

Runnymede Borough CouncilFull CouncilThursday, 20 July 2023 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Council present: Councillors S Saise-Marshall (Mayor), R Bromley (Deputy Mayor), A Balkan, A Berardi, D Coen, M Cressey, M K Cressey, S Dennett, T Gates, E Gill, 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, N Prescott, S Ringham, M Singh, M Smith, P Snow, D Whyte, S Whyte, S Williams, M Willingale and J Wilson.

27 Mayor's Announcements

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

28 Minutes

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

- Council – 17 May 2023.
- Council – 29 June 2023.
- Standing Appointments Sub-Committee – 5 June 2023.
- Standing Appointments Sub-Committee – 16 June 2023.

29 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Burton, Clarke, Cunningham, Davies, Furey, Nuti and Walsh.

30 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no public questions or speaking.

32 Petitions

There were no petitions.

33 Questions from Members of the Council under Standing Order 13

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

“Over four sessions during the last few weeks, Councillors received the opportunity to undertake Carbon Literacy training. This training was designed to equip Councillors with a better understanding of what needs to be done to tackle climate change. One of the sessions addressed ‘turning points’ that Runnymede could experience at a local level if emissions continue to rise, such as increased flooding, drought, lack of access to food, water and vital resources and even civil unrest. Meanwhile it was announced in May that scientists now believe the Earth’s temperature will exceed 1.5C by 2027, before Runnymede’s intended Net Zero target of 2030. Given all of this, does the Leader of the

Council agree with me that Runnymede should declare a Climate Emergency as soon as possible?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“I too attended the Council’s Carbon Literacy training and understand the very sincere intent with which your question is asked. I would note though that the situation we are facing in regard to our environment is not new. We have debated this item a number of times. As has been said on those occasions, we favour action and results, rather than rhetoric and soundbites.

Runnymede has been working on reducing our carbon footprint and being more sustainable for a number of years. In our Corporate Business Plan approved last year we incorporated a climate change strategy setting out our ambitions to become a net zero council by 2030 and support the transition to becoming a net-zero borough by 2050.

We have more than 6 staff focussed on supporting this strategy which is more resource than any other Surrey district or borough that I am aware of.

Rather than obsessing on an almost Canute-ean desire to make a declaration, what we are and should be doing is demonstrating to our residents real action and a plan to deliver more. There are numerous examples of councils who have declared a climate emergency and yet have not delivered on their net zero commitments.

The priority at Runnymede is to get on with making things happen.

We have:

- Transitioned the meals at home service to an electric fleet, saving 7 tonnes of CO2 emissions a year.
- Installed solar panels on two of our day centres.
- Delivered a high EPC rated transformative regeneration scheme in the heart of Egham
- Planted 2,250 trees in the last four years
- Supported local, corporate and national activity through the Great Big Green week
- Adopted a new procurement strategy that rewards climate friendly approaches
- Secured grants to fund renewable energy installation in residents’ private homes
- Begun investing £13 million in upgrading our social housing

I am not aware of any instance where declaring a set form of words has delivered more than the achievements of this Council. I am proud of the work we are doing and thank councillors and officers for their continued focus, support and hard work on this important area.”

Councillor Jenkins asked whether the Leader encouraged members who attended the carbon literacy training to undertake the two pledges that attendees were asked to, and to submit the requisite form back to the trainer? The Leader said that he did and would ensure that his own form was returned over the summer.

Councillor Mullens asked whether the Leader personally felt that there was a ‘climate emergency’? The Leader referred Councillor Mullens to his previous remarks, adding that concerns about the planet’s climate were not new and had been part of scientific discourse since the 1980s.

Councillor Gillham sought confirmation on whether the Council would lose external funding in the event of it not declaring a ‘climate emergency’? The Leader said that he was not

aware of any current central government funding that required a 'climate emergency' declaration to access it.

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

"What forward planning is taking place for greater levels of support this winter time as residents, already impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, will again be struggling to keep the lights on, keep cupboards full and keep a roof over their heads?"

The Leader responded in the following terms:

"Vulnerable households across Runnymede will be able to access the household support fund to help them with essentials over the coming months as the country continues to face cost of living pressures.

