

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 March 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present:	Councillors Susan Little (Chair), Adam Carter, Gary Collins (<i>substitute</i>), John Kent, Bukky Okunade, and Graham Snell (<i>substitute</i>)
Apologies:	Councillors Colin Churchman (Vice-Chair) and James Halden
In attendance:	Gerard McCleave, Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth Sarah Welton, Strategy Manager Jonathan Wilson, Assistant Director of Finance Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the recording to be made available on the Council's website.

32. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2022 were approved as a true and correct record.

Councillor John Kent arrived – 7.02pm

33. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

34. Declaration of Interests

There were no items of urgent business.

35. Quarter 3 (April-December 2021) Corporate Performance Report 2021/22

The Strategy Manager introduced the report and stated that it outlined the relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for quarter three of 2021/22. She explained that any missed targets were accompanied by a 'route to green' narrative, and although it was difficult to predict the future regarding COVID-19, officers hoped that those KPIs which had been impacted would begin to improve with the lifting of restrictions.

Councillor Okunade questioned the KPI regarding litter on page 19 of the agenda and asked how the KPI was measured. The Strategy Manager explained that the KPI regarding litter was measured using a random, independent survey which looked at different areas of Thurrock on a regular

basis, including residential areas, town centres and industrial land. She stated that this survey determined whether or not litter levels were at an acceptable level across the borough. She stated that the figures for this KPI tended to be higher during the summer months, but the KPI had been met. The Chair felt it would be interesting to see a breakdown of the litter levels by ward, and the Strategy Manager replied that this could be provided to the Committee outside of the meeting, as well as information as to how the Council was encouraging people not to drop litter.

Councillor Collins highlighted page 20 of the agenda and the KPI relating to social care direct payments. He questioned why this KPI was under-performing. The Strategy Manager replied that this KPI had been significantly affected by COVID, as many private care service providers had to change the way they worked or not been able to work due to the pandemic/illness. The Chair added that some resident's healthcare situations had also deteriorated during the pandemic, so their care needs had expanded.

Councillor Kent drew the Committee's attention to page 21 of the report and the KPI relating to new apprenticeships. He questioned what the route to green was for this KPI, and how the Council had been engaging with the Kickstart Scheme. He also queried the KPI regarding the rate of young people re-offending on page 23 of the report and asked how the backlog of court cases was affecting this KPI. He added that the KPI relating payment of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) on page 22 of the agenda showed that only one in four people had paid their FPNs in December. He asked who was responsible for collecting this payment, and how the Council was ensuring residents continued to pay their fines. The Strategy Manager stated that the Council, along with other local authorities across the country, had struggled to meet the KPI regarding apprenticeships due to the impacts of COVID-19. The Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth added that some services were working with Inspire and the Kickstart Scheme, for example the Cleaner and Greener team were offering work experience placements. The Strategy Manager stated that the number of young people reoffending was a small cohort, which produced larger percentages that appeared biased. She stated that the actual figures for the number of young people reoffending couldn't be provided to the Committee as the cohort was so small, and this could make these young people identifiable. The Strategy Manager explained that she would find out additional information regarding the process for the FPN KPI and provide this information after the meeting, but highlighted that residents did have three months to pay their fines, and therefore the KPI figures for November and December were subject to change, due to the deadlines regarding the publication of the report.

Councillor Collins queried the KPI relating to health hazards on page 24 of the report, and asked what the difference was between a category 1 and a category 2 health hazard. The Strategy Manager replied that category 1 was seen as the most serious health hazard, compared to category two which was not as serious. She agreed to find out more information and reply to the Committee in writing. Councillor Collins then questioned why the KPI relating to re-let voids had not been met. The Strategy Manager replied that the team

were currently struggling to re-let sheltered accommodation units that were not on the ground floor due to access issues. She explained that officers were working hard to make these properties more attractive and accessible.

Councillor Carter highlighted page 23 of the agenda and the KPI relating to the number of Looked After Children not receiving Initial Health Assessments. He asked if the target for this KPI could be changed from 80% to 100%. The Chair replied that the young person had a choice whether or not they undertook an Initial Health Assessment, and some young people could be unwilling. Councillor Carter understood this issue and asked if there could be an additional KPI target to ensure that every Looked After Child had been offered an Initial Health Assessment.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Noted and commented upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators in particular those areas which are off target and the impact of COVID-19.

