accurate count. Counting whips in March or April is not recommended as the data would not be reliable. Generally, when planting very young trees, you would expect a survival rate of 70%. To comply with the treescape funding conditions (under which scheme these trees were planted) we are targeting a total of 75%.”

Councillor Jenkins asked whether, once the assessment of trees planted as part of last year’s tree planting programme had been carried out, whether members could be informed of the findings? Councillor Gracey confirmed that he was happy for this information to be shared when it was available.

Councillor Burton, citing difficulties in obtaining a tree preservation order for a tree on her property, asked whether the process for granting tree preservation orders needed to be reviewed? Councillor Gracey said that he was supportive of the principle of preserving trees, but that any such review of Council policy would be limited by what was acceptable within various applicable legal provisions.

Councillor Mullens, citing a previous request from occupants of Frogs Island, asked whether it was possible for the Council to provide resources, such as water bowsers, to residents who wanted support for caring for trees? Councillor Gracey said that any such proposals would need to be reviewed before commitments could be made.

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

“During last month’s Planning committee meeting, the proceedings during the debate on the Fairmont Planning application were viewable in the Committee Room, using existing equipment, and an audio recording of the item was also made by a Council officer. Could the Leader of the Council tell me what extra expense would have been required in order to make the proceedings of the meeting viewable by the public at large via YouTube?”

The Leader replied in the following terms:

“In terms of the cost on a one off basis, the relevant cabling, audio switch, and contractor costs came to £445. In addition to this, there were additional staffing costs in respect of the four members of staff required to support the arrangement for the duration of the meeting. Were we to make the recording available through You Tube we would also need to take out a licence for £200, though this would cover any additional recordings for a year.

However, this approach only provided a fixed camera view and shared screen of the presenters laptop with audio provided by the one microphone in the laptop. Any participants who could not be heard on the presenting laptops microphone was not recorded so the workaround used would not support public streaming due to the nature of the systems used and is also manually intensive in terms of additional staffing required to support.

It is for reasons like this that provision for a dedicated streaming system which can be integrated with the Council Chamber’s AV equipment was included as a target growth item in the budget put forward to Full Council in February for 2025 – 2026.”

Councillor Mullens asked why the Council was able to livestream the proclamation of King Charles III at no additional cost, in the context of an approximate £45,000 capital cost for introducing webcasting for the Council and its committees? Councillor Gracey stated that the proclamation was streamed from an individual’s handheld device and that such an arrangement would not be appropriate for a formal decision making meeting.

## 104 **Recommendations from Committees**

### 104a **Annual Review of the Constitution 2024 - recommendation from the Corporate**

## Management Committee

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey), seconded (by Councillor Willingale) and resolved that the adoption of the proposed changes to the Constitution, as detailed in the officer's report to the Corporate Management Committee, to come into effect at the beginning of the municipal year i.e. 15 May 2024, be agreed subject to:

- 1) Standing Order 27.5 being amended to read:

“Members who wish to request that a particular item of business be included on the agenda for a meeting must consult with the Chief Executive and other chief officers as appropriate, with a view to defining the scope of any such item, prior to giving notice under this Standing Order. Notice must be given in writing to the Chief Executive by 9.30am of the tenth working day before the meeting.”

- 2) The division of officer responsibilities document being updated to include the following provision:

“The Enforcement of Land Drainage Bylaws, including the authorisation or refusal of any application for consent submitted under the said Bylaws.

CHES/PE”.

A named vote was requested on this resolution, with the voting recorded as follows:

### In favour of the resolution (31)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Burton, Clarke, Coen, MD Cressey, MK Cressey, Cunningham, Davies, Dennett, Furey, Gates, Gracey, Howorth, Kettle, A King, R King, Lewis, Mann, Mavi, Nuti, Prescott, Singh, Smith, Snow, Walsh, D Whyte, S Whyte, Willingale and Wilson.

### Against the resolution (5)

Councillors Berardi, Gill, Harnden, Jenkins and Williams.

### Abstentions (2)

Councillors Mullens and Ringham.

