

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 28 February 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Susan Little (Mayor), Qaisar Abbas (Deputy Mayor), John Allen, Alex Anderson, Deborah Arnold, Paul Arnold, Gary Byrne, Adam Carter, John Cecil, Daniel Chukwu, Gary Collins, George Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Robert Gledhill, Aaron Green, James Halden, Vikki Hartstean, Mark Hooper, Mark Hurrell, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Ben Maney, Jacqui Maney, Fraser Massey, Valerie Morris-Cook, Sara Muldowney, Augustine Ononaji, Srikanth Panjala, Maureen Pearce, Terry Piccolo, Georgette Polley, Kairen Raper, Joycelyn Redsell, Elizabeth Rigby, Sue Sammons, Sue Shinnick, Graham Snell, Neil Speight, Luke Spillman, James Thandi, Lee Watson and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillor Cici Manwa

In attendance: Dr Dave Smith, Chief Executive
Claire Demmel, Interim Director Public Realm
Asmat Hussain, Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Alix MacFarlane, Communications Advisor - Intervention and Improvement, Interim Director
Steven Mair, Interim Chief Financial Officer/Section 151 Officer
Patrick McDermott, Chief of Staff to the Thurrock Commissioners
Jayne Middleton-Albooye, Assistant Director Legal & Governance
Alex Powell, Assistant Chief Executive
Kerry Thomas, Chief of Staff
Ian Wake, Executive Director of Adults, Housing and Health)
Nicole Wood, ECC Best Value Commissioner
Matthew Boulter, Head of Democratic, Scrutiny and Member Services
Jenny Shade, Principal Democratic Services Officer

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

123. Minutes

Minutes of Extraordinary Council held on the 31 January 2024 were approved as a correct record.

Minutes of Council held on the 31 January 2024 were approved as a correct record. Councillor Speight voted against these minutes.

124. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

125. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

126. Announcements on behalf of the Mayor or the Leader of the Council

The Mayor acknowledged the official portrait of His Majesty King Charles III was now being displayed in the chamber and on behalf of all members wished him a speedy recovery.

The Leader made the following announcements:

- Since last full council meeting, the council in partnership with the Department of Transport and other councils had launched a new initiative to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour on railways and secured £490,000 from the Department of Transport for new transport safety officers.
- A joint operation with Essex Police to tackle dangerous drivers and car cruising in West Thurrock, using a mobile CCTV van to enforce the public space protection orders.
- Heard today that Jetstream had decided not to continue running the ferry crossing service from Tilbury to Gravesend. The Leader gave his reassurance that every effort would be made to ensure that a new ferry supplier would be found.

127. Questions from Members of the Public

The Mayor informed the chamber that three questions had been received from members of public.

| From | To | Subject |
|-------------|--------------------|---|
| Ms Hattle | Councillor B Maney | Money spent via S106 on bus stops/shelters. |
| Ms Byrne | Councillor Snell | Allocation of Transformational Fund money. |
| Ms Ramdenee | Councillor B Maney | Cutting of essential services. |

128. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

A petition was presented in respect of a request to sell small piece of land, title number EX798887, at Market rate to Grays Gurdwara, Sikh Temple. Councillor B Maney provided a response.

129. Petitions Update Report

Members received a report on the status of those petitions handed in at Council meetings and Council office.

130. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies, Statutory and Other Panels

There were no changes to appointments made.

131. Amendment to Polling Place and Station

The report presented informed Council of a Polling Place amendment within Belhus Ward.

No points arose.

RESOLVED

That members noted the new polling arrangements for Belhus Ward, polling districts E2 and F and the new polling place is Belhus Park Scout Hall, Faymore Gardens.

132. Update on Appointment of Interim CFO, Section 151 Officer

The report provided background and details of the decision taken by Commissioners to appoint Dawn Calvert as Section 151 Officer in line with the powers transferred to them by the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities. This appointment was also considered and recommended to Commissioners at the meeting of General Services Committee on 13 February 2024.

Members thanked Steven Mair for all his hard work in his role as acting Section 151 Officer and wished him well for the future.

RESOLVED

That Full Council noted the decision of Commissioners to appoint Dawn Calvert Interim Chief Finance Officer as Section 151 Officer.

Meeting was suspended at 7.45pm

Meeting reconvened at 7.51pm.

