

Runnymede Borough Council

Corporate Management Committee

Thursday, 25 May 2023 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors T Gracey (Chairman), C Howorth (Vice-Chair), D Coen, M Cressey, L Gillham, A King (In place of S Ringham), R King, I Mullens, M Nuti, P Snow, D Whyte and M Willingale.

In attendance: Councillors M Smith.

1 Notification of Changes to Committee Membership

Councillor A. King substituted for Councillor Ringham.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2023 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

3 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

4 Declarations of Interest

Agenda item 10 – Surplus Properties

Councillor Coen declared that he was a director of RBC Investments (Surrey) Limited and did not participate or vote during this item.

5 Annual Governance Statement

The Annual Governance Statement had been reviewed by the Standards and Audit Committee the previous night and had been recommended for approval by the Corporate Management Committee. The Statement set out how the Council had complied with its Code of Governance during 2022/23 and a summary of the key governance improvements introduced during the year was provided. Formatting changes had been introduced in the document in the previous year, which aimed to make the Governance Statement more digestible and transparent. An overview of the progress made against the previous year's actions was provided to the Committee. Some of these actions, such as those pertaining to risk reporting, had been incorporated into the proposed action plan for 2023/24.

[Councillor Howorth arrived.]

The Committee discussed the proposed Governance Statement. It was felt that the document was comprehensive and the changes made were welcomed. The importance of risk monitoring was noted, with particular regard paid to recent investigations carried out by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) on behalf of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). It was reported that CIPFA's report into Woking Borough Council's finances had been published earlier in the day. An update from DLUHC regarding CIPFA's review into Runnymede Borough Council's finances would continue to be pursued.

It was **resolved** that the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 be approved.

[Councillor Howorth did not vote as he was not present for the entirety of the item.]

6 **Climate Change Action Plan**

The report outlined the Council's initial approach to engaging with residents (including young people), businesses and local community groups, with the eventual aim of developing Climate Change Action Plan actions to influence people's behaviour and minimise their climate impact, in order to achieve national and local net-zero carbon targets. The survey, which sought to generate a manageable level of useable data, had been created with the input of a third party consultant. In addition to the online survey, a number of engagement activities were planned, some of which would be linked to the 'great big green week'. Further updates on the Council's climate change activities would be provided to the Committee at regular intervals.

The Committee welcomed the proposals set out in the report and agreed that significant progress had been made. The Committee was also pleased to note that further proposed activities would be brought forward for consideration in due course.

Members reviewed the proposed survey. A number of potential amendments were discussed. Suggestions included asking about people's diet and their consumption of resources, and asking for their views on the barriers they faced when choosing whether to engage with climate change activities. Careful consideration would be given to the language used in introducing the survey, to ensure that it was relevant to a range of respondents.

There was discussion about how the consultation would take account of the views of harder to reach groups. The consultation would be conducted through a range of media – both online and physical – in order to generate a broad range of responses. It was noted that whilst the Council could consider making use of resident data that it held across its services, compliance with data protection requirements would considerably restrict the exercise. The Council's relationships with reputable local businesses and other organisations could also potentially provide an additional means of reaching a range of individuals.

It was **resolved** that the following be approved:

- a) the research and engagement plan, as set out in the report, including the use of online surveys for residents, businesses and young people as shown in draft format at Appendix 1 of the report;
- b) a commencement date of 1 June 2023, for implementing the engagement plan, including launching the online surveys for a period of six weeks;
- c) the Chief Executive be granted delegated authority, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Corporate Management Committee, to agree any further required minor changes to the online surveys as shown in Appendix 1 of the report, prior to the consultation commencement date of 1 June 2023.

7 **Appointment to Outside Bodies**

Applications to join outside bodies needed to be submitted in accordance with the new process, that was implemented in January 2022. As there were still a number of positions for which nominations had not been received, a further round of applications would be invited in time for the next Corporate Management Committee.

Members were reminded of the requirement to provide reports on the activities of the bodies they were appointed to.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The following appointments be made, in accordance with the arrangements set out in the report:

Organisation/type of representation	Appointees
Armed Forces Champion	Councillor Walsh
Basingstoke Canal JMC	Councillor Ringham (deputy)
Chertsey Combined Charity	Mr D Cotty
Community Safety Partnership	Councillor Balkan Councillor Burton
Egham Chamber of Commerce	Councillor Balkan
Egham United Charity	Mr H Shah
Fairoaks Airfield JCC	Councillor Mann
Frank Muir Memorial Field	Councillor Gill Councillor Gillham Councillor Harnden
Mary Drew Almshouses	Councillor Prescott Mr H Meares
Noise and Airspace Community Forum	Councillor Howorth Mr P Conway (community representative)
Runnymede Access Liaison Group	Councillor Jenkins
Runnymede and Spelthorne Citizens' Advice	Councillor Mullens (member) Councillor Balkan (deputy)
Runnymede Open Awards Centre	Councillor Walsh
Thames Basin Health Special Protection Area Strategic Partnership Board	Councillor S Whyte
Thorpe Parochial Charities	Mrs J Gruncell Mr I Patenall

- 2) A further round of nominations be invited, where none had been received, for consideration at a future Corporate Management Committee.

8 Code of Corporate Governance

The Code of Corporate Governance had been reviewed by the Standards and Audit Committee the previous night and was recommended for approval by the Corporate Management Committee, prior to its consideration by the Council on 20 July 2023.

The format of the Code of Corporate Governance had been updated to reflect the structure of the Annual Governance Statement. The Code was reviewed on an annual basis, in order to ensure that it remained reflective of the current governance arrangements. A new

process for reviewing the Code was included in the report.