While winter will bring additional pressures, we remain vigilant to changing pressures on households. The UK remains subject to international market volatility. Russia pulling out of the Ukrainian grain deal and threatening shipping has already caused wheat prices to rise steeply. This may undermine efforts to reduce inflation, putting further cost pressures on food prices, feeding into core inflation which just this week had been showing a positive downward trend.

In respect of the support being provided, Runnymede Borough Council has been allocated £326,504 to support families who have been adversely impacted and those households in the most need. As the fund will be distributed in four tranches, the scheme will change to meet the seasonal demand for fuel during the colder winter months and where possible adapt to changing needs.

In addition, officers from Community Services have met with Surrey County Council recently to discuss possible collaboration in supporting residents in relation to fuel poverty, although further information on this from County is required to understand how we can provide support through partnership.

We will also be considering what measures we can directly support within our own estate should we experience a particularly harsh winter or see another volatile increase in energy prices, such as the use of Council owned buildings as warm hubs.

I encourage any resident who is struggling to contact the Council for support and advice."

Councillor R. King asked whether the Leader felt that the Government's support schemes had failed, given that there had been a 20% take up rate? The Leader said that he was unable to comment on the success or failure of national policies, adding that Runnymede had provided support to its residents, such as the scheme for residents of park homes.

Councillor A. King asked what the Council planned to do to help families put food on their tables over the winter? The Leader noted that there was exceptional pressure on food prices due to international influences. He added that whilst the Council was not able to address this issue, it would continue to support local foodbanks as much as possible.

c) Question from Councillor Rhys Davies to the Leader of the Council

As Councillor Davies was not present at the meeting, the Council was advised that he would need to resubmit his question for the next ordinary meeting, should he wish for it to be answered.

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

“A number of small businesses have written to myself and my group colleagues looking for workshop and production space in the Borough, which is both affordable and meets their needs so they can grow as firms. As the council owns a large portfolio of office space, a significant proportion of which is vacant, is the Leader developing a strategy to convert existing estates to provide affordable workshop and production spaces needed for these local engines of growth?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“I think this is an excellent suggestion that you have brought forward. Unfortunately, (specifically in the context of this inquiry) whilst the Council’s investment portfolio does contain industrial units, all our industrial parks are currently fully let and income producing. As things stand the only available office space to rent is Pine Trees, which is not suitable for work production units due to the building design.

Even though we are currently unable to support local business directly by providing a location for their workshops, we absolutely want to encourage and grow the local economy. The Council’s Economic Development team can assist businesses in finding commercial spaces which meet their needs and I would ask that the businesses in question contact the Business Runnymede team and also their local Chamber of Commerce. Both of these organisations would be well placed to help identify potentially suitable sites.

I would add that the Council is also investing in a Business Growth and Innovation Service which will be providing free mentoring, coaching and financial support to small businesses which have potential to grow. The service is funded from the Shared Prosperity Fund and will start in Autumn 2023. I would also recommend all local businesses which are either starting out or looking to expand to engage with the new service.

Separately, whilst it is possible in principle to investigate whether vacant garages can be repurposed for business use, to do so would require capital investment which will be difficult to come by, particularly whilst we await a response from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities following their recent CIPFA review of the Council’s finances.”

Councillor Ringham asked whether the Council was able to encourage the Addlestone Chamber of Commerce to take a more active role in the local business community? The Leader said that he was aware of Addlestone councillors’ efforts to reactivate the Addlestone Chamber of Commerce, but felt that the success of such organisations was dependent on engagement from local businesses. The Leader noted that the Egham Chamber of Commerce was very active.

e) Councillor Eliza Kettle asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“The footpath which runs from Bagshot Road to Blays Lane, next to Englefield Green Cemetery, despite repeated efforts by my colleague Cllr Abby King to lobby Surrey County Council continues to be left unkept, untidy and overgrown. Will the Leader join myself and other Englefield Green Councillors in asking Surrey to take action to clean up and cut back the overgrown path to help our residents have a clean and safe route home?”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“Having checked with the Surrey County Councillor for this area, I can confirm these works are listed to be done and the County highways team are looking to cut back the vegetation including around the lamp columns to improve the light quality.

