

MINUTES of the meeting of Council held on 23 January 2013 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Yash Gupta MBE (Mayor), Tony Fish (Deputy Mayor), Phil Anderson, Clare Baldwin, Lynn Carr, Mark Coxshall, Charles Curtis, Wendy Curtis, Angie Gaywood, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, Sue Gray, James Halden, Diana Hale, Martin Healy, Shane Hebb, Wendy Herd, Terence Hipsey, Victoria Holloway, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Charlie Key, Steve Liddiard, Susan Little, Suzanne MacPherson, Ben Maney, Val Morris-Cook, Tunde Ojetola, Bukky Okunade, Barry Palmer, Maureen Pearce, John Purkiss, Robert Ray, Joycelyn Redsell, Michael Revell, Andrew Roast, Andy Smith, Philip Smith, Richard Speight, Michael Stone, Simon Wootton and Lynn Worrall.

Apologies: Councillors Garry Hague, Aaron Kiely, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice and Pauline Tolson.

In attendance: Reverend Darren Barlow – Mayor's Chaplain

Before the start of the Meeting, the Mayor advised all present that the meeting was being recorded and that the recording would be made available on the Council's website within 3 working days of the meeting.

The Mayor invited Reverend Barlow to say a few words and lead the Council in Prayer.

106. MINUTES

Councillor Gledhill informed Members that apologies had been recorded for Councillors Baldwin and Kiely and that he did not recall apologies for either Member being submitted at the meeting. He further advised that he had checked the recording of the meeting and that the Mayor confirmed that no apologies had been received.

In relation to Minute No. 99, Councillors Roast and Johnson advised the Council that they had not received the written answers to questions they had posed to Councillor Phil Smith in respect of his report to the Council.

The Minutes of the Council meeting, held on 28 November 2012, were approved as a correct record, subject to the amendments identified at the meeting.

107 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

The Mayor informed the Council that he had not agreed to the consideration of any items of urgent business.

108. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests.

109. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor informed the Chamber that three local professionals had been recognised in the Queen's New Years Honours List, as follows:

- Angela O'Donoghue, the Principal and Chief Executive of South Essex College, who had been awarded a CBE for her services to further education;
- Alan Peaford of Lodge Lane, Grays who had been awarded an MBE for services to people with disabilities; and
- Sheila Hatcher of Churchill Road, Grays had been awarded a British Empire Medal for her services to Music.

The Mayor advised Members that he had invited all three to attend the meeting was pleased to announce that Sheila Hatcher was in attendance at the meeting and he invited her to receive a small gift on behalf of the Council for her service to Music.

The Mayor informed Members that since the last Council Meeting, he had attended 54 events and that he wished to mention four of these, in particular:

- The Grand opening of the New Building of the Stanford and Corringham Sixth Form at the Gable Hall School on 5th December 2012, which the Mayor felt was a great step toward higher aspirations for our young students.
- A visit to Ockendon Academy and Studio School on 14 January 2013, where the Mayor had been greatly impressed by young people's higher aspirations. The Mayor paid tribute to the Principal, Barbara King, and her leadership team for inspiring the young people for future professional careers.
- The Christmas Pantomime, Cinderella, where the Mayor highlighted the musical and artistic talents of our young school children when they performed with professional artists as being a great performance.
- The concert given by Tasmin Little, the World Famous violinist, with 40 of our young musicians at the Thameside Theatre on 12 January 2013. The Mayor informed Members that Tasmin Little really inspired our young musicians. In addition, the Mayor thanked Thurrock Music Services for putting Thurrock on the National map and raising the musical aspirations of

our young people and their families by arranging a number of musical events during the whole year.

Finally, the Mayor was pleased to accept a cheque for £664 from the 2012 Diversity Champions, Victoria Gaskell and Ben Darby. He informed Members that this would be put towards the cost for a memorial stone to commemorate the Holocaust.

The Leader of the Council was then invited to make any announcements he wished to make. The Leader took the opportunity to inform the Chamber that he did not wish to make any announcements at this time.

110. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A copy of the transcript of questions and answers can be viewed on CMIS at <http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/cmiswebpublic/>

111. PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

The Mayor informed Members that, in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, the requisite notice had been given by one councillor that they wished to present a petition at the meeting.

Councillor Wendy Curtis addressed the Council and presented a petition on behalf of local residents regarding improvements to a play area in Cruik Avenue, South Ockendon.

112. PETITIONS UPDATE REPORT

Members received a report on the status of those petitions handed in at Council Meetings and Council Offices over the past six months.

Councillor Little informed the Council that in respect of Petition No.419, local residents felt that there had been no notable improvement in the anti-social behaviour that had been reported in the redundant A128 loop and that they felt the Council was being ambiguous as to how much evidence was "enough" and what evidence it had that the redundant loop was actually needed.

In addition, Councillor Little informed Members that the residents had queried why some of the £44,000 the Council had for an upgrade of the junction with the A128 could not be used to close the redundant loop.

The Mayor advised Councillor Little that her comments had been noted and that a response would be provided.

113. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND OUTSIDE BODIES, STATUTORY AND OTHER PANELS

The Mayor enquired whether Group Leaders wished for any changes to be made to the appointments previously made to Committees and outside bodies, statutory and other panels.

Councillor Anderson requested that the following changes be made to the appointments previously made by the Council:

- That Councillor Anderson and Councillor Coxshall be appointed as Members of the Joint Appointments Committee.
- That Councillor Johnson be appointed as a Member of the Planning Committee to replace Councillor Hebb.
- That Councillor Hebb be appointed as a substitute member of the Planning Committee to replace Councillor Johnson.
- That Councillor Coxshall be appointed as a substitute member of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor MacPherson.

The Leader of the Council informed Members that he wished to make the following appointments:

- That Councillor J Kent and Councillor Okunade be appointed as Members of the Joint Appointments Committee.

Members indicated their agreement to those appointments being made, as requested at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Councillors J Kent, Anderson, Coxshall and Okunade be appointed as members of the Joint Appointments Committee.**
- 2. That Councillor Johnson be appointed as a member of the Planning Committee to replace Councillor Hebb.**
- 3. That Councillor Hebb be appointed as a substitute member of the Planning Committee to replace Councillor Johnson.**
- 3. That Councillor Coxshall be appointed as a substitute member of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor MacPherson.**

114. JOINT APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

The Mayor informed Members that the report requested the Council to consider a minor change to the terms of reference of the Joint Appointments Committee that was established at the last meeting, following consideration by the Constitution Working Group.

In addition, Members were informed that the consequential amendments required to be made to the Constitution as a result of setting up this Joint Committee were also set out in the report.

Upon being put to the vote, the Mayor declared the recommendations contained within the report to be carried.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the terms of reference of the Joint Appointments Committee be approved, as set out at Appendix A to the report.**
- 2. That the consequential amendments required to be made to the Constitution as a result of the creation of the Joint Appointments Committee, as set out in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.10, be noted.**

115. APPROVAL OF THE COUNCIL TAX BASE, COLLECTION FUND BALANCE AND NNDR 1

The Mayor invited the Leader of the Council to introduce the report, which sought the approval for the determination of the Council Tax base, the Collection Fund Balance and NNDR 1 to be delegated to the Director of Finance and Corporate Governance, in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

The Leader informed the Council that this item would ordinarily have been brought in detail to the meeting for Members to approve but that this year, notification of the local grant settlement from the government was only received on 19 December and that there had not been sufficient time to undertake the work required. It was reported that this was the reason for the recommendation to delegate this to the Section 151 Officer.

Members were informed that for the first time the National Non Domestic Rate (NNDR) schedule was to be brought to the Council for approval the first time. It was reported that this was because for the first time in many years, the Council had an opportunity to keep some of the business rate that was generated in the Borough.

