

Empowering Communities Strategy (Chief Executive – Paul Turrell)

Synopsis of report:

The Empowering Communities Strategy is part of the forthcoming Corporate Business Plan to be submitted to this Committee in July. This report sets the context, highlighting the main section of the Strategy and inviting Members' comments.

Recommendation(s):

Members are asked to comment on the draft Strategy (Appendix A), suggest any additions or revisions for report back to the July meeting of this Committee and approval and sign off by Full Council as part of the Corporate Plan.

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 The Empowering Communities Strategy has a number of elements designed to connect with all parts of the Runnymede community. It is a theme taken up by local authorities across the country; perhaps a sign of the possibilities which exist to harness the energies and skills of communities in a post covid world.
- 1.2 The Covid Pandemic proved just how communities can bind together to support individuals and families in a crisis. Runnymede has a vibrant, energetic community with many voluntary and community groups. There is an enormous amount of pride in and commitment to this historic area. This provides an opportunity for the public sector to support and enable communities to own and develop their own initiatives. Many of the community groups that exist require support and sometimes seed corn funding to develop their activities. The Council will seek to support community initiatives and recently has employed a Bid Writer to research and help to bid for community funds from government and other sources. Surrey County Council has also set up a £100m pot to support voluntary groups across the County and it is important Runnymede is in the strongest position possible to exploit these funding opportunities. The priority will be sourcing funding for Council initiatives but, wherever possible, voluntary organisations will be supported or signposted to sources of funding.

2. Report

2.1 The Empowering Communities Strategy aims to:

- a) Ensure that decisions made by the Council are based on sound evidence, particularly through consultation with our residents. The Council will set up a CITIZENS PANEL of up to 800 residents drawn from all sectors of the community to ensure that both qualitative and quantitative analysis can be carried out. Further details will be set out in a report to the Corporate Management Committee later in the year. This will allow a number of focus and interest groups to be established as well as surveys of a statistically representative sample of the

community of 88,000 in Runnymede. We will use new technologies to test ideas and discuss improvement of our services, This will give residents every opportunity to give us their opinions in a way which is convenient to them.

- b) Voluntary groups will be supported wherever possible and encouraged to provide new activities and facilities. One such project recently has been the Holme Farm workshops project which will provide a skills and crafts base (workshops) for learning hobbies and skills and outdoor activities associated with horticulture, understanding nature and encouraging bio-diversity. Similarly, there are groups that provide important communication points between public services and communities, for instance flood prevention groups.
- c) The Government has encouraged communities to consider their own neighbourhood plans. One has already been put in place in Thorpe and others are in the pipeline. This will give local communities more say and control over shaping their communities and the Council will support those that want to put their plans in place.
- d) The voluntary sector plays a key role in many different aspects of Runnymede life but particularly in terms of health and wellbeing. Many people give up enormous amounts of time to devote part of their lives to community activities whether this be cultural activities or sports, scouting or interest groups. This commitment to community must be harnessed and supported if it is to thrive. Where finances permit, the Council will provide seed corn funding or assist with accessing funding from other bodies.
- e) Ensure that the Council presents the best possible case to external stakeholders in preserving, protecting and enhancing the quality of life in Runnymede. There are many key initiatives that impact upon Runnymede and where our residents should and have come to expect us to be strong advocates for their interests. Some of the key issues impacting on the Borough in the next few years will or may include:
 - The River Thames Scheme
 - Development of Heathrow, night flights and flight movements, the road network, skills and jobs
 - Southern Rail access to Heathrow
 - Devolution and a County Deal
 - The Esso Pipeline project

All of these are vital issues to the Borough, and it is important the Council has the capacity to play its role in representing the perspective of Runnymede and its residents.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 A number of elements of the Strategy have financial implications, particularly the Citizens' Panel. Officers will report back on the costs of individual items but the Strategy's objectives will be aligned with the Medium-Term Financial

Plan to ensure that any new initiatives can be fully funded. Individual elements of the Strategy requiring funding will be reported back to this Committee for approval.

4. Equality implications

4.1 As each initiative is formulated, an equality impact assessment will be carried out.

(To resolve)

Background papers - none