

Runnymede Borough CouncilFull CouncilThursday, 27 April 2023 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors M Harnden (Mayor), S Saise-Marshall (Deputy Mayor), A Balkan, A Berardi, J Broadhead, R Bromley, T Burton, D Clarke, D Coen, D Cotty, M Cressey, V Cunningham, M Darby, R Davies, S Dennett, E Gill, L Gillham, J Gracey, T Gracey, M Heath, C Howorth, J Hulley, S Jenkins, A King, R King, S Lewis, C Mann, I Mullens, M Nuti, J Olorenshaw, N Prescott, P Snow, S Walsh, D Whyte, S Whyte, S Williams, M Willingale and J Wilson.

1 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor provided an update on the events and engagements that she had attended since the last Council. As this was her final meeting as Mayor, Councillor Harnden also recounted various highlights from her Mayoral year.

The Mayor, joined by members from across the chamber, paid tribute to Councillors Broadhead, Cotty, Heath and N. King who were retiring from their roles as councillors for Runnymede Borough Council.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 2 March 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N. King and Ringham.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no public questions or speaking.

6 Petitions

There were no petitions.

7 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 13

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

“Our recently adopted Climate Change Strategy encourages the local community to support the Council’s work in tackling climate change. Recently a campaign was initiated at Royal Holloway, led by the President of the Students’ Union, to encourage the university to stop investing in fossil fuel companies. A letter in support of this campaign was signed by over 200 students and staff. Please can the Leader of the Council confirm if Runnymede Borough Council has any active business interests involving coal, gas or oil companies, and if so can this information be made available to the general public?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“I can confirm that Runnymede Borough Council does not directly invest in fossil fuel companies. Investments undertaken by our Treasury Management function are governed by the Council’s Treasury Management Strategy, with our approach to Environmental, Social and Governance issues covered in section 14 of the Strategy and in Appendix F of the accompanying Treasury Management Practices which you will recall were approved by Full Council in February 2023.

However, there is a possibility that the Council may have some exposure via the funds it invests in. The Council invests funds with CCLA Investment Management. Whilst their own funds are subject to their ESG Policy (which considers climate change, biodiversity and the environment) their trading mandate allows for investment in companies that generate more than 10% of their revenue from the extraction and/or refining of oil and gas.

The Council also places deposits with banks and building societies and with Money Market Funds. It is possible, though less likely, that some indirect exposure to fossil fuel companies may exist as a result of these investments.”

There were no supplementary questions.

b) Councillor Abby King asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“Many women in Runnymede experiencing domestic violence understandably feel too afraid to approach service providers. Given Runnymede doesn’t have a fully funded women’s centre, how does Runnymede work with women who experience domestic violence, and their families, to enable them to access advice and urgent support without fear?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“Your question is very timely, following a letter received last week from NHS England, on behalf of the Women’s Support Centre Surrey, based in Woking, which due to a financial shortfall is at risk of closure.

Within this letter, given that the Women’s Centre is available to support women from across Surrey, a request for a contribution of £15,000 from each district and borough council in Surrey was made, that would address the financial shortfall and allow for more sustainable financial models to be considered.

I am pleased to confirm that Runnymede Borough Council, through its 22/23 budgets, has been able to commit its support with the requested sum and I have asked for the preparation of an SO42 to be brought forward so we can make this contribution as soon as possible.

The Woking Women’s Centre has done fantastic work to support those women who are at risk of or experience domestic violence and I am sure that you would support my view that we do what we can to sustain its operation.

In addition to that, in order to ensure that our staff are best positioned to make referrals to the Centre Finally, our corporate Safeguarding Policy sets out the training requirements for all staff, which includes Domestic Abuse e-learning for support staff to help them identify and work with women who experience domestic violence or who are at risk.”

There were no supplementary questions.

c) Councillor Robert King asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“With even one of the cheapest areas in Runnymede for buying a first home over 8 times the average household income, it is completely unaffordable to be approved for a mortgage. What advice would the leader give to those trying to buy their first home in Runnymede Council’s area under this administration and is it doing enough to support them?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“I am sure you will understand that this question goes beyond the remit of Runnymede Borough Council. On a personal note, as an individual with senior management responsibilities working within financial services, I am neither approved or authorised to provide advice in respect of individuals looking to buy a home in Runnymede or elsewhere where such a purchase would involve the use of retail banking financial products. I am therefore unable to answer your question.”

Councillor R. King asked whether the Leader felt that the Government’s mortgage premium made owning homes more unaffordable? The Leader suggested that Councillor King take the matter up with the local Member of Parliament.

d) Councillor Rhys Davies asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“What is Runnymede Council doing to inform residents when water companies dump sewage into our local rivers, to keep them safe from the pollution and mitigate the risk of residents and their pets falling ill from contaminated water?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“When notified of any sewage being dumped into local water courses, officers from Environmental Services refer the problem to colleagues in the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency are the responsible authority for managing water quality in our waterways.