## 104b Updates to Article 8 of the Constitution - recommendations from the Standards and Audit Committee

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

- 1) The Standards and Audit Committee be responsible for approving the Annual Governance Statement and the Statement of Accounts.
- 2) Authority be delegated to the Corporate Head of Law and Governance, to make any necessary amendments to the Constitution, to give effect to 1) above.

## 104c Sustainable Fleet Management Strategy - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey), seconded (by Councillor Coen) and **resolved** that the Sustainable Fleet Management Strategy be adopted.

## 105 Preliminary consideration of deputy mayoral selection

It was proposed (by Councillor Gill), seconded (by Councillor R King) and **resolved** that Councillor Harnden be nominated as Deputy Mayor for the 2024/25 municipal year at the annual meeting of the Council.

## 106 Notices of Motion from Members of the Council under Standing Order 15

Motion a) In support of community food growing

The proposed altered motion, as set out in the supplementary summons, was moved by Councillor Berardi in accordance with Standing Order 17.10.

The proposed motion was seconded by Councillor Mullens.

The proposed altered motion was debated by the Council.

The proposed altered motion was **CARRIED**:

This council notes:

- The cost-of-living crisis and the continued efforts to recover from the pandemic brings a new focus on ensuring that residents have access to enough healthy fresh food for day to day living.
- The increasing need to put the health and well-being of residents at the heart of our corporate strategies.
- The powerful evidence which demonstrates the link between people's health and wellbeing and the availability of fresh locally produced food.
- That communities coming together to grow food can radically reduce costs to NHS and social care budgets by reducing loneliness and providing healthy food.
- That localising food growing reduces food miles, reduces food waste in the production and consumption process, and can contribute to supporting biodiversity and community cohesion.
- That Runnymede Borough Council is a major landowner and some of its land could be used for community food growing while also improving the public realm.

This council resolves to request the Community Services Committee to review and propose to the Corporate Management Committee options for promoting lease agreements for the purpose of community food growing with constituted community groups on council owned land which is suitable for cultivation.

This is a distinct policy strategy different to allotments where agreements are with individual plot holders.

Suggested considerations for the Corporate Management Committee include:

- Developing a policy enabling community food growing on sites awaiting development for other uses on a fixed term basis for a term agreed with the council to allow at least one growing season (i.e. 1 year with the possibility to extend on an annual basis) a minimum 2-year term.
- The production of a map of all council owned land and buildings suitable for community cultivation and ancillary activities (e.g. equipment storage) and making this land and buildings available for cultivation by a simple license to community organisations at no cost.
- Exploring external grants in order to support local Community Food Growing

Coordinators and to provide utilities and materials (raised beds, mobile planters, water butts, composting bins, tools, seeds, etc).

- Promoting community food growing activities through the council's public communication channels (printed newsletter, website, and social media)
- Designating an officer to champion community food growing in the borough
- Providing support to communities that wish to establish a constituted community group to enable them to qualify for adopting a community food growing site.
- Integrating community food growing in citizen panel deliberations to explore the role communities, the council and other stakeholders (such as businesses) can play in order to encourage community food growing.
- The inclusion of community food growing within the council's climate change, biodiversity and community wellbeing strategies and action plans to the extent that such actions are not already reflected in Council documentation.
- The inclusion of community food growing within planning policies and frameworks, such as the emerging Local Plan and the Green and Blue Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Document.
- The inclusion of community food growing within non-mandatory planning advice i.e. proactively explore with planning applicants the possibility of integrating community food growing spaces and edible landscapes in developments involving communal spaces within flats, student halls of residence and public spaces. Examples may include community fruit orchards and gardens.
- Submitting, for consideration by the Full Council, a proposal for creating a working group tasked with promoting leases for community food growing.

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

#### **In favour of the resolution (36)**

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Berardi, Burton, Clarke, Coen, MD Cressey, Cunningham, Davies, Dennett, Gates, Gill, Gracey, Harnden, Howorth, Jenkins, Kettle, A King, R King, Lewis, Mann, Mavi, Mullens, Nuti, Prescott, Ringham, Singh, Smith, Snow, Walsh, D Whyte, S Whyte, Williams, Willingale and Wilson.

#### **Against the resolution (1)**

Councillor Furey.

