

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 29 November 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Fraser Massey (Chair), Paul Arnold, Adam Carter, Victoria Holloway and John Kent (*arrived 7.09pm*)

Apologies: Councillor James Thandi (Vice-Chair)

In attendance: Gerard McCleave, Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

13. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

14. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

15. Thames Freeport

The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships introduced the report and stated that he believed the Thames Freeport was a significant economic opportunity for Thurrock over the next few years. He explained that it would be private sector led by Forth Ports, DP World and Ford, but would include three local authorities: Thurrock; the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD); and the London Borough of Havering (LBH). He stated that the Freeport Business Case (FBC) outlined the proposed governance for the Thames Freeport, and framed by government guidance, there would be a Governance Board formally established with Ruth Kelly as the Chairperson, and 12 Board members, including local authorities and key stakeholders. He stated that the first meeting of the Governance Board would be in early 2023, dependent on Cabinet approval and approval of the FBC by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DHLUC). The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships explained that the Board would be accountable to government through a Memorandum of Understanding, and would be responsible for the delivery of Freeport objectives such as creating a global hub for trade, a centre for innovation, and enabling levelling up and regeneration. He commented that the report asked the Committee to note the potential economic benefits, endorse the approach supporting Thames Freeport, and provide comments on the governance structure before the report was submitted to Cabinet on 7 December. The Assistant Director of

Economic Growth and Partnerships clarified the process that had been undertaken on Thames Freeport, explaining that a business case had been submitted to DHLUC on 14 April 2022, and was currently going through the quality assurance process, which included critical action responses from Thames Freeport to DHLUC. He expected formal approval of the FBC early in the New Year.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report and highlighted point 4.6. He queried which MPs would be the observers of the Freeport. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships explained that all MPs across the Freeport Outer Boundary covering Thurrock, LBB and LBH would be invited to attend meetings.

Councillor Kent arrived at 7.09pm.

Councillor Carter felt that the Freeport would be a good opportunity for Thurrock, and highlighted that 68% of investment would be within the borough. He asked if this percentage was an estimate or contained investments that had been agreed upon. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships explained that some investments had already been agreed and secured, including seven new private sector investments at London Gateway, funding for seed capital projects, as well as direct port investments. He stated that other longer-term planned investments had been estimated using asset sites, types of development and potential jobs over the next ten years.

Councillor Kent highlighted section 2.4 and asked if the borrowing against future business rates was no longer going to happen. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships confirmed that it would not, but clarified that retained business rates would still be available to be used by Thurrock for regeneration and levelling up projects. He explained that the team had remodelled and considered the impact, and as there would no longer be borrowing charges the amount of retained business rates available in the future would likely be considerably more than originally thought, in relation to governance and Accountable Body status. He added that the commissioners may also have a future role. Councillor Kent felt concerned that the Freeport would increase traffic and air quality issues in the borough. He also felt concerned that Thurrock officers, as the lead local authority/Accountable Body, would not have the capacity for the additional work and would become overstretched. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships replied that the need for additional capacity had been identified from the outset and had been considered in terms of the team for administration and operational roles in finance and legal etc., and this would be funded through business rates. The Chair asked if the other local authorities involved were at the same stage as Thurrock in terms of governance. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships stated that the governance structure of the Freeport Board would be signed off by the other local authorities in line with their own internal processes.

An additional recommendation was proposed and agreed:

“Asked Cabinet to consider and respond to comments made by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.”

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Noted the potential economic benefits, endorsed the overall approach to supporting Thames Freeport, and provided comments on the report and recommendations to be considered by Cabinet on 7 December 2022:

That Cabinet:

- a. considers the approves the Thames Freeport proposed governance structure (Section 4).**
- b. Approves the appointment of the Leader of the Council or nominated representative to the Thames Freeport Governance Board (Section 4.4, 4.5 & 5.3).**
- c. Endorses that relevant Officers support the Leader of the Council or nominated representative at the TFGB to participate in and represent the Council on the various Thames Freeport Sub-committees as necessary, delegating authority to the Acting Chief Executive to appoint officers as appropriate to Sub-committees e.g. Levelling Up and Regeneration (Section 4.10).**
- d. Delegates authority to the Acting Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council to enter into any Memoranda of Understanding with government and Freeport bodies to deliver activities of the Thames Freeport (Section 4.2, 4.13, & 5.4).**
- e. To note the approach of investing retained business rates in regeneration and infrastructure projects as the rates become available to the Council (Section 2.4).**

2. Asked Cabinet to consider and respond to comments made by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting finished at 7.20 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

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