2. Identified any areas which require additional consideration.

36. Report on Asset Related Savings

Mr Woodbridge read out his statement as follows:

“Thank you Chair and others for allowing us to make a short statement this evening. We are Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions CIC and Thurrock International Celebration of Culture Ltd.

Firstly, we wanted to thank Officers and Members for the opportunity to try and save the Thameside and keep a place for arts and culture at the heart of Thurrock. All Members have expressed their desire to support this and as Cllr Coxshall stated “if the Thameside complex was transferred to the community, it will not only save the Council money but would improve the arts and cultural offer of the borough. He also stated, “the right financial support would have to be put in place to ensure the success of this project in the long term”.

The Thameside Complex has not yet been saved. As you can imagine it has been quite some journey these past 20 weeks and we are aware that our governance is currently what we would describe as credible, but our plan is to make it incredible. We will need your help with this. Our original outline business plan was well received and we believe the figures you state are ‘about right’ in that this building costs the Council £647,000 per year and our plan will enable us to do this cheaper.

We subsequently have met with other Directors at the Council, as well as Officers, museum staff, library staff, and artists. Indeed, there are 150 children working on their own business plan for the building as we speak. We have invested community money and the final business plan is being worked on tirelessly. As part of this we need you to understand that this is a partnership

between community, Officers and Members. We want you to have a role in our governance going forwards, but your democratic mandate is at the fore when supporting us in this endeavour. Our consultation has included as diverse a community as possible, everyone is entitled to a voice and trust me, we have been listening. Our business plan is based on three pillars of governance, transformation and finance – Sounding Boards will ensure the continual engagement with all the cultures within our community.

We know that being born with two ears and one mouth is the correct ratio – we're still listening – talk to us. The saving of this building for the community of Thurrock is crucial. We have been overwhelmed by Thurrock's outpouring of love and understanding of the role arts and culture will play as the borough expands and support its citizens. The governance, conversations and actions will continue onwards.

We are very excited to have our business plan ready for you at the end of March, but we wanted to be clear that this will not only be transformational, but also it needs to be sustainable. We think that there are clever ways of using your money to lever in even more money. But the very starting point will be a need to ask for some of your transformational funds to help us on this journey together. SO be prepared for our ask – ideally in your June meetings. The decision will then be yours.

We want to go on this cultural journey with you together and are working tirelessly to get it over the line. So once again thank you.”

Councillor Kent declared a non-pecuniary interest as he worked for Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions.

The Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth introduced the report and thanked Mr Woodbridge for his statement. She stated that there were currently positive ongoing discussions with community groups and officers were looking forward to receiving the Full Business Case by the end of March. She stated that the team were talking to services and business partners, but assured Members that there would be no immediate, short-term changes to the Thameside Complex, and Members would receive regular updates on the situation.

Councillor Kent highlighted point 3.5 of the report and sought assurances that the Thameside Theatre would not close in August 2022. He felt that uncertainty surrounding the future of the site could cause difficulties for groups trying to book the venue and wanted to ensure this would not be the case. Councillor Kent also urged Cabinet to ensure that funding was available to the community group if the Thameside was transferred to them, so they would be able to improve the arts and culture offer within the borough. He felt pleased to see that Cabinet and officers were working with community groups on the asset transfer and hoped that the proposal would be submitted as planned.

Councillor Collins asked if the Full Business Case could be shared with

Members, and queried how long until the Thameside became self-funding if transferred. Mr Woodbridge replied that the business case could be shared if Members wished, and that they planned to be self-funding within five years. Councillor Collins asked if the building was life limited. The Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth replied that the building required ongoing maintenance, and the projected capital costs had been shared with Mr Woodbridge for consideration in developing the Full Business Case. Mr Woodbridge added that they had compiled a red list of maintenance issues that required action, which equated to approximately £200,000. He explained that as the building had been designed as a library, and therefore needed to be structurally sound to hold a vast number of books, the structure of the building was solid.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Commented on the report and the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet on 9 March 2022:

a. That Cabinet note the main points from the discussions with the community and through the ongoing wider Roundtable meetings.

b. That Cabinet support the relevant Portfolio Holders and Officers to continue with further discussions with the community over the future of Thameside building and related services and that a recommendation is made to Cabinet for final decision no later than July 2022.

