

Runnymede Borough CouncilCommunity Services CommitteeThursday, 5 January 2023 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors C Howorth (Chairman), S Walsh (Vice-Chairman), A Balkan, D Clarke, V Cunningham, S Dennett, S Jenkins, A King and S Whyte (In place of T Burton).

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors T Burton and C Mann.

In attendance: Councillor L Gillham.

415 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2022 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

A Member raised a query with regard to an update on appointing a Safeguarding Champion which it was implied would be reported to the meeting. Officers confirmed that the Council's Constitution did not require one to be appointed. It was acknowledged that safeguarding was a matter of priority for all Members to promote. It might be the subject of a future report to Corporate Management Committee.

416 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor C Mann.

417 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

418 Parks and Recreational Spaces - Consultancy and Health and Safety works budget

The Committee's approval was sought to recommend to Corporate Management Committee that a sum of £215,000 from the ring-fenced budget from 2022/2023, following the cessation of the school transport service, be utilised to commission a third party consultant to evaluate and deliver a comprehensive inspection of the Council's play areas. This would enable Officers to address the low to medium (as previously assessed) health and safety concerns regarding existing play equipment and any new risks identified.

The Consultant's work would support that already undertaken by Officers. Specifically, they would be asked to:

- conduct thorough health and safety inspections all play and recreation sites
- Conduct a full DDA Assessment
- Carry out a Play Value Assessment
- Carry out an estimated life expectancy assessment
- Provide guidance and insight to support decision-making on the potential rationalisation of play facilities
- Provide guidance and insight to support decision-making on a replacement scheme, including the provision of indicative costs

associated with such a scheme

Members noted that the consultant would also be tasked with conducting an enhanced annual health and safety inspection, to help inform decision making on pieces of play equipment, which was a priority to repair/replace due to the likelihood of it deteriorating further.

The use of a consultant was deemed necessary to support Officers in understanding the scope, potential scale and ambition of this project, with part of the work being to ensure that spaces were fit for the future and refreshed to reflect current and anticipated trends within the targeted demographic.

The request for approval was aligned with the decision at Full Council regarding the de-continuation of school buses, where it was agreed that the budget should be ring fenced to focus on development and maintenance activity in relation to provision for children and young people, one of the key priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy as discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Member Working Party, to whom updates would be presented.

Members agreed that the use of the current 2022/2023 budget to undertake some immediate maintenance works to play facilities, as well as provide a direction and plan delivery of play facilities was an appropriate use of this funding.

Officers proposed that the sum of £215,000 be split £20,000 for the consultancy work and £195,000 for any resulting remedial health and safety works.

Officers anticipated that 2022/2023 provision of £215,000 set aside for the development of leisure and recreation opportunities for children and young people across the borough, would be fully utilised by this request. However, given the need to procure contractors to undertake the necessary works resulting from the consultant's report, it was unlikely that the full £215,000 would be spent in the current year. Therefore, it was proposed to request that any unspent sums at the end of the year be carried forward to allow the works to be completed in the next financial year.

Members were advised that work would begin to appoint a consultant at the earliest opportunity and Officers would engage with colleagues within Procurement, whilst work to address any identified health and safety issues would also commence, utilising existing contractors.

Members were assured that the consultant's report would be available for all Members when it was presented to the Health and Wellbeing Member Working Party and there would be consultation with Ward Members when proposals came forward, especially if these were significant such as alterations to the site such as removal of fencing, equipment, or rationalisation of the play space altogether. Members were concerned that play facilities were available and not cordoned off entirely whilst a piece of equipment was repaired or replaced. This was noted as well as the need for timely execution of works.

Proposals would come forward in due course with the explicit intention to enhance provision, promote increased usage and accessibility for all.

A Member asked about the very popular paddling pool at Heathervale Recreation Ground and the likelihood of its re-opening by April 2023. It had been closed for some time which had caused residents concern. Officers from Environmental Services (Green Spaces) would be asked to confirm.