Following a question regarding webcasting, it was confirmed that the next opportunity to review this would be the budget setting process for 2024/25. The proposed member training and development programme was welcomed. It was suggested that a skills audit, to supplement the proposed programme, be considered.

It was **resolved** that the Local Code of Corporate Governance be recommended to the Council for approval.

9 **Exclusion of Press and Public**

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the remainder of the meeting during the consideration of the remaining matters under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information as set out in Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

10 **Surplus Properties**

The Committee discussed the proposals set out in the report. The properties would be returned by the Housing Service in a lettable condition, with refurbishment costs met by the Housing Service from within the general fund. The Committee sought confirmation that the properties were no longer required for temporary homeless accommodation.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The disposal of 2 flats at the Literary Institute in Egham to RBC Investments Limited ('RBCI') by way of a lease of less than 7 years, subject to the agreement of the RBCI Board, be agreed.
- 2) The lease contain provisions for:
 - Agreeing the basis on which the units were to be rented i.e. at 'market' rate or 'social rent' rate.
 - A 10% letting management fee deduction from the rental income.
 - The balance of rental income to be passed to Runnymede Borough Council.
- 3) That the Chief Executive be delegated authority (in consultation with the chairman and vice-chairman of the Committee) to explore with RBCI the opportunities and consequences of offering the units at a reduced 'social rent' rate, with a view to determining whether this would be realistic and viable, and agree the relevant provision(s) for inclusion in the lease with RBCI.

11 **Commercial Rent Arrears**

The report updated the committee on commercial tenants whose rent accounts were in arrears. Such reports were required in organisations who were landlords. It was noted that not all of the debts referred to in the report would become irrecoverable.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The potential write off in respect the bad debts detailed in section 2.1 of the report, be noted.
- 2) The proposed rent concession, as set out in section 2.2 of the report, be agreed.

- 3) The position on other debts and the actions being taken, as detailed in section 2.3 of the report, be noted.

12 Potential Letting in Egham

The Committee reviewed the proposed letting for the vacant M&Co unit in Egham. A concern was raised about local ward councillors not being consulted about potential tenants, although the Council's duty to secure the best possible value meant that there was limited scope to influence the type of businesses units could be let to.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The lease to the company detailed in the report, on the Heads of Terms outlined in Appendix A, be approved.
- 2) The Chief Executive (or Assistant Chief Executive in the Chief Executive's absence), in consultation with Corporate Head of Assets and Regeneration, be delegated authority to amend the terms of the lease if necessary, provided that this offer remains the highest ranked offer.

13 Grounds Maintenance - Vehicles & Equipment

The portfolio of grounds maintenance machinery and vehicles had been re-evaluated following the recent repatriation of this service. Some issues with service quality remained, principally due to the unavailability of appropriate or working machinery. A waiver to the Council's Procurement Standing Orders was requested to facilitate the purchase of currently available equipment, with a view to remedying some of the service issues being experienced.

There was discussion about the types of work being undertaken, particularly around grass cutting at various locations and the maintenance of cemeteries. Some concern was expressed about the premature replacement of recently purchased vehicles, and whether there had been good value for money secured for the Council. It was noted that the Chief Executive was undertaking an investigation into the matter and would report back to members at the appropriate time.

Members expressed frustration with maintenance issues that fell under the responsibility of Surrey County Council. It was reported that the Leader continued to lobby key Surrey County Councillors.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) A supplementary capital estimate, for the sum set out in the report, to facilitate remodelling of the fleet and equipment provided for the new in-house grounds maintenance service be approved.
- 2) It be noted that the additional cost would be partially offset by resale of two less efficient fleet vehicles, in accordance with the arrangements set out in the report.
- 3) A virement for the sum set out in the report, currently set aside in the general fund revenue estimates, for a contribution towards the running costs of a Surrey-wide Traveller site, be put towards the remaining costs of this scheme as a revenue contribution to capital.
- 4) A waiver of the contract standing orders, to facilitate direct purchase of vehicles and equipment due to urgency and potential risk to the provision of council services be agreed, in order to secure improved efficiency and service continuity.

14 **Procurement of Insurances**

This item had previously been considered by the Committee, where a procurement approach was agreed. It had not been possible to use the service offered by the London Borough of Sutton because they did not have the capacity to support an additional client.

The insurance market had become significantly less favourable and insurance premiums had recently been subject to sizeable increases. Some of the additional cost could be passed onto tenants and leaseholders, although this would only partially mitigate the impact on the Council's finances.

It was **resolved** that:

- 1) The Council enter into a three-year agreement (with two possible 12 month extensions) with the insurers for the insurances tendered, as set out in the report.
- 2) The Council commence negotiations to secure either an extension of the existing cover for Leasehold and Right-to-Buy with the current insurance provider for up to 12 months or obtain such insurance from alternative insurance providers for up to 5 years by using its appointed insurance broker.
- 3) A supplementary estimate for the sum set out in the report (inclusive of taxes) to cover the increased costs of the insurance be agreed.

15 **Standing Order 42 - Mini Restructure within Environmental Services**

Concerns were raised about the timeliness of this matter being reported to the Committee. It was clarified that whilst the decision was initially proposed on 20 March 2023, the decision was not finalised in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders until 19 April 2023. As this was after the statutory agenda publication date of 12 April 2023, it was not possible to include it on the agenda for this meeting.

Additionally, it was questioned whether this decision needed to be made using the Council's urgency procedures, given that it was finalised the day prior to the Committee meeting.

The Chief Executive undertook to review the circumstances around this decision and to review the process for signing off decisions.

The decision pertaining to the restructure within Environmental Services, taken in accordance with Standing Order 42, was noted.

(The meeting ended at 9.37 pm.)

Chairman