Surrey County Councillor Marisa Heath met the highways officer for the area last month to walk the footpath and put it on the works list alongside the other works which need to be

done across the Borough.

On issues such as this I would encourage all Councillors to contact the Surrey County Councillor responsible for the area to ensure the swiftest response possible.”

Councillor A. King asked whether the Leader was able to share the response that he had received from Surrey County Council with Englefield Green Councillors? The Leader confirmed that he was able to do so.

f) Councillor Nick Prescott asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

“The progress of the sale of Barbara Clark House has been long and slow. Whilst the sale of the land has been completed; there is no date for the redevelopment of the land by PA housing.

Whilst I understand there is the section 73 element to be completed along with the arrangements of the S106, this is a needed capital receipt for RBC and I would like the Leader to give the council a firm timeline to complete the regeneration of urgently needed affordable Housing for the residents of Englefield Green.”

The Leader responded in the following terms:

“As you will appreciate, there are two parties to this transaction. As we do not have the ability to compel action on the part of the prospective buyer, we are unable to commit to a firm timeline for completion.

As things stand, the Section 106 agreement sits with PA Housing’s solicitors for comment. As soon as they have responded and there are no outstanding issues from a legal viewpoint that affect this sale, this transaction will complete. Verbal discussions with PA Housing have confirmed that they have a contractor ready to implement the planning permission and commence the build when the transaction completes. We will ask for a timeline for the development as soon as we have completed the legal process.”

Councillor A. King asked whether, where there were issues with housing associations, the Council should be holding them to account? The Leader agreed that it was important for housing providers to treat residents fairly.

Councillor Berardi asked whether the Council could encourage PA Housing to allow residents to create temporary community gardens on any disused land that it held, as had happened in some other local authority areas? The Leader stated that this was an innovative suggestion and that he would discuss it with PA Housing, notwithstanding the fact that there was currently no timeline for completion of the transaction.

34 **Appointment of Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service**

Prior to commencing this item, the Council took an opportunity to thank Paul Turrell (the outgoing Chief Executive) for his service to the borough and its residents. Mr Turrell was wished well for his retirement.

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

- 1) That Andrew Pritchard be appointed to the role Head of Paid Service of Runnymede Borough Council, holding the position of Chief Executive and Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer.
- 2) That a salary as stated in the report for Council on 29 June 2023 apply from 1

August 2023.

35 **Recommendations from Committees**

35a **Code of Corporate Governance - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey), seconded (by Councillor Howorth) and **resolved** that the Local Code of Corporate Governance 2023/24 be agreed.

35b **Review of Drainage Bylaws - recommendation from the Environment and Sustainability Committee**

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

1. The proposal to update the drainage byelaws, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed.
2. The Council consult with Defra, Natural England and the local navigation authority on the Council's proposal to make the drainage byelaws.
3. Subject to there being no objections by Defra, Natural England and the local navigation authority to the consultation, the byelaws be made.
4. The Head of Environmental Services, in consultation with the Principal Engineer, be authorised to consider and seek to resolve any objection to the said byelaws being made (including amending the proposed byelaws).
5. The byelaws be submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation with or without any outstanding objections (as the case may be).
6. In the event these byelaws are adopted by the Council, authority be delegated to the Principal Engineer to:
 - a) Authorise or refuse any applications for consents submitted under the said byelaws.
 - b) Serve enforcement notices for contraventions of the said byelaws.

35c **Process for achieving savings and efficiencies - recommendation from the Corporate Management Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey) and seconded (by Councillor Howorth) that the approach set out in the report, with regard to the identification and delivery of savings, income generation and efficiencies be agreed.

Members debated the proposals set out in the report. It was felt by some that, due to the significance of the workstream and its potential impact on services, greater scrutiny of any proposals put forward was required by service committees.

It was argued that the process had been designed to allow the process to move forward quickly in order to realise potential savings and efficiencies as soon as possible. Some members also felt that the ability for all members to attend and participate the proposed working parties (to be considered under a later agenda item) provided the member participation that was sought.