Another Member was advised that facilities at Englefield Green were currently under discussion, including potential sources of funding.

RESOLVED that –**Corporate Management Committee be requested to approve that –**

- i) the sum of £20,000 be approved for the use of a consultant to conduct the necessary evaluation of existing play equipment and to complete an enhanced annual health and safety inspection;**
- ii) the sum of £195,000 to be used to address immediate health and safety repairs required, as identified in routine site assessments and via the work of the above appointed consultant; and**
- iii) any unspent allocation from recommendation ii) as at 31 March 2023 be carried forward to the 2023/24 financial year to progress the works.**

419 Step Down Scheme Update

The Committee received an informative update on the Council's successful Step Down Scheme, funded by the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP). A report was also being presented to the Housing Committee later in January 2023, with a view to seeking its approval to extend the operation of the scheme from April 2023, to be reviewed in 2026.

Members noted that the scheme was operated jointly with Spelthorne, Woking and Elmbridge with 7 properties across the boroughs. The scheme was managed by a co-ordinator based at Spelthorne, who worked with partners across health and social care to ensure care packages for the individuals leaving hospital were in place prior to discharge.

The scheme ran in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocations Policy (section 9.6 concerning Exceptions to advertising properties). Members also noted the Equality implications in the report, and that there were positive outcomes for the elderly which outweighed the removal of the two units from use as IRL units.

Members were very pleased with the scheme and its effectiveness in assisting people leaving hospital back to living at home independently while their existing property was adapted or pending a housing need solution being put in place. People were accommodated for a period of up to 6 weeks using two of the Independent Retirement Living (IRL) units at Floral House in Chertsey, the largest of the Council's IRL schemes.

A multi-agency approach ensured that so far no-one had needed to stay beyond the agreed 6 weeks. Careful assessment prior to referral was an important part of the process. In addition, there was potential for expansion should the need arise. However, Officers had found that having 7 units was a good balance. Officers confirmed that the scheme was not means tested; this was welcomed.

Officers confirmed that using the two units at Floral House which were located in the outer blocks, and therefore less in demand, had not adversely affected residents or unduly lengthened the waiting list; there being no applicants with a priority band waiting for a unit in Chertsey. This would however be monitored and reviewed if necessary.

Officers were thanked for their report.

420 Home Improvement Agency - Update

The Committee received for information an update on the work of the Home Improvement Agency (HIA).

Members were advised that the HIA provided a dedicated service to assist any elderly and disabled residents make repairs and adaptations to their homes. The service had access to the Disabled Facility Grants (DFG) discretionary grants, major and minor grants. Decision making and grant distribution was in accordance with primary legislation, set out in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

The Committee was pleased by the service statistics, showing that over 80 cases had been completed between October 2021 and December 2022, approximately 54 were in progress and only 14 cases were yet to be allocated.

Officers confirmed that the team had been enhanced and upskilled to prepare for a re-launch of the HIA in the spring of 2023. The aim was to be a more holistic service, working closely with other services to improve all aspects of an individual's life, utilising the grants available but within the specified criteria. Officers wanted to be in a position to spend all the budget, which hitherto had been underspent, owing to limited resources. In 2022/2023 the HIA had received the grant sum of £874,000, the remaining balance was £182,000 with an anticipated £570,000 being allocated by the end of the financial year.

Officers highlighted the pieces of work for the year, following a review. These were to review and re-publish, after consultation with stakeholders, the HIA Assistance Policy and guidance to applicants. This would include a new update on the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC). Members requested that the Runnymede Access Liaison Group and Runnymede Foodbank be part of the consultation.