The Leader informed the Chamber that he had initially been pleased and welcomed the announcement by the government in respect of the localisation proposals for business rates and had hoped that these could be set locally and kept locally. It was noted that the Council, regardless of which political group formed the Administration, had always fought for a return of the business rates that had been collected in the borough rather than a proportion of these being redistributed to other areas.

The Leader advised Members that after careful examination of the new rules, it was clear that the Council would be able to keep less than one-third of any new rates from any new businesses, over and above those existing today, that

were created in Thurrock. In addition, Members were informed that the Council would not receive any new powers, as the setting and varying of business rates would remain with the government.

Members were informed that there was no opportunity to use business rate relief to boost town centres or other shopping areas and no chance to give meaningful help to businesses that were struggling or to give reductions to help local entrepreneurs. The Leader expressed his disappointment and suggested that the Council should now seriously think how it would go about campaigning for a true return of business rates.

Councillor Gledhill advised the Chamber that although the Leader had mentioned that business rates collected in Thurrock had been redistributed to “leafy suburbs”, he had forgotten that these had also gone to help London and other metropolitan areas. He asked whether the Leader could outline if the recommendations in the report would cause a problem for the other major precepting authorities, who would need to know the council tax base to work out their precept.

Councillor Johnson advised Members that Councils had called for greater financial freedom for a long time. He asked the Leader whether he did not want the additional funding that would be available to the Council and challenged the point made in respect of help that was available to local businesses as the Council could give local hardship exemptions to businesses and that the level of this could be set by the Council.

The Leader responded to the questions that had been asked. He advised that the council tax base had to be set by 31 January and that as long as this was done by this date he could not see any difficulties being caused to precepting authorities. He also advised Members that whilst he welcomed the additional funding, he would have like to have seen more of this and more of the business rates generated in Thurrock being kept by the Council. Finally, he informed Members that whilst he was aware of the hardship exemptions that could be given, he had hoped that more powers would have been available to the Council.

Upon being put to the vote, the Mayor declared the recommendations contained within the report to be carried.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Council delegates to the S151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council:**
 - (a) The setting of the Council Tax Base;**
 - (b) The determination of the balance on the Collection Fund and its subsequent allocation to precepting bodies; and**
 - (c) The submission of the NNDR 1.**

2. **That copies of the completed council tax base, collection fund balances, and associated submissions be provided to Members in writing as soon as they are completed.**

116. REPORT FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSFORMATION & COMMUNITY

Members received a report from Councillor Lynn Worrall, Cabinet Member for Community.

The report of the Cabinet Member was set out on pages 47 to 50 of the Agenda. Members questioned the Cabinet Member and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Anderson raised the issue of the promotion of community events and that the Council had a safety advisory group, whose job was to ensure that practical matters, such as road closures, policing and litter clearance, were all in place to allow such events to proceed as planned. He advised the Cabinet Member that, as a result of this group, a number of events in Corringham had been cancelled and that the both the Corringham Carnival and Stanford Festival had been put in doubt. He asked the Cabinet Member if she would “feel the collar” of this group and endeavour to ensure that events would be supported in future.

Councillor Worrall informed the Chamber that she would undertake to do this.

- Councillor Gledhill asked what the Cabinet Member intended to do to ensure that certain sections of the community would not be disadvantaged by the transformation project and the introduction of technology.

Councillor Worrall recognised that whilst a number of people did make use of online technology, others did not. She advised Members that it was not her intention for the option of face-to-face contact to be removed completely and that this would continue to be made available to ensure that the needs of the older and more vulnerable residents continued to be met.

- Councillor Ojetola advised that the recent census report showed that there was a growing diverse community in Thurrock. He sought assurances that the Cabinet Member would do all she could to engage and reach all parts of the community. He also highlighted a petition that had recently been submitted to the Council by the Nepalese community.

The Cabinet Member informed the Members that the Council did try its best to engage with everybody and that it was working with organisations, such as TRUST, and others in the voluntary sector to ensure that all communities were engaged.

- Councillor Revell noted that the written report stated that “the Council spends a lot of money” and asked whether officers had prepared an up