

Runnymede Borough CouncilFull CouncilThursday, 8 February 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, M Darby, S Dennett, J Furey, T Gates, L Gillham, T Gracey, M Harnden, C Howorth, J Hulley, S Jenkins, E Kettle, A King, R King, S Lewis, C Mann, J Mavi, I Mullens, M Nuti, N Prescott, S Ringham, M Smith, P Snow, S Walsh, D Whyte, S Whyte, S Williams, M Willingale and J Wilson.

72 Mayor's Announcements

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

73 Minutes

The minutes of the following meetings of the Council were confirmed and signed as a correct record:

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

74 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davies, Gill and Singh.

75 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no public questions.

77 Petitions

There were no petitions.

78 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 13

(a) Councillor Peter Snow asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

"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?"

The Leader replied in the following terms:

"I can confirm that the article was not factual in respect of reporting a less than one percent return. I would like to take this opportunity to ensure there is an unambiguous understanding of our finances.

Reconciliation to Figures in the 24/25 Budget Report (as at 31 March 2023)							
	Total Value of Investment Properties (From 22/23 Statement of Accounts)		Investment Property Net income (From 22/23 Statement of Accounts)			Investment Property Income Net of borrowing costs	
	£		£			£	
Investment Property	539,580,800		26,208,000	4.9%		11,182,293	2.1%

Within the line "investment property" we include all those assets in which we primarily sought a return to provide the borough with stable cash flows during the period when a number of our established town centre assets were regenerated, as well as the assets that have been delivered through that regeneration, namely Addlestone One, Magna Square and the Egham Orbit.

Factoring in all costs other than interest and Minimum Revenue Provision and excluding revenue derived from residential units, we receive an income of just over £26mn against assets valued at just under £540mn, for a return of 4.9%. When we factor in borrowing costs our total net revenue from our investment property comes to £11.2mn, for a net return of 2.1%.

Without wanting to pre-empt the budget items coming forward shortly, I would point out that this compares to our core spending power of £10.4mn and provides this Council with the financial stability and capability to maintain its broad range of discretionary services and support to its residents.

In terms of the steps that were taken following the publication of the story, a correct presentation of our returns was immediately made available to the two media outlets that ran the story online. One corrected their record immediately, the latter however took several days in which time an additional version of the story was published in the 12 January 2024 edition of the Surrey Advertiser.

Following further discussion with the newspaper's editor, the 19th January edition contained the corrected record in the form of a letter from me. I would note that when the article was being prepared by the journalist, the Council was not contacted to present its view up front or offered the right of reply to the quotes made in the article.

To describe the return as less than one percent is wholly inaccurate. Some have suggested these figures were shared with the media despite knowing they were inaccurate purely for political ends and to bring this Council into disrepute. I, as Leader of this Council, would like to think that no member of this Council would ever do such a thing and I would welcome the relevant councillor to correct the record in print.

Our finance team are consummate professionals who work tirelessly on behalf of this Council and the residents we serve and I have full confidence in their and this Council's ability to deliver for residents."

Councillor Lewis asked which member had provided the original information to the local press? Councillor Gracey stated that the quote reported in the local press was attributed to Councillor R King.

Councillor R King asked whether the Leader understood the level of risk involved in purchasing assets between 2014 and 2019, in light of the non-statutory Best Value Notice's (NSBVN) reported nominal return of 1.4%? Councillor Gracey stated that he was confident all members had an understanding of the risks and that the committee-based system of governance offered recurring and regular scrutiny through papers such as treasury management reports. He added that when appreciation on the Council's assets was factored in, the figures were considerably higher than those quoted in the NSBVN.

79 **Notification of receipt of non-statutory Best Value Notice**

The receipt of the non-statutory Best Value Notice was noted.

80 **Recommendations from Committees**

80a **Chertsey Town Centre Street Licensing - recommendation from the Environment and Sustainability Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Coen), seconded (by Councillor Cunningham) and **resolved** that:

1. All previous resolutions of the Council, made pursuant to paragraph 2 of Schedule 4 to the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1982 (the Act), be rescinded.
2. Pursuant to Paragraph 2 of Schedule 4 to the Act, that as from the date on which this resolution takes effect, all areas of land within the Borough of Runnymede which were "streets" within the definition of that term contained in Paragraph 1 of Schedule 4 to the Act, be designated as prohibited streets with the exception of any streets referred to in resolution 3 below.
3. The streets and parts of streets set out below be designated as Consent Streets and Licence Streets, as defined in Schedule 4 to the Act:

Consent Streets – Broadway, New Haw - at the eastern service road adjacent to the street from the northern boundary of the Black Prince Public House for a distance of fifteen (15) metres in a northerly direction

Licence Streets – High Street, Egham; Station Road North, Egham; Guildford Street, at the junction of Riversdell Close and Heriot Road, and the junction that meets Windsor Street and London Road.

4. The designation come into effect on 30 March 2024.

80b **RIPA Policy Annual Review - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

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

1. The Council note it had not used its RIPA powers during the period 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023 and that the Council further note such powers had not been used since 2011.
2. The revised policy, to govern the use of the Council's RIPA powers for the period 9 February 2024 to 7 February 2025, be adopted.