Following a debate on the proposals before the Council, a named vote was requested. The

voting was as follows:

In favour of the proposed motion (15)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Coen, M.D. Cressey, M.K. Cressey, Dennett, Gracey, Howorth, Hulley, Lewis, Mavi, Prescott, Willingale and Wilson.

Against the proposed motion (17)

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

Abstentions

Councillor Mann.

The proposed motion therefore **FELL**.

35d **Overview and Scrutiny Function – Annual Report – 2022/23 - recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

It was proposed (by Councillor Prescott), seconded (by Councillor Lewis) and **resolved** that the Overview and Scrutiny Function – Annual Report be agreed.

36 **Chertsey Town Centre Street Licensing Review**

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

- 1) The Corporate Head of Law and Governance be authorised to review the designation of licensed streets in the borough, pursuant to powers under Schedule 4 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982.
- 2) Public consultation to designate Guildford Street, Chertsey as a licensed street to permit street trading proceed.

37 **Amendments to the Constitution**

Member working parties

Members requested that working party papers have greater visibility among all members by distributing them via the same method as committee papers.

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

- 1) The revised Working Party structure be introduced with effect from 1st August 2023 and be reviewed at the end of the municipal year.
- 2) That delegated authority be given to the Corporate Head of Law and Governance to make necessary amendments to the Council's Constitution to give effect to the changed structure and composition of Working Parties.
- 3) That delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive (or Assistant Chief Executive (S151) in his absence) to agree the composition and membership of Working Parties following discussions with group leaders.

Developer Contributions Advisory Group

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

- 1) The creation of a Developer Contributions Advisory Group, in accordance with the arrangements set out within the Corporate Management Committee report, be endorsed.
- 2) The Corporate Head of Law and Governance be authorised to make any necessary amendments to the Council's Constitution to give effect to the Developer Contributions Advisory Group.

There was extensive debate about the proposals before the Council. Some members felt that there was a lack of democratic accountability, particularly with regard to the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding for local/ward level projects. It was alleged that the proposals created a Cabinet-like group which, it was felt by those stating this, was not appropriate in a committee based system of governance. It was reported that some councillors had been approached by residents expressing concerns about the proposed process.

Other members stated that a balance between local and borough-wide strategic use of the CIL needed to be struck, and that having extensive ward member presence would make achieving this balance more challenging. It was also suggested that there was a clear process for consulting residents on the local use of CIL funding.

Following a debate on the proposals before the Council, a named vote was requested. The voting was as follows:

In favour of the proposed motion (11)

Councillors Saise-Marshall, Bromley, Balkan, Coen, Dennett, Gracey, Howorth, Hulley, Mavi, Prescott and Willingale.

Against the proposed motion (22)

Councillors Berardi, M.D. Cressey, M.K. Cressey, Gates, Gill, Gillham, Harnden, Jenkins, Kettle, A. King, R. King, Lewis, Mann, Mullens, Ringham, Singh, Smith, Snow, D. Whyte, S. Whyte, Williams and Wilson.

Abstentions (0)

The proposed motion therefore **FELL**.

38 Designation of minority groups

It was proposed (by Councillor Gracey) seconded (by Councillor Willingale) and **resolved** that all current political groups be designated as "minority groups" for the purposes of Standing Order 23.

39 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 A. King, subject to a referral being made to the Community Services Committee.

Councillor Ringham seconded the proposed motion.

The proposed motion was debated by the Council.

Councillor Ringham proposed (seconded by Councillor R. King) that the final paragraph of the proposed motion be amended to read as follows:

“Ask the Community Services Committee to look at ways to provide free, and as a preference, plastic-free and bio-degradable, period products in all of the council’s public accessible toilets and buildings including leisure centres, libraries and community centres.”