Future spending plans would be updated to reflect discussions with partners and changes to the Regulatory Reform Order. Staff would also be reviewing all processes and develop a forward plan. An important part of this was an accredited staff training programme to increase efficiency and become more self sufficient, without reliance for example on third party Occupational Therapists. Upgrades to casework software would also assist the team and key performance indicators would be introduced to monitor and instigate service improvements. These would be reported to the Committee from April 2023. Feedback from service users would form an integral part of the process.

One of the biggest challenges facing the team was the procurement of contractors and their availability. Members endorsed the commitment to undertake an exercise to widen the pool of contractors over the coming months.

The Committee was very supportive of the service and staff delivering it to some of the community's most vulnerable residents. The re-launch was welcomed and Members were keen for it to be promoted widely in liaison with partner organisations. Officers would be meeting in early February to further the re-launch. Officers agreed to provide Members with guidance on raising awareness of the HIA and as part of the re-branding a clear pathway for the referral process.

Officers agreed to discuss a particular case that a Member had been involved in separately.

Officers were thanked for their report.

421 **Safer Streets Funding**

The Committee noted a detailed update on progress with the pilot of a youth café in

Addlestone, using funds from Safer Streets; the result of a successful cross-departmental bid to combat anti-social behaviour, working in partnership with the local Neighbourhood Police team, who were the leading body for the bid.

Prior to submitting the bid, site visits had taken place around the Garfield Road Estate with Police colleagues. It was identified that improvements such as the installation of gates into stairwells, CCTV, additional lighting and the reconfiguration of gardens to remove secluded pathways would all assist. Officers saw an opportunity to include in this project the Council's long held ambition to provide a youth café, which was accepted by the Police team.

The Committee noted the financial implications of the report. After clarification from Safer Streets, it was noted that funding of £321,970 was available for two years for the youth café, after which, if it was to continue, alternative funding would be needed as there was currently no revenue provision for it. In addition, a sum of up to £160,000 already existed in the capital budget for fit out costs for the café. The total funding bid was £643,940, match funded 50% by the Council from a combination of the capital sum and non financial match funding.

Officers advised that having secured time-limited funding they were keen to introduce those physical measures to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and find a suitable location for the pilot café. Some of the improvements, including the installation of gates will be consulted on with residents.

With only two weeks to submit a bid for funding, the ability to develop a delivery model in advance of submission was limited. However, Officers felt it was appropriate to try and secure the funding to enable the opportunity to be pursued further.

The Committee members were made aware of the risk that a suitable location for the café might not be found, but Officers in Assets and Regeneration were working on this as directed by the Chief Executive. Potentially the former Eileen Tozer Centre was a possibility as a temporary venue but was not ideal due to the double financing of short and longer term venues that would be unaffordable. Officers advised that in addition to the challenges of identifying a site, the escalation of costs for fit out works as well as potentially more significant works than the capital budget in place, could make the project unviable.

Finding a suitable service delivery model was also a work in progress. The services of specialist youth workers from a charity organisation based in Leatherhead were being used, as were a more local youth charity, Eikon to explore this further. Officers advised that the pilot, if it happened, would determine need and viability. The location and cost was a key consideration.

Given the potential risk of the Youth Café model not being possible, Officers were also working with the Police, Police and Crime Commissioners Office and the Home Office to agree alternative service provision that engaged with young people in the community identified, but which was not dependent on a physical building. With a very tight window to spend the grant, this might be the most viable option within the timescale if a building was not immediately identified.

The Committee was anxious that the café did materialise, as an important part of delivering the health and wellbeing strategy and providing diversionary activity and support for local young people. Officers would report on progress to a future meeting of the Committee.

422 **Runnymede Pleasure Grounds Estimates 2023-2024**

The Committee was asked to approve the estimates for Runnymede Pleasure Grounds for 2023/2024.

Members considered this report as Trustees of the Pleasure Grounds, a function delegated by the Council to the Community Services Committee. The budget was held in Community Services to use income generated by car parking fees, rents and leases to maintain and improve the facilities.