80c **Housing Revenue Account Estimates - recommendation from the Housing Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Nuti), seconded (by Councillor Hulley) and **resolved** that the revenue estimates for 2024/25, as set out in Appendix A of the officer's report, be approved, and that provisions be made accordingly.

80d **Review of Local Council Tax Discounts - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

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

1. With effect from 1 April 2024, the following discounts council tax continue:
 - Care leavers
 - Ukrainian refugees
 - Properties affected by flooding
2. 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. With effect from 1 April 2025:
 - a) 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 were unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than one year.
 - b) The additional amount of council tax be increased from 50% to 200% for properties that were unoccupied and unfurnished for more than five years.
 - c) The additional amount of council tax be increased from 50% to 300% for properties that were unoccupied and unfurnished for more than ten years.

80e **Medium Term Financial Strategy - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey), seconded (by Councillor Willingale) and **resolved** that the Medium-Term Financial Strategy be approved.

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

In favour of the resolution (23)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Clarke, Coen, MD Cressey, MK Cressey, Cunningham, Darby, Dennett, Furey, Gracey, Howorth, Hulley, Lewis, Mann, Mavi, Nuti, Prescott, Snow, Walsh, Willingale and Wilson.

Against the resolution (15)

Councillors Berardi, Burton, Gates, Gillham, Harnden, Jenkins, Kettle, A King, R King, Mullens, Ringham, Smith, D Whyte, S Whyte and Williams.

Abstentions (0)80f **24/25 Budget - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey) and seconded (by Councillor Willingale) that the recommendations, as put forward by the Corporate Management Committee be agreed.

It was proposed (by Councillor R King) and seconded (by Councillor D Whyte) that the amendments to the budget from the Labour, Co-operative and Green Group, the Liberal Democrat Group, and Runnymede Independent Residents and Englefield Green Independent Group be agreed.

[Councillor A King left the meeting at this point due to ill health.]

[The meeting adjourned between 8.50pm and 8.57pm.]

The proposed amendments to the budget were put to the vote and **FELL**.

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

In favour of the amendments to the budget (15)

Councillors Berardi, Burton, Gates, Gillham, Harnden, Jenkins, Kettle, R King, Mullens, Ringham, Smith, Snow, D Whyte, S Whyte and Williams.

Against the amendments to the budget (22)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Clarke, Coen, MD Cressey, MK Cressey, Cunningham, Darby, Dennett, Furey, Gracey, Howorth, Hulley, Lewis, Mann, Mavi, Nuti, Prescott, Walsh, Willingale and Wilson.

Abstentions (0)

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

It was **resolved** that:

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 of said report be agreed.
2. An increase to the Band D Council Tax level of 2.99% (£5.53) from £184.92 to £190.45 be agreed.
3. The maintenance of the minimum threshold for the General Fund Working Balance at £5m be agreed.
4. The transfers to and from reserves, as set out in the officer's report, be agreed.

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

In favour of the resolution (22)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Clarke, Coen, MD Cressey, MK Cressey, Cunningham, Darby, Dennett, Furey, Gracey, Howorth, Hulley, Lewis, Mavi, Nuti, Prescott, Snow, Walsh, Willingale and Wilson.

Against the resolution (14)

Councillors Berardi, Burton, Gates, Gillham, Harnden, Jenkins, Kettle, R King, Mullens, Ringham, Smith, D Whyte, S Whyte and Williams.

Abstentions (1)

Councillor Mann.

80g Council Tax Resolution

[This item was considered after agenda item 9i - Capital and Investment Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28 - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee.]

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey), seconded (by Councillor Willingale) and **resolved** that formal approval of the Council Tax Resolution be deferred to a meeting of the Standing Council Tax Setting Committee, in accordance with its existing delegation, to be held once all precept notifications had been received.

80h Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

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

1. The proposed 2024/25 Treasury Management Strategy, which also encompassed the Annual Investment Strategy, be agreed.
2. The Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators for 2024/25 be agreed.
3. 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 Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for 2024/25, as set out in paragraph 7.15 of the officer's report, be agreed.

80i Capital and Investment Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28 - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee

[The proposed amendment to the capital programme was determined as part of the agenda item relating to the 24/25 Budget - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee.]

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

1. The Capital and Investment Strategy at Appendix 'A' and the Capital Programme at Exempt Appendix 'B' be agreed.
2. A moratorium on any new debt-funded asset investment, in light of the requirements of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, be agreed.

3. The “low value” limit for IFRS16 reporting purposes be set at £10,000, subject to the agreement of the external auditor.

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

In favour of the resolution (22)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Clarke, Coen, MD Cressey, MK Cressey, Cunningham, Darby, Dennett, Furey, Gracey, Howorth, Hulley, Lewis, Mavi, Nuti, Prescott, Snow, Walsh, Willingale and Wilson.

Against the resolution (9)

Councillors Berardi, Burton, Kettle, R King, Ringham, Smith, D Whyte, S Whyte and Williams.

Abstentions (6)

Councillor Gates, Gillham, Harnden, Jenkins, Mann and Mullens.

[Councillor A King rejoined the meeting.]

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

There were no notices of motion.

82 Minority Group Priority Business

There was no minority group priority business.

83 Press and Public to be Excluded by Resolution

There was no exempt business.

(The meeting ended at 9.15 pm.)

Chair