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

The amended motion was **CARRIED**:

1) *This council notes that:*

- a) *In 2022 a survey commissioned by Action Aid UK found nearly one in eight women in Great Britain had recently struggled to buy menstrual products – either for themselves or for a dependent.*
- b) *The charity found that girls across the country were cutting down on food and school supplies in order to afford period products. Of those who struggled to afford menstrual products, 75% had needed to prioritise spending money on food and 49% needed to prioritise spending money on gas/electric.*
- c) *A number of councils across the UK, including Surrey County Council, Oxford City Council and Southwark Council, have all set up or agreed to schemes to provide free period products.*
- d) *In a YouGov survey undertaken last year two thirds of Britons supported making it a legal requirement for local authorities to provide free period products.*

2) *This council believes that:*

- a) *The cost of living crisis has forced many women to prioritise other household essentials such as food, clothes and heating over menstrual products.*
- b) *No one should experience period poverty.*

3) *This council resolves to:*

- a) *Ask the Community Services Committee to look at ways to provide free, and as a preference, plastic-free and bio-degradable, period products in all of the council’s public accessible toilets and buildings including leisure centres, libraries and community centres.*

Motion b)

The proposed motion, as set out in the summons, was altered by Councillor Ringham in accordance with Standing Order 17.9 to read as follows:

This Council notes that

- a) *There are 6 train stations across the borough - Addlestone, Byfleet & New Haw, Chertsey, Egham, Longcross and Virginia Water. All of which bar Longcross currently have some level of manned ticket office operation.*
- b) *These stations will be impacted by the “Station Change Proposal” - see Appendix 1*

for link - as they are identified as type 2,3 or 4 stations.

- c) *Egham and Virginia Water stations will be upgraded to contactless payment by December 2023 (not to be confused with Oyster Zone membership).*
- d) *A number of residents also choose to use one of a number of stations on the boundaries of the borough due to the current level of service offered. These include the stations of Staines, Woking, West Byfleet and Weybridge, all of which will also be affected by proposed adjustments to service offering.*
- e) *1.3 million UK adults were identified as “unbanked” in 2019 - having no bank account.*
- f) *15 Disability Charities, including Transport For All, RNIB, RNID and Guide Dogs have written to the Secretary of State with their objections to the proposals.*
- g) *Not all ticket fares can be purchased via Ticket Vending Machines. Some such as 50% Wheelchair User Discount can only be purchased at a ticket office.*
- h) *The ability of travellers to get refunds is restricted to ticket offices or online. Refunds cannot be obtained from a ticket machine.*

This Council believes that:

- a) *The proposed measures are being consulted on by South Western Railway with the intention of managing costs, rather than a genuine attempt to improve the traveller experience.*
- b) *The proposed changes do not demonstrate sufficiently how they will deliver real benefit to all travellers.*
- c) *Having a manned ticket office provides benefits especially to vulnerable or disadvantaged customers. It is unclear how the impact of the loss of this service on these customers will be mitigated.*
- d) *The complexity of rail fares with a wide variety of ticket types for what often appears the same journey means that travellers, especially larger groups (such as families), those with accessibility needs and infrequent users can overpay significantly.*
- e) *The South Western Railway consultation document states that an equality impact assessment will have to be carried out for changes to each station. This must ensure that disabled or vulnerable customer are not disproportionately affected.*
- f) *South Western Railways must pay due regard to the Rail Delivery Group’s Ticketing and Settlement Agreement in respect of the retailing of tickets. This Council acknowledges that there are concerns over the duty to safeguard the interests of passengers, which may be subject to legal review..*
- g) *The proposed changes may act as an obstacle to the recovery of rail passenger numbers post-pandemic.*
- h) *Furthermore, it may be responsible for more car journeys as a result, an outcome at odds with the drive towards Net Zero.*

This Council resolves that:

- a) *The Leader of the Council will submit a response to the SWR / Transport Focus*

public consultation by the deadline Wednesday 26 July 2023 in the form of a Letter. Leaders of all political groups will be invited to sign this letter.

- b) *This letter will outline the significant concerns we have regarding the proposals as set out above, and, call on South Western Railways to cease work on these proposals until these concerns have been clearly addressed.*

The altered proposed motion was seconded by Councillor Gracey.

It was agreed that the proposed altered motion be determined at the meeting, in accordance with Standing Order 15.6 (b) ii.

The proposed altered motion was debated by the Council.

The altered motion was **CARRIED**.

40 **Minority Group Priority Business**

There was no minority group priority business.

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

There was no exempt business.

(The meeting ended at 9.35 pm.)

Chairman