#### **Abstentions (1)**

Councillor MK Cressey.

[Councillor Gillham arrived.]

Motion b) Debate Not Hate

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

The proposed motion was seconded by Councillor Williams.

The proposed motion was debated by the Council.

Councillor Mullens proposed that the motion be amended, to reference delaying the press release until the conclusion of the upcoming annual meeting of the Council, to enable the formation of political groups and the list of signatories to be updated to reflect the political makeup of the Council at that time.

Councillor Gillham seconded the proposed amendment.

The proposed amendment was put to the vote and **FELL**.

Councillor D Whyte proposed that the motion be amended to remove references to the press release.

Councillor Burton seconded the proposed amendment.

The proposed amendment was put to the vote and **FELL**.

A named vote was requested on Councillor D Whyte's proposed amendment, with the voting recorded as follows:

#### **In favour of the amendment (15)**

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Burton, Davies, Gill, Gillham, Harnden, Kettle, A King, R King, Mullens, Prescott, Ringham, Singh, D Whyte and S Whyte.

#### **Against the amendment (22)**

Councillors Balkan, Berardi, Clarke, Coen, MD Cressey, MK Cressey, Cunningham, Dennett, Furey, Gates, Gracey, Howorth, Jenkins, Lewis, Mann, Mavi, Nuti, Snow, Walsh, Williams, Willingale and Wilson.

#### **Abstentions (2)**

Councillors Bromley and Smith.

The substantive proposed motion was put to the vote and **CARRIED**:

#### **Motivation:**

This motion is being brought forward to publicly demonstrate the commitment of Runnymede Borough Council to improving the quality of public and political debate and to challenging abuse and intimidation of people in public life, by supporting the Local Government Association (LGA) Debate Not Hate Campaign.

#### **The Council notes:**

Increasing levels of toxicity in public and political discourse is having a detrimental impact of local democracy.

Prevention, support and responses to abuse and intimidation of local politicians must improve to ensure councillors feel safe and able to continue representing their residents.

The LGA Debate Note Hate campaign (see footnote 1) aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the response to and support those in public life facing abuse and intimidation.

#### **Guiding Principles of the Debate Not Hate Campaign**

Based on workshops and interviews with council officers, the LGA are proposing some guiding principles to help councils who wish to support the Debate Not Hate Campaign (see footnote 2):

- 1) Zero-tolerance approach to abuse: Establish and enforce a strict policy that clearly

outlines expectations for interactions and promotes respectful debate.

- 2) Clarity of process and responsibility: Clearly define the process for raising concerns and assign responsible individuals within the council to provide support to councillors.
- 3) Relationships with local police: Proactively develop strong relationships with the police to enhance coordination and foster mutual understanding of abuse affecting councillors and the role of police in addressing it.
- 4) Tailored risk assessments: Consider individual councillors' needs and proactively identify risks through dynamic and periodic risk assessments.
- 5) Prioritise councillor wellbeing: Recognise and consider how your council can support councillor wellbeing and address the negative impacts of personal attacks.

**The Council believes that:**

- The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or online, undermines our community; preventing elected members from representing the wards they serve, deterring individuals from standing for election, and undermining public life in democratic processes.
- Some councillors have been put off from standing in future elections due to abuse and intimidation.
- A cross-party approach is required to ensure that Runnymede can remain a Council where healthy debate and discourse thrives without turning into personal abuse.

**The Council resolves:**

- 1) To endorse the LGA Debate Not Hate Public Statement and its guiding principles.
- 2) To ask the Chief Executive to email [debatenohate@local.gov.uk](mailto:debatenohate@local.gov.uk) on behalf of the Council to add Runnymede Borough Council's signature to the LGA Debate Not Hate Public Statement.
- 3) To ask all Group Leaders and the proposer of this motion (Cllr Jenkins) to sign the attached Press Release and to ask the Chief Executive's Office to publish the signed release via the Council website, newsletters to all residents and RBC social media.
- 4) To ask the Leader of the Council to write to the Member of Parliament for Runnymede and Weybridge to ask him to support the LGA Debate Not Hate Campaign.