133. Section 25 Report

Under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 there was a requirement for the Council's Chief Finance Officer to report to Council on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations of the budget and the adequacy of the proposed level of financial reserves.

The following points were raised:

- The report confirmed that the Council was not yet on the path to sustainability by the end of the next five-year period.
- The report had listed the range of risks.
- Very difficult to bring the budget in May next year but will be something all members will be working hard to achieve.
- The budget put forward had shortfalls and required solutions to be found.
- The report highlighted the council was still in a very precarious financial position.

Members approved the recommendation.

RESOLVED

That Council had regard to this report when making decisions about the calculation of council tax requirement.

134. Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Council's financial position was virtually unprecedentedly challenging and would remain so for several years. The position was forecast to improve considerably in the next five years, via the divestment of assets, the implementation of a challenging savings programme, working differently and service delivery changes. The report presented the council's financial position.

The following points were raised:

- There was no option but to approve the report.
- This was a clear strategy document for all members to see.
- There was no clear route to set the budget without Government support.
- Labour welcomed and would support the recommendation.

Members voted to approve the recommendation with 46 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 2 abstained votes.

RESOLVED

That Council approved the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and in doing so agreed the financial targets summarised in paragraph 1.3; the financial assumptions / deliverables as summarised at paragraph 1.4

to 1.7; that if any of the above targets or assumptions adversely vary, alternatives to the same timescale and value would need to be identified and implemented; the treatment of the MRP calculations was based on recent KC guidance and was subject to approval from the Councils auditors and there was an inherent risk that these numbers could change.

135. Capital Strategy Programme 2024/25

The report set out the proposed changes to the Council's capital strategy from 2024/25 to 2028/29.

The following points were raised:

- The document made sobering reading.
- Element of the improvement journey to financial sustainability had been overlooked.
- The report highlighted how the Council had ripped the heart and soul out of the borough and was a sad landmark point in the Council's history.
- Welcomed some of the lessons that appeared to have been learnt as a result of the Government intervention.
- Report highlighted issues how the Council had been prior to the run up to the point of intervention.
- There were now reassurances that capital projects must be agreed in the open and with more money security behind them.
- Looking to the future the Council needed to enable the community to do more.

Members voted to approve the recommendation with 45 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 3 abstained votes.

RESOLVED

That Council approved: (a) the revised capital programme and 5-year capital programme for 2024/25 to 2028/29 as set out in this report (b) that the capital projects: currently "on hold" totalling £119.0m were not included in the Capital Programme and the associated borrowing of £62.9m was not required; the capital schemes that have not started totalling £3.3m were also formally confirmed as removed from the capital programme and the associated borrowing of £3.3m was not required and those schemes assessed and considered no longer necessary totalling £60.1m were confirmed as removed from the capital programme and the associated borrowing of £56.5m was not required (c) the proposed financing of the capital programme (d) delegation to the Interim Director of Finance s151, in consultation with Commissioners, all decisions surrounding the financing of expenditure within the revised capital programme, in a manner which achieves the most effective use of Council's resources (e) that any future changes to the capital programme should be approved by Council, whilst ensuring that external funding was able to be used in a timely manner, with any new

borrowing requirements subject to Commissioner approval (f) that the Capital Programme Board review and receive updates on the action plans put in place to address the further improvements identified and to note progress on continued delivery of these improvements.

136. HRA Business Plan

The report set out the proposed 30-Year Business Plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and considered both the Revenue and Capital position.

The following points were raised:

- Identified the need to increase rents, but the Council must continue to offer a good service, keeping the staff costs down at all times.
- Increase the number of homes that the Council inspected.
- Be prepared for dealing with damp and mould legislation.
- Confident that housing would continue to perform the day-to-day delivery to a very good standard.
- The report made no mention of the 500 new homes.
- This would affect every person on the housing list waiting to move from a flat to a house.
- Since the report had been published the use of right to buy receipts to purchase additional homes would not be used to support a temporary accommodation offer.
- The Council needed to find a way to bring new, affordable homes to Thurrock potentially working with housing associations and developments.
- Appealed to commissioners to allow the Council to borrow to enable the council to purchase properties from the market to use as temporary accommodation, which would save money as most would be paid out of housing benefit which would avoid a significant number of cuts to the Council.
- Questioned what the limits were that the commissioners and Government could offer to Thurrock.
- The business plan offered a lack of ambition, omitted details and made no references to the fundamental part of the Council's future.
- Questioned whether any attempt to consider new partnerships such as housing associations.
- Questioned whether this was a 30-year-old business plan or a snapshot in time.
- Concerns raised in the HRA was where presumptions were being made on the procurement of items such as the repairs contract.
- Concern that scrutiny was unable to keep pace with the procurement exercise.
- Concerns also raised on the delivery of new council homes.
- Referred to the social housing scheme recently presented at Planning Committee that could now be in jeopardy and urged commissioners to take another look at that.