I would however like to go further in my response and pay tribute to the work of Councillors Willingale and Lewis who are looking into the means by which Safer Runnymede may be able to support the cascade of communications to residents and businesses in respect of cases of sewage discharge. I look forward to seeing that initiative develop through the Service and Digital Transformation Working Party next year before going forward to Community Services Committee for adoption.

I recognise that some residents face the direct threat of overflows into their homes at times of heavy rainfall, with many more affected by the impact of overflows into our rivers and waterways. I am keenly aware of the distress and concern this causes. While sewage overflows and their impact on water quality present an acute challenge for residents in Runnymede it is clearly an issue that affects the whole country.

For that reason I was delighted that our local MP, Dr Ben Spencer, spoke in the House of Commons this week to call for cross-party support for the Government’s announcement that it will make sewage overflow reduction plans legally binding and backed the Government’s Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan of 2022, which set out stringent targets to protect people and the environment, backed up by up to £56 billion of capital investment.”

Councillor Davies sought clarification on whether the Safer Runnymede initiative that the Leader mentioned in his response would be tasked with alerting residents at times that it was considered unsafe to enter local waterways? The Leader said that he hoped that

existing lines of communications would be used as fully as possible.

Councillor S. Whyte asked whether Runnymede Borough Council could continue with its use of social media when communicating with residents on this matter? The Leader said that he supported the use of the Council's social media channels as and when necessary.

e) Councillor Alex Balkan asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

"Would the Leader of the Council agree with me that whilst Councillors and officers efforts to improve the transparency of its services have seen progress over the last year, there is more that can be done to further improve this in the coming years. Would the Leader support that in the coming year we develop a calendar on the Council website, which includes the scheduled activities to be undertaken by the DSO across our range of services including bin collection, grass cutting, street cleaning etc?"

The Leader responded in the following terms:

"I very much welcome and support you bringing this proposal forward and would support the development of such a calendar which Councillor Lewis has been investigating with a view to delivering through the workplan of the Service and Digital Transformation Working Party in the coming year.

The date of collection for household waste and recycling is already communicated to residents with the information also available on our website. Similarly grass cutting, park cleaning and street sweeping schedules are prepared for the year so integrating this into a calendar would be the next logical step.

I would caution however, falling back on a maxim from my former employment, that no plan survives the first five minutes of contact with the enemy, and the enemy in this instance is the Great British weather. Heavy rainfall in one month can disrupt the planned schedules leading to a knock-on effect on upcoming scheduled activities. Whilst it is right that the delivery of our services to residents is transparent, we must be mindful that there will inevitably be a need to review and revise such calendars once they are up and running, with consideration also given to limiting the administrative burden of such a task."

Councillor Balkan asked whether Runnymede Borough Council should work with Surrey County Council on the compilation of a calendar of scheduled street cleaning and other similar activities, and also whether a memorandum of understanding should be signed to facilitate this proposed activity? The Leader said that he supported both of these suggestions.

8 **Recommendations from Committees**

8a **Procurement Strategy and related policies - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor T. Gracey) and seconded (by Councillor Howorth) that the recommendation of the Corporate Management Committee be agreed.

It was **resolved** that the Procurement Strategy and associated policies be adopted.

8b **Amendments to the Constitution - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor T. Gracey) and seconded (by Councillor Howorth) that the recommendations of the Corporate Management Committee be agreed.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The proposed updates to the Constitution be adopted at the beginning of the 2023/24 municipal year i.e. from 18 May 2023 (subject to the deletion of a repetitious entry on page 168 of the agenda pack).
- 2) Surrey County Council's withdrawal from the Runnymede Joint Committee be noted.
- 3) Runnymede Borough Council withdraw from the Runnymede Joint Committee with immediate effect, thus bringing about the Joint Committee's dissolution.
- 4) The Corporate Head of Law and Governance be delegated authority to make any unforeseen and necessary changes to the Constitution, arising from the dissolution of the Runnymede Joint Committee, in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

8c **Members' Allowances Scheme 2023/24 - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor T. Gracey) and seconded (by Councillor Willingale) that the recommendations of the Corporate Management Committee be agreed, subject to the subsequent amendment stated in the summons also being agreed.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The 2022/23 Members' Allowances Scheme be withdrawn with an end date of 31 March 2023 inclusive.
- 2) An updated Members' Allowances Scheme (as attached at appendix 1 of the officer's report), to incorporate a 3% uplift with the basic allowance and special responsibility allowances, be agreed with an implementation date of 1 April 2023 inclusive.
- 3) Any required payments or recovery of sums paid to holders of special responsibility allowances be backdated to 1 April 2023 inclusive.