**The Council additionally resolves to ask the Standards and Audit Committee to consider:**

- 1) Including the LGA Debate Not Hate Campaign as a standing item on the committee work programme from May 2023 onwards, allowing it to be kept informed of any developments.
- 2) Reviewing the Council's Complaints Procedure to ensure a robust, zero-tolerance approach to harassment, intimidation or abuse with clear reporting and monitoring mechanisms, and to ensure that the guiding principles of Debate Not Hate are supported by the Protocol for the Management of Unreasonable Complaint Behaviour.
- 3) Regularly reviewing the support available to Councillors and Officers in relation to abuse, intimidation and safety.

**The Council additionally resolves to ask the Crime and Disorder Committee to consider:**

- 1) Working with the Borough Commander and the Police to ensure there is a clear and joined-up mechanism for reporting threats and other concerns about the safety of councillors and their families and discuss the need to take a preventative approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, like MPs.

Footnote 1 - <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/debate-not-hate>

Footnote 2 - <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/debate-not-hate-ending-abuse-public-life-councillors>

## **Proposed press release**

### LGA Debate Not Hate Campaign

Title: Debate Not Hate – council supports bid to tackle abuse and intimidation against Councillors

At Full Council on 25th April 2024, Councillors voted to pass a motion committing to challenge the normalisation of abuse against councillors and uphold exemplary standards of public and political debate at their meetings.

The vulnerability of elected representatives has been at the forefront of the political sphere in recent years with high profile incidents like the murders of Jo Cox MP and Sir David Amess MP.

The most recent Local Government Association Councillor Census revealed 7 in 10 councillors reported experiencing abuse and intimidation within the last 12 months and one in 10 experienced abuse frequently.

At the meeting, Councillors agreed to work together on a cross-party basis to set an example of healthy debate and denounced abusive or threatening behaviour from anyone within the community on social media and in-person.

The council also pledged to support the LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign to remind everyone that while democracy thrives on good, frank discussions these should never turn into personal abuse.

In addition, the council resolved to:

- Use the LGA template letter to write to the Member of Parliament for Runnymede and Weybridge to ask them to support the campaign.
- Regularly review the support available to councillors in relation to abuse and intimidation and councillor safety.
- Work with the local police to ensure there is a clear and joined-up mechanism for reporting threats and other concerns about the safety of councillors and their families.
- Take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers.

Cross-party statement:

Democracy is at the heart of local government and councillors are as much part of the community they represent. While debating and disagreeing with each other are an integral part of the process, councillors should not be subjected to abuse and intimidation because of their role. In passing this motion, Runnymede Borough Council is fully committed to standing up against abuse and working to promote positive, constructive public and political debate within our community. Further information on the motion and the campaign can be found on the council's website <link>

Cllr Tom Gracey – Leader of the Council

Cllr Linda Gillham – Leader of the Runnymede Independent Residents' Group and Englefield Green Independents

Cllr Robert King – Leader of the Labour, Cooperative and Green Group

Cllr Don Whyte – Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

Cllr Malcolm Cressey – Leader of the Independent Group

Cllr Sam Jenkins – Egham Town ward Councillor and Motion Proposer

## Notes to editors

- 1) Link - [Debate Not Hate: Sign our public statement | Local Government Association](#)
- 2) Link - [Debate Not Hate | Local Government Association](#)

A named vote was requested on the substantive motion, with the voting recorded as follows:

**In favour of the resolution (23)**

Councillors Bromley, Berardi, MD Cressey, MK Cressey, Davies, Dennett, Furey, Gates, Gillham, Jenkins, Kettle, A King, R King, Mann, Mavi, Prescott, Ringham, Singh, Smith, Walsh, D Whyte, Williams and Wilson.

**Against the resolution (14)**

Councillor Saise-Marshall, Balkan, Burton, Clarke, Coen, Cunningham, Gill, Gracey, Howorth, Lewis, Mullens, Nuti, Snow and Willingale.

**Abstentions (2)**

Councillors Harnden and S Whyte.

**107 Minority Group Priority Business**

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

Councillors from across the chamber thanked departing members for their service to the residents of Runnymede.

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

There was no exempt business.

(The meeting ended at 9.08 pm.)

Mayor