- Referred to Blackshots and how this project was progressing well and should not be lost and urged commissioners to look further into that.
- Praised the work of housing officers on the Blackshots project.
- Referred to the delivery of social and affordable housing and questioned whether those land assets owned by the Council could be sold to lease developers.

Members voted to approve recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 with 46 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 2 abstained votes.

Members voted to note recommendations 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7 with 48 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 0 abstained votes.

RESOLVED

Council approved:

1.1 The HRA revenue budget for 2024/25 (Table 1 & Appendix A)

1.2 The HRA 5-year capital programme for a total of £175.069m (Table 3 & Appendix C).

Council noted:

1.3 The HRA 5-year revenue budgets for 2024-25 to 2028-29 (Table 1 & Appendix A);

1.4 The HRA 30-year revenue budget for 2024-25 to 2053-54 (Appendix B);

1.5 The 30-year capital programme for 2024-25 to 2053-54 (Appendix D);

1.6 The draft HRA reserves and balances for the 5-year business plan (Appendix E)

1.7 The submission of the two requests to the Secretary of State. The outcome of it would be reported to Cabinet / Council.

137. HRA Rent Setting 2024/25

This report was approved at Cabinet held on the 21 February 2024.

138. Council Tax Base for 2024/25 and determination of Collection Fund

The report presented set out the number of properties within Thurrock that were chargeable for council tax and classified them into Band D equivalents for budget setting purposes. The report also referred to the Collection Fund Balances 2023/24 where regulations required a local authority to estimate the balance on its Collection Fund as of 31 March each year. Any such balance

relating to Council Tax was to be distributed to/borne by the Council and the Essex Police and Fire Authorities in proportion to the value of their respective precepts.

Labour stated their support for the recommendations and that it made sense to move back to the previous way with cabinet looking at the base before the council budget setting meeting.

Members voted to note recommendation 1.1 with 48 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 0 abstained votes.

Members voted to approve recommendations 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 with 48 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 0 abstained votes.

RESOLVED

Council noted:

1.1 That under existing delegated authority the Council Tax Base for 2024/25, calculated in accordance with legislation, has been set by the Interim Chief Financial Officer at 53,322 properties.

Council approved:

1.2 The proposal that in future years Cabinet would be required to approve the Council Tax Base and change the Constitution accordingly;

1.3 The proposal that: (a) the estimated 31 March 2024 balance of the Council Tax Collection Fund to be a surplus of £326,924 (before distribution to major precepting authorities) and (b) allocated the surplus to the three main precepting bodies in proportion to their precepts for 2023/24 as follows: Thurrock Council £272,910; Essex Police £40,193 and Essex County Fire £13,821. Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, but each had an individual precept balance.

1.4 The proposal that: (a) the estimated 31 March 2024 balance of the Business Rate Collection Fund to be a surplus of £7,272,612 (before distribution to Central Government and Essex County Fire) and (b) allocated the surplus to the three main precepting bodies in the proportion set out in legislation: (i) Thurrock Council £3,563,580; (ii) Central Government £3,636,306; and (iii) Essex County Fire £72,726.

139. Council Tax Premium 2024/25

This report provided details and impacts of the current level of council tax premiums charged within Thurrock and provided further information to allow consideration of the recommendation that the council introduced changes to these premiums in line with the amended legislation.

The following points were raised:

- Labour agreed these were sensible measures that would be supported.
- Questioned how the council would monitor where the properties were being actively marketed.
- What measures would be put in place for properties undergoing major repairs.
- Councillor Speight proposed to defer recommendation 1.2 for further consideration.

Members voted to approve recommendation 1.1 with 47 votes in favour, 1 vote against and 0 abstained votes.

Members voted unanimously in favour to defer recommendation 1.2 for further consideration.

Members voted unanimously in favour to approve recommendation 1.3.