37. Thames Freeport: Business Rates Policy and Governance Structure

The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships introduced the report and stated that it formed part of a wider government policy for increased investments in trade; innovation and regeneration; and levelling up to improve people's employment prospects and contribute to initiatives aimed at improving health and wellbeing. He stated that the Outline Business Case for the scheme had been submitted to government and was approved in October 2021, with the sites designated alongside other financial aspects in December 2021. He stated that the Full Business Case (FBC) had been submitted in January 2022, and was currently being quality assured by numerous government departments at Whitehall. He added that the partners were hoping to receive formal approval of the FBC by the end of March or early April. He thanked partners at the London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham and Havering for their joint work on the project.

The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships stated that the Freeport could provide approximately 21,000 new jobs and would see additional private investment of over £4bn, the majority of which would come into Thurrock. He commented that the Freeport would provide opportunities for businesses both during construction and operation, and Thurrock were hoping to link small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to the Freeport through the supply chain. He added that the Freeport would also present opportunities to upskill the local workforce as Officers were currently looking at how they

could target opportunities available and upskill people to be able to apply for these jobs. He stated that targeted pathfinder programme would be available that would help people to access jobs and remove their barriers to employment.

The Assistant Director of Finance added that the business rates scheme for the Freeport had been active since December 2021, but the proposed policy provided clarity for businesses regarding business rate relief. He stated that the process for business rate relief sat within the Council, but business rates would be compensated for by central government. He stated that Thurrock were the lead local authority and accountable body for the Freeport, and that any further funding would go through Thurrock as the accountable body for the other three local authorities.

Councillor Kent queried the difference between the new proposed Freeport and the freeports that had existed until 2012 and had been removed in 2014. He also asked if the Thames Freeport would work on the same basis as the other 5000 Freeports worldwide. He questioned what the basis for the business rate retention was and if this was up for negotiation. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships replied that the difference between the Freeports in 2012 and 2022 related to the different policies, additional levers and processes in place. He stated that the new Freeports connected multiple different departments across central government and involved new regeneration policies. He explained that customs arrangements for Freeports remained the same as in 2012 but there were ongoing discussions with HMRC regarding this issue. The Assistant Director of Finance stated that the customs site provided ongoing benefits for the Council and businesses, and 100% of business rates would be retained for 25 years, and would help generate larger capital programmes.

Councillor Kent asked how the Council would work to ensure businesses did not move from other areas in Thurrock into the Freeport area to receive business rate relief. The Assistant Director of Finance replied that the Council were working hard to ensure that issues regarding displacement did not arise across the three involved local authorities. He stated that every application to the Freeport would be considered and government guidance was scheduled to be published on this issue. Councillor Kent asked if an update report could be brought back before the Committee. The Chair and Committee agreed to this and a report was added to the Work Programme for next municipal year. Councillor Collins queried how the Freeport would be funded. The Assistant Director replied that £25mn would be from seed funding; £22mn from Thurrock Council; and £3mn from Ford. He explained that this would accelerate the preparation to get businesses on site, for example through land remediation programmes. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships added that this funding would speed up the investment and other processes by approximately six-eight months and would support infrastructure such as junction improvements. Councillor Collins asked if any business could apply to become part of the Freeport. The Assistant Director of Finance replied that certain businesses would be rejected if they did not meet the objectives of the proposal, for example residential and retail areas in the

Freeport. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships added that the Freeport would focus on four sectors: advanced logistics; light manufacturing; automotive manufacturing; and energy/circular economy. He stated that these sectors built on Thurrock's current economic strengths and business base.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Commented on the report and the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet on 9 March 2022:

That Cabinet:

- a. Approves the Thames Freeport Business Rates Policy at Appendix 1.**
- b. Delegates authority to the Section 151 Officer to make necessary amendments to the policy as required, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Strategic Planning and External Relationships.**
- c. Approve the Chief Executive's appointment as the Council's representative on the Thames Freeport Governance Board, who will be responsible for briefing and updating the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Finance, and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Strategic Planning and External Relationships on key and significant activity.**
- d. Endorses the relevant Officers to participate in and represent the Council on the various Thames Freeport Sub-committees as necessary and delegates authority to the Chief Executive to appoint Officers to appropriate sub-committees e.g. Skills, Levelling Up and Regeneration.**
- e. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Corporate Director of Resources and Place Delivery and the Monitoring Officer, to enter into any Memoranda of Understanding with government and Freeport bodies in order to deliver the activities of Thames Freeport in consultation with the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Finance and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Strategic Planning and External Relationships.**

38. Work Programme

The Committee agreed that an update report regarding the governance surrounding Freeports based on central government guidance would be added to the Work Programme.

The meeting finished at 8.17 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**