

Business Runnymede, and relationships with other organisations relevant to the economic well-being of the Borough, (Planning Policy and Economic Development - Rachel Raynaud)

Synopsis of report:

This report provides information on Business Runnymede, and Council relationships with Chambers of Commerce and other organisations relevant to the economic well-being of the Borough. As requested under Standing Order 27.5. It covers:

- Information about the most recent activities of the Business Runnymede and how Councillors can support this area of work.
- Information about the working relationship between Runnymede Borough Council and each Chamber of Commerce.
- Information about financial, practical or any other form of support which Runnymede Borough Council provides to each Chamber of Commerce.

Recommendation:

For information only

1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 Established in 1998, Business Runnymede (formerly Runnymede Business Partnership) brings together the local business community, Chambers of Commerce, Surrey Police, schools, colleges, and the Borough Council to tackle issues affecting business across Runnymede. Business Runnymede signposts businesses to support available via its monthly newsletter, organises networking events and operates a business directory. The administration of Business Runnymede is carried out by the council's Economic Development Team under guidance from the Business Runnymede Steering Group which includes business representatives and other relevant stakeholders.
- 1.2 There has been no recent Council or Committee consideration specifically regarding Business Runnymede and relationships with the Chambers of Commerce and other business organisations. However, Priority 2 of the Council's Economic Development Strategy (EDS) 2022-2026, approved at Full Council on 20 October 2022, seeks to 'Maintain competitive advantage through business engagement, strengthening business networking'. This priority, one of six within the EDS was identified as a result of the findings of the Economic Assessment of the Borough, the business survey undertaken in 2021, and a workshop with businesses held at Royal Holloway, University of London in September 2021. One of the deliverables of Priority 2 is to develop Business Runnymede by promoting the organisation, growing its membership and programme of networking, seminars, business support and information signposting.

2. Report

Business Runnymede

- 2.1 Business Runnymede does not have a formal membership, but business representatives and other interested persons can sign up to receive a monthly e-newsletter via the [Business Runnymede](#) website. There are currently 341 businesses signed up, and the Economic Development team is actively visiting businesses to raise awareness of Business Runnymede and inform businesses of the benefits of signing up to the newsletter. The newsletter provides businesses with up-to-date information on grants and business support. For example, information on grants to help businesses reduce their carbon omissions was circulated to businesses and promoted at a Business Runnymede Event in September. As a result, two businesses have received grants totaling £13,633.88, generating an investment of £37,345.71 and saving 11.34tCO₂e.
- 2.2 The Business Runnymede website provides businesses with information on: business support opportunities and funding; local networks and organizations'; a calendar of events, including networking events and seminars organised by Business Runnymede itself; access to the Business Directory (which includes details of 235 businesses); as well as commercial property information and testimonials highlighting why Runnymede is an excellent location from which to operate a business and place to invest. In 2022 members of Business Runnymede were able to benefit from free membership to the Federation of Small Business (FSB). Membership to the FSB provides access to free legal and HR advice, business networking and support.
- 2.3 In future it is proposed that the Business Runnymede Steering Group meet three times per year to discuss Business Runnymede activities and events. The group comprise representatives from local businesses and other stakeholders such as the police and Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL). The current Chair is Mark Adams. The administration of Business Runnymede is undertaken by the Council's Economic Development team, and the Planning Policy and Economic Development Business Unit budget includes a small revenue budget to help cover catering and marketing costs incurred with organising Business Runnymede networking events. Sponsorship for events however is sought wherever possible.
- 2.4 In 2022, three events have been organised by Business Runnymede. The latest event was held on 16 November and focused on the opportunities for businesses to utilize new creative technologies to increase productively and develop new markets. The event was delivered in partnership with Royal Holloway University of London who showcased their work to support immersive technologies through the [StoryFutures](#) project. Details on all events are provided on the Business Runnymede events calendar and promoted via the monthly newsletter.
- 2.5 Members support in promoting Business Runnymede is welcome, and the Economic Development team would encourage all Members to sign up to the Business Runnymede newsletter to keep abreast of its activities. Although the audience for networking events is predominately aimed at business representatives, the Leader and Deputy Leader will be invited to all future events, and if Members are particularly interested in attending a specific event, they are welcome to sign up via eventbrite.
- 2.6 In accordance with the EDS, Business Runnymede in conjunction with Runnymede Borough Council is planning to host the first Runnymede Business Awards next May to celebrate our local businesses, raise the profile of the Borough as a business location, and provide a further networking opportunity. Discussions have already commenced with businesses regarding sponsorship, and a sponsorship brochure is

being prepared. The awards will be launched in January. The sponsorship brochure and information on entering the awards will be sent out to all Members so that they can help promote the event.

Chambers of Commerce

- 2.7 Runnymede is home to three Chambers of Commerce in Addlestone, Chertsey and Egham. However, only Egham Chamber of Commerce is currently active. The Chambers are independent membership organisations and are not financially supported by the Council. A Member and Deputy Member from Runnymede Council however are nominated to each Chamber of Commerce. The Chambers of Commerce are categorised for nomination purposes as 'C organisations' - 'independent outside bodies and the appointees are placed there to act as Trustees, members of the Management Committee, or some similar role. They are not there to act as Council representatives but to use their judgement in the best interests of the Charity. In many cases, while acting on the outside body, they will be under a positive legal duty to act in its best interests rather than those of the Council.'
- 2.8 Officers from the Economic Development Team attend occasional Egham Chamber of Commerce meetings, to hear from Egham businesses about their needs and to promote the Business Runnymede newsletter and events. Egham Chamber also promotes Business Runnymede events to its members where appropriate.
- 2.9 Some businesses in the Borough are also members of Surrey Chambers of Commerce. The Economic Development team works with Surrey Chambers where applicable to assist local businesses, and the Chamber also promotes Business Runnymede events to their members where appropriate.
- 2.10 Town Teams have been set up in each Town in the Borough to bring together businesses, residents representatives and other stakeholders to support town centre businesses and promote activities to increase footfall and dwell time. In Egham some members of the Town Team are also members of the Chamber of Commerce.

3. Policy framework implications

- 3.1 Priority 2 of the Council's Economic Development Strategy (EDS) 2022-2026, seeks to 'Maintain competitive advantage through business engagement, strengthening business networking'. One of the deliverables of Priority 2 is to develop Business Runnymede by promoting the organisation, growing its membership and programme of networking, seminars, business support and information signposting.

4. Resource implications/Value for Money

- 4.1 The Council supports Business Runnymede through staff resources from the Economic Development Team and provision of a small annual revenue budget to support organisation and promotion of Business Runnymede networking events and seminars, including the business awards.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Council insurance does not cover Members nominated to the Chambers of Commerce, but Members of the Council are currently covered by an indemnity when appointed by the Council, which the Council has agreed to provide.

5.2 There are no other legal implications

6. **Equality implications**

6.1 None. The EDS was subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.

7. **Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

7.1 None.

(For information)

Background papers

None stated