RESOLVED

The Council approved:

1.1 That from the 1 April 2024 a council tax premium was charged (in addition to normal council tax) on long term empty and substantially unfurnished properties as follows: Properties empty after 12 months and up to 5 Years = 100% Premium; Properties empty between 5 and up to 10 years = 200% Premium; Properties empty over 10 years = 300% Premium;

1.2 That from 1 April 2025 a 100% council tax premium was charged (in addition to normal council tax) on properties classed as 2nd homes – DEFERRED FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION.

1.3 That from 2024/25, Quarterly outturn reports to Cabinet would include a clear and transparent summary on the council tax performance, including additional income secured through the proposed changes to the premium.

The meeting was suspended at 9.05pm.

The meeting reconvened at 9.19pm.

140. Local Council Tax Scheme 2024/25

The Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) helped support council taxpayers who had a low income by providing a reduction to the actual amount of Council Tax payable. The Council was required to consider the scheme annually and consult on any changes before they were introduced. The current LCTS scheme was implemented on the 1 April 2017 following consultation and had been agreed for each subsequent year up to the current financial year with no changes.

Labour welcomed the extension of the existing scheme and for the full review to be carried out.

Members voted unanimously in favour to approve recommendations 1.1 and 1.2.

RESOLVED

That Council approved:

1.1 The current Local Council Tax support scheme for 2024/25 which has been in place since 2017/18 with no changes as detailed in section 3.1.

1.2 A full review of the scheme in 2024/25 and completed by autumn, to enable inclusion within the budget setting process for 2025/26 and to comply with the Commissioner's recommendation above.

141. Revenue Budget Savings 2024/25

This report was approved at Cabinet held on the 21 February 2024.

142. Revenue Budget 2024/25

The Leader

As members are fully aware, the Council has had serious financial challenges over the last few years. We have to be aware of these challenges and we have to face them head on. We've had to make some tough decisions in this budget to secure a viable long-term future for Thurrock. We have made great progress in securing the viability of this Council. When you consider two years ago we were in a place where we did not know if Thurrock would be able to continue as a Council, I want to thank officers for their time, effort, and advice in helping to secure this budget. I know that it was a hard budget to work on, and I want to thank everyone who worked on putting it together. By supporting this budget today, all 49 members are taking responsibility for the future of this Council. They are saying yes to securing a future of fiscal responsibility and they are proving they have learned the lessons from the BVI and are willing to make the tough decisions that decades of different Thurrock administrations showed that they were unwilling to make. Thurrock has come a long way, and this should be applauded and all Members who have contributed to the positive development of Thurrock should be congratulated. It's only by gritting our teeth and making decisions that are challenging are we able to secure the future of Thurrock, simply saying no, and offering no alternative, as has happened in the past, can't happen again. We all have the responsibility to the residents of Thurrock to help deliver a well-run local authority. This budget has received more scrutiny than any in Thurrock's history and I would like to thank Councillor Kerin for chairing all the extraordinary O&Ss meetings and all Members who offered

fair challenge and questioned the many parts of this budget. This again showed that we were learning the lessons from the BVI which have challenged the Council scrutiny process. I personally thought that the two meetings were truly a good concept and should be done every year, although I might like to consider booking a day of work the next day. My administration is committed to making the correct decisions for a better future for Thurrock, these have not been easy, but we have secured the future of our libraries and saved our school crossing patrols in order to keep the services that matter to the residents of Thurrock. The council was asked to increase council tax by 10% this was deemed unfair by myself and my administration to Councillor Snell, Councillor Maney and I had a very challenging discussion with ministers. I am pleased to say he recognised that we were not prepared to increase the tax by 10% and if his budget is passed this evening council tax will be increased by 7.99%, this means that Thurrock will no longer have the lowest council tax in Essex, but we will in fact be the third lowest. This was a hard decision that we've had to make to secure the viability of the council. A 7.99% increase protects the services for the most vulnerable whereas increasing council tax by less puts those services at risk and that is not something that I nor my administration is willing to do. There's been much speculation on the budget both in the media and on social media, and many were led to believe that there would be swingeing cuts to services that are most vulnerable residents rely on. The budget before you this evening will ensure that children's services and adult social care are protected, will not be losing even one child social worker, our grass will still be cut in our parks and open spaces and our streets will be cleaned and our public bins will be emptied. In comparison to our nearest competitor council with nearby unitary authorities, Thurrock will have a council tax that is lower than the average, this really highlights Thurrock past inability to make difficult decisions, since it became a unitary, the second lowest council tax in the country was never where we should have been with the services that we provide. We continue to maintain a low council tax with this budget but is the acknowledgment that the record lows of the past were not sustainable. This budget does not solve all of our problems, there are still tough decisions to make in the future. My overriding priority with this budget is to protect the most vulnerable in Thurrock, and I do believe that we have achieved this. However, whilst this budget is a good step forward for a better future, there are more difficult and tough decisions to make in the future, and this budget does not make right all the wrongs of the past. This budget, I believe, is the right thing for the Council to adopt the administration, has tackled our challenges and is committed to delivering a relatively low council tax, as well as good services, particularly protecting the services that are used by the most vulnerable. This budget recognises the difficulties of the Council's finances but sets out a positive way forward for the next year. I would urge all 49 Members to support this budget today is really not a day to play party politics but a time to do the right thing for Thurrock and its residents. My administration has and will continue to tackle the many challenges that we face, and we are committed to delivering as lower council tax as possible whilst also protecting services. Thank you, Madam Mayor.