Officers reported that the funds were still very healthy. Overall, the Trust was due to make a surplus of £63,000 in 2022/2023, and £95,000 in the coming year, creating Trust reserves of £488,000 by March 2024. Members noted that investment income was forecast to rise, given the increases in reserve balances and a higher than anticipated bank base rate.

The Committee was advised that car parking income was a little less than expected, and there had been increased costs associated with the ANPR car parking system that was introduced in March 2021. Other pressures included energy prices, inflation, cash collection costs and a higher re-charge from grounds maintenance.

Members sought clarification regarding some of the re-charges. For example transport which it was confirmed were Green Spaces vehicles.

Members accepted that cash did still need to be an option for visitors paying for parking for accessibility. It was understood that new signage to promote paying by phone would be installed in the coming months.

RESOLVED that –

The proposed financial projection set out in the Appendix to the report for 2023/2024, be approved.

423 **Community Services Service Area Plan**

The Committee was asked to approve the Community Services Business Unit Service Area Plan for 2023/2024 and to note that any General Fund business cases requiring growth would be subject to approval by Corporate Management Committee or full Council, depending on their value.

Officers advised that a corporate approach had been adopted to develop service plans for all of the business units. These included a mission statement, planned activity, and outline business cases for growth items. Each Corporate Head had been assigned targets in consultation with their relevant Member Working Party and Service Chair(s) which would be used to set objectives for their teams.

Officers provided a summary of the Community Services plan. In doing so, the breadth of activities was noted, all contributing towards strands of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. In addition, areas of the plan supported other corporate strategies such as Climate Change and Empowering Communities.

Members acknowledged the wide range of services in the plan from prevention services, promotion of independent living, partnerships with the health and social care sector, work with communities, residents of all ages, voluntary, community and faith organisations.

It was noted that Community Services encompassed sport and recreation, the arts, community safety, heritage and culture through Chertsey Museum and strategic work to enhance the Council's green spaces, land held in Trust, playspace provision and recreational facilities. Community Services contained 11 service areas and Community Development 8.

Officers also highlighted the Council's membership of the North West Surrey Health

Alliance and partnership with Surrey Heath on Prevention Services, and the Council's lead on Social Prescribing, Homesafe Plus and CCTV.

Members reviewed the Service Area Plan for 2023/24. It contained 19 Strategy Actions, and 6 Service efficiency/improvements. With a robust structure and resources, Officers planned to deliver a number of new projects and initiatives. These included:

- Development of Safer Runnymede (HWB001)
- Implement a play space improvement programme (HWB018)
- Deliver facilities and services across the borough for children and young people (HWB020)
- Investigate appropriate sites for play, sport and recreation facilities/Kings Lane development (HWB024)
- Implementation of community hub at Egham Hythe (if viable)(CSCD003)
- Extension of Homelink to tenure neutral service offer (HWB012)
- Digitalisation of Community Alarm service (HWB003)

Members noted that the following proposed initiatives might require growth as part of their delivery; identified as part of the preliminary work to be undertaken:

- Review of core voluntary sector grant funding (EC008)
- Creation of Local Initiatives Fund (EC006)
- Development/Implementation of Community Safety Strategy (HWB016)
- Continuation of Family Support project (HWB039)
- Review and future delivery of Meals at Home (HWB040)

One Member asked about the Kings Lane Project and it was confirmed that this would be progressed in the near future to include a fresh consultation and public engagement regarding future facilities. Officers also had the concept of a community hub for Chertsey South in mind as part of the theme of Community Hubs.

The Committee agreed it was an ambitious programme and looked forward to receiving updates and detailed business plans for growth items over the course of the year.

RESOLVED that –

- i) **the 2023/2024 Community Services Business Unit Service Area Plan be approved; and**
- ii) **Members note any General Fund business cases requiring growth are subject to approval by Corporate Management Committee (or full Council, depending on value)**

424 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

There were no confidential or exempt items on the agenda.

(The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.)

Chairman