9 **Notices of Motion from Members of the Council under Standing Order 15**

Motion a)

The proposed motion, as set out in the summons, was moved by Councillor Hulley, subject to a referral being made to the Corporate Management Committee.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Mann

The proposed motion was debated by the Council. As a result of the debate, Councillor Hulley altered his proposed motion, in accordance with Standing Order 17.9 as follows:

- Amend the third bullet point to read "Request the Leader of the Council to write to our MP outlining our support for his campaign to give local authorities increased powers of enforcement (affording group leaders in agreement with the letter an opportunity to countersign it)."
- Insert an additional bullet point to read "Seek to ensure that appropriate funding is made available to local authorities in respect of the planning enforcement functions."

The proposed altered motion was **carried**:

This Council recognises the impact that breaches of planning rules can have on local

communities. This Council recognises that, whilst Planning Enforcement is not a statutory responsibility and is therefore not allocated ring-fenced funding, Runnymede Borough Council remains committed to maintaining and developing our Planning Enforcement resource.

This Council welcomes the recent increase in resource that has been allocated to support Planning Enforcement and re-affirms its support for the RBC Planning department in upholding national and local planning guidance.

The importance of this issue is also recognised by our Member of Parliament who has been campaigning to strengthen the legislative framework in respect of planning enforcement both through the administration of sanctions and the ability to track repeated offenders through a national database.

Therefore, we call on the Council to:

- Reaffirm our commitment to upholding planning rules through the use of enforcement where warranted.
- Express its support for our Planning team working to deliver this.
- Request the Leader of the Council to write to our MP outlining our support for his campaign to give local authorities increased powers of enforcement (affording group leaders in agreement with the letter an opportunity to countersign it).
- Hold discussions with our MP to advocate for Planning Enforcement to become a statutory service.
- Seek to ensure that appropriate funding is made available to local authorities in respect of the planning enforcement functions.

Motion b)

The proposed motion, as set out in the summons, was moved by Councillor Heath. The motion was determined at the meeting, in accordance with Standing Order 15.6 (b) ii.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Coen.

Councillor R. King, seconded by Councillor D. Whyte, proposed that the motion be amended to add an additional bullet point to read "That this Council declare a climate emergency."

A named vote was requested on the proposed amendment and the voting was as follows:

For the amendment (13)

Councillors Harnden, Berardi, Burton, Davies, Gill, Gillham, Jenkins, A. King, R. King, Mullens, D. Whyte, S. Whyte and Williams.

Against the amendment (22)

Balkan, Broadhead, Bromley, Coen, Cotty, Cressey, Cunningham, Darby, Dennett, J. Gracey, T. Gracey, Heath, Howorth, Hulley, Lewis, Mann, Nuti, Olorenshaw, Prescott, Snow, Willingale and Wilson.

Abstentions (3)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Clarke and Walsh.

The proposed amendment **fell**.

Following further debate, Councillor Burton proposed, seconded by Councillor Heath, that the motion be amended as follows:

- That the third bullet point be amended to read “Will investigate and understand what it means to join UK100 and utilise the resources offered through this body to take forward our strategy.”

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

A named vote was requested on the amended motion and the voting was as follows:

For the amended motion (33)

Councillors Harnden, Saise-Marshall, Balkan, Berardi, Broadhead, Bromley, Burton, Clarke, Coen, Cotty, Cressey, Cunningham, Darby, Dennett, Gill, Gillham, J. Gracey, T. Gracey, Heath, Howorth, Hulley, Jenkins, Lewis, Mann, Nuti, Olorenshaw, Prescott, Snow, Walsh, D. Whyte, Williams, Willingale and Wilson.

Against the amended motion (4)

Councillors Davies, A. King, R. King and Mullens.

Abstentions (1)

Councillor S. Whyte.

The amended motion was **carried**:

This Council notes that it has set out a comprehensive outline plan to tackle its carbon emissions and to play its role in addressing climate change. Since this plan was agreed further evidence has been published through the 6th IPCC report highlighting the importance of action on every front. This means we all have a role to play from residents and local authorities to national government. The IPCC report also set out that avoiding the worst ravages of climate breakdown is still possible, and there are “multiple, feasible and effective options” for doing so. Government have set out ambitious targets and County, Borough and District councils have set out strategies on how to deliver this. We must also support our residents in shifting to low carbon lifestyles.

This Council will continue to take action locally to reduce carbon emissions and the Council will continue to work collaboratively with other councils, the community and businesses and also seek expertise where possible to further its objectives.

Therefore, this Council agrees to:

- *Recognise the strong work so far undertaken by officers and members in delivering a robust strategy and way forward;*
- *Will actively support and work with businesses and local organisations in moving towards net zero;*
- *Will investigate and understand what it means to join UK100 and utilise the resources offered through this body to take forward our strategy.*

10 **Minority Group Priority Business**

There was no minority group priority business.

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

There was no exempt business.

(The meeting ended at 8.48 pm.)

Chairman