Councillor J Kent

I want to start by joining with Councillor Jefferies actually on the process we have been through to get here this evening when we formally set the council's budget. Those two joint scrutiny sessions were, I think a real step forward, they were, despite the excellent chairing of Cllr Kerin, very long, very arduous and, at times, utterly chaotic but they were a huge step forward and every member in this chamber this evening has had every opportunity to have their say in the formation of the budget before us tonight before it has got to this stage. It has, clearly, been a better, more inclusive, and more transparent process than those we have unfortunately grown used to over recent years. We welcome that and I just genuinely want to acknowledge it. To set a balanced budget this evening the cabinet has nodded through a package of savings that come to more than £19 million and we heard a lot of talk from the leader of the council about securing services for the most vulnerable, protecting the most vulnerable, yet they include cuts that will hit some of the most vulnerable in our community scrapping the Hardship Fund for instance, charging to get disabled youngsters to college, charging for dispersed alarms that help our vulnerable elderly live independently and more besides that. Cuts that will hit the weakest and cuts that frankly shame the Conservatives. We will also see fortnightly bin collections, an £80 charge for garden waste and a huge rise in a raft of fees and charges. These are cuts and charges that will hit every resident of Thurrock. There are, of course, savings included here that we unreservedly welcome; the reductions in spending on agency staff, improvements to the Trade Waste service and entering into a business pool, where business rates pool that brought in millions of pounds to this authority and I am still genuinely baffled as to why we haven't entered into a new arrangement before now but welcome the fact that we are. But we will also see another punishing, above the cap, to Council Tax increase of 8%. But once again it's the residents who will be paying the price of the Tory financial disaster and it means that the level of Council Tax has gone up by practically half since the Conservatives first formed an administration back in 2016 and the Band D Council Tax charge will pass £2,000 a year for the first time in Thurrock. Even with all that, what we have before us this evening isn't, frankly, proposals for a balanced budget. There is still that gap of some £850k to be identified by the 22 March and I would ask the leader when he responds to tell us how he proposes to plug that gap. Will he return to the closure of the Thameside, will it be closing libraries, will be crossing patrols, the fact is we just don't know, and the Leader needs to come clean on what more he is looking at. Even after all of that, we will still need exceptional government support of £68.6 million in order to set a balanced budget. That, Madam Mayor, is the incredible scale of the financial catastrophe for which the Tories are responsible and the consequences of which the people of Thurrock will have to live with through higher Council Tax and fewer and diminished front-line services for years to come. Tonight, although there is much that we really do strongly oppose in this budget, we accept that we must do the responsible thing and allow the budget to pass. To do anything else would risk turmoil, uncertainty, and deeper government intervention and that is not something we are prepared to do Madam Mayor, so we shall, therefore be abstaining and allowing the Conservatives to have their budget and let's be in no doubt, that's

what it is, the Conservative's budget. Madam Mayor, I would like to turn to the future and the fact is, that having divested the council of the Tories disastrous Toucan investment, at what appears to be a loss of £250 million, we will not be able to set a budget without that exceptional government support, in the lifetime of the MTFs that we agreed earlier. That is up to the year 2028/29. This year we are paying the equivalent of 138% of our revenue budget on servicing debt, next year that reduces to closer to 33% and by 2028/29 will still be paying a quarter of our revenue on servicing this toxic Tory debt and that just isn't sustainable. We have to look at different ways of working, different ways of running the council and delivering council services. That means embracing a new operating model for the council and searching for real innovation. Innovation that will once and for all, tackles the issues of silo working, will embrace the opportunities afforded by artificial intelligence and up to the minute Customer Relationship Management tools, meaning that we put the resident at the centre of what we do helping to cut down on waste and unnecessary duplication and if we are going to be able to ensure a good level of services for all our residents, we just have to accept that we just can't afford to do that in the traditional way. Generally, we think of resources in terms of money, but it has to be so much more than that. We have to harness the skills, the passion, the experience, and energy of the whole community of businesses, the third sector, community groups and residents so that working together we will be able to, not only ensure a good level of services but will be able to start to tailor services more closely to the needs of our different communities allowing us to ensure consistency across the borough but not uniformity. All of this has to be done at pace and, rather than be seen alongside next year's budget setting process, the new operating model and the budget must be seen as one and the same thing. And finally, Madam Mayor, we have to continue to rebuild the credibility of the council in the eyes of our residents, in the view of our commissioners and in the judgement of government. If we can do those things, we can start to have a different conversation with government one where we can offer a different proposal around how we deal with the toxic level of debt that we would still have in 2028/29 in a way that gives us a chance of being self-sustainable council and leave intervention more quickly than looks likely at the moment.

Councillor Speight

I have given a great deal thought about what to say this evening that reflects not just my thoughts on this budget, but those of my independent colleagues. We are not a political party, and we are a collective of differing opinions so what I am saying reflects my view although it has been seen beforehand by my colleagues how I vote will be my own choice. Colleagues may go a different way. But what I think is a communality between us is that the recommendations before us are, in the main, the product of a fractured, broken council that has shown little by way of humanity and compassion in the way it has gone about the business of putting a budget together. Firstly, let me say on behalf of myself and colleagues, we have no issue with supporting a 2% increase for adult social care. If we have a concern, it is that the figure is not enough nor does its ring fence stretch far enough. It should surround children's services as well. As for the rest, it's largely a matter of

irrelevance. We have to set a budget by law, and it has to balance. Which is exactly what the highly paid number crunchers have put before us. As to its validity, I question it deeply. It is a fiscal plan created with all the finesse of a battlefield butcher, rather than the precision of a surgeon trying to heal and piece together a wounded patient. It shows little humanity, and it has little strategic value. I regard it as a mark in the road rather than panacea aimed at progression. It's a budget of slash and burn, not of creativity. It does a job but not a very good one. Of course it's easy to be critical when you're not the one making the decision so it beholds me to offer some thoughts about what the budget planners could have done. They could have shown vision, talked to prospective stakeholders and investors, to housing associations, for example. They could have laid foundations that would have made an immediate financial implication. They could definitely have questioned more. I look every month with ever-increasing anguish at what we spent online pages. I see not just profligacy but a huge lack of quality control. Buyers of services opt for the cheapest cut, so I go back to my butcher analogy. A good butcher may charge you more at the outset, but what you are served up with will last longer, feed more and end up being much greater value for money. We continue to approach procurement with a belief that the longer a contract is, the better value the council will get. There is no guarantee that equation works. And, as we have seen from our rising cost experience, I think the spreadsheet of damning invoices proves it did not work. So for me this is a poorly conceived, badly thought-out mere scratching of numbers by pen pushers - albeit very expensive ones. Its only merit is getting us past a 31 March mile pole. A statement made earlier by Councillor Snell about a budget which moved somewhere in the region of £31.5 million between the 14 February and today just shows how much of this is guesswork. But let's look forward on 1 April work needs to start on a new, strategic, humanitarian budget based on the needs of the people in this borough; not a group of non-invested accountants trying to make an arbitrary set of numbers add up. I cannot support this year's budget personally, but I have the luxury of being able to make a protest vote. Colleagues on other benches do not have that and I respect their position. I am sure this budget will pass without my support but then let's consign it to theoretical history and start again on a better one.

The following points were raised:

- Concern on lack of join-up strategic thinking on budgets that all local authorities had found themselves in.
- More guidance from Government was required to find a solution which was systemic across local government.
- Money continued to be poured into unnecessary projects, expensive services with the council repeatedly failing residents.
- Questioned whether next year could see a deduction on the brown bin charge if there were to be a good take up by residents.

The Leader

First of all, I would like to say I agree entirely with what leader of the opposition said about the workings of the Council, and it should becoming

more of an enabling council, and you'll be pleased to know that there is work taking place at the moment at pace, trying to bring about those changes, I agree entirely with what Councillor Spillman said and that was, on one hand, you say that these budget proposals were nodded through by cabinet, but then you also praised the fact that we had the two O&Ss and on that subject I think you had the two O&Ss but there were other meetings with people with councillors having the opportunity to question the budget. This budget does protect the most vulnerable in our communities. I've said that repeatedly and I wouldn't be putting my name to something that wasn't protecting the most vulnerable and, as I said in my speech, you mentioned libraries and school crossing patrols. We have protected those, they are still there, libraries will stay open, and our children will be safely cross the road. I am disappointed that neither political party have come forward with an alternative budget. one is going to actually abstain. I don't know what the others are going to do. I'm not quite sure they're going to vote against, abstain, I'd probably make up their mind when it comes to it, but no one has put forward an alternative budget. Time and time again you were offered the opportunity to put forward alternative budgets with other ideas, but you haven't done it and tonight I've not heard one opposition councillor come forward with any decent proposal that we could listen to and use as an alternative. What I have heard is a councillor talking about things that were bought years ago, but it certainly wasn't what anyone within this administration, and it's that kind of thing that we've been trying to put right. Councillor Redsell with regard to brown bins, I think just like any charges and fees that we do, they're always reviewed every year, and I would love to say yes, they will come down in price, but that is something that will review in 12 months' time when they system has been up and running for a period of time. Thank you, Madam Mayor.

Members voted unanimously in favour to note recommendation 1.1.

A recorded vote was undertaken on recommendation 1.2:

For: Councillors Qaisar Abbas, Deborah Arnold, Paul Arnold, Adam Carter, Gary Collins, George Coxshall, Robert Gledhill, James Halden, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Susan Little, Ben Maney, Jacqui Maney, Augustine Ononaji, Maureen Pearce, Terry Piccolo, Georgette Polley, Joycelyn Redsell, Elizabeth Rigby, Graham Snell, Luke Spillman and James Thandi (23)

Against: Councillors John Allen, Alex Anderson, Gary Byrne, Jack Duffin and Neil Speight (5)

Abstain: Councillors John Cecil, Daniel Chukwu, Tony Fish, Aaron Green, Vikki Hartstean, Mark Hooper, Mark Hurrell, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Fraser Massey, Valerie Morris-Cook, Sara Muldowney, Srikanth Panjala, Kairen Raper, Sue Sammons, Sue Shinnick, Lee Watson and Lynn Worrall (20)

Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendation 1.2 carried.

Members voted unanimously in favour to approve recommendation 1.3.

A recorded vote was undertaken on recommendation 1.4:

For: Councillors Qaisar Abbas, Alex Anderson, Deborah Arnold, Paul Arnold, Adam Carter, Gary Collins, George Coxshall, Robert Gledhill, James Halden, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Susan Little, Ben Maney, Jacqui Maney, Augustine Ononaji, Maureen Pearce, Terry Piccolo, Georgette Polley, Joycelyn Redsell, Elizabeth Rigby, Graham Snell, Luke Spillman and James Thandi (24)

Against: Councillor Speight (1)

Abstain: Councillors John Allen, Gary Byrne, John Cecil, Daniel Chukwu, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Aaron Green, Vikki Hartstean, Mark Hooper, Mark Hurrell, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Fraser Massey, Valerie Morris-Cook, Sara Muldowney, Srikanth Panjala, Kairen Raper, Sue Sammons, Sue Shinnick, Lee Watson and Lynn Worrall (23)

Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendation 1.4 carried.

At 10.01pm, the Mayor extended standing orders.

Members voted unanimously in favour to approve recommendation 1.5.
Councillor Speight voted against this recommendation.

Members voted unanimously in favour to approve recommendation 1.6 and 1.7. Councillor Speight voted against this recommendation.

Members voted unanimously in favour to note recommendations 1.8, 1.9 and 1.10.

RESOLVED, Council

1.1 Noted the statutory Section 25 report of the S151 Officer when considering this report and in determining a) the proposed budget for 2024/25 and b) the level of reserves as set out in section 13.

1.2 Approved the 2024/25 Budget to enable the Council Tax requirement for 2024/25 to be set at £91.266m (as per section 5), a 7.99% increase on 2023/24. The result of which was:

1.3 Noted the Council Tax Resolution 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 2 which showed that the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner had increased Council Tax for Band D property to: £246.42 per annum (a 6% increase on 2023/24) for the Essex Police precept; £82.62 per annum (a 3% increase on 2023/24) for the Essex County Fire precept.

1.4 Members approved to work with officers to identify the full £1.7m in additional savings by 22 March 2024, potential actions were presented in Table 18. The result of which was:

1.5 Approved the 2024/25 Budget based on the estimated financial deficit to be funded by a capitalisation direction of £68.6m.

1.6 Approved the submission of business cases by services to secure approval to utilise budgets earmarked for contract inflation, use of contingencies and budgets earmarked for pressures (Section 10, Table 21) for approval by the Chief Finance Officer and the Finance Commissioner in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Human Resources and Payroll to allow in-year budget adjustments.

1.7 Approved the submission of a spending plan by services before the newly announced additional grant funding for Social Care can be utilised (£1.4m). This would require approval by the Chief Finance Officer and the Finance Commissioner in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Children & Housing to allow in-year budget adjustments.

1.8 Noted the savings of £18.2m as identified in the budget, as approved at Cabinet on 10 January 2024 and 21 February 2024;

1.9 Noted the Dedicated Schools Grant settlement for 2024/25 and the Thurrock allocation of £61.6m as set out in Section 11;

1.10 Noted the continued use of measures to control expenditure as set out in section 14.

At 10.09pm, Councillor Collins left the chamber.

143. Treasury Management - Mid Year Report

The report presented updated Members on the delivery of the 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy approved by Council on 1 March 2023.

Members voted unanimously in favour to agree recommendations 1.1 and 1.2.

RESOLVED

Council agreed:

1.1 That there was a revision to the Counterparty Limits in that investments placed with the Debt Management Office (DMO) were changed from £5m to unlimited.

1.2 Amend the Minimum Revenue Provision policy to revert back to Option 1 in respect of supported capital expenditure in line with the Statutory MRP Guidance.

144. Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25

The Council was required to approve a Treasury Management Strategy before the start of each financial year. This was in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Accountancy Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2021. The Council's Treasury Management Strategy set out the parameters for the Council's planned treasury activity during 2024/25 under which the Treasury Team would manage activity. The strategy reflected the Council's proposed Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2028/29.

Members voted unanimously in favour to approve recommendations 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and to note recommendation 1.4.

RESOLVED

That Council approved:

- 1.1 The proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25;**
- 1.2 The proposed MRP Policy for 2024/25 as set out in Section 9;**
- 1.3 The proposed Borrowing Strategy as set out in Section 7.**

That Council noted:

- 1.4 The requirement within the Prudential Code 2021 for quarterly reporting on the Council's Treasury Management activities. These reports will be presented quarterly during the year.**

145. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the chamber of the questions received to cabinet members.

| From | To | Subject |
|--------------------|--------------------|---|
| Councillor Byrne | Councillor B Maney | Total spend of the demolished Stanford Le Hope station. This question was withdrawn. |
| Councillor J Maney | Councillor Carter | Clarity on RAAC guidance. |

146. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

No reports were presented.

147. Minutes of Committees

The minutes of committees as set out in the agenda were received.

148. Update on motions resolved at Council during the previous year

Members received an information report updating the progress in respect of motions received at Council.

Councillor Redsell referred to her Motion raised at October 2023 council meeting to establish a task and finish group to look at options for tackling school parking across the borough and stated the lack of response had been unacceptable.

Councillor Speight referred to his Motion raised at September 2023 council meeting to commission a full independent inquiry into the management and achievements of Thurrock Council's planning department since 2015. Following the closure of a significant police investigation now cleared the way for no further delay for the council to undertake a thorough independent investigation into the planning department.

149. Motion submitted by Councillor Piccolo

This item was deferred to the 20 March 2024 council meeting.

A full recording of the meeting can be viewed from the following link:

[Council - Wednesday 28 February 2024, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

The meeting finished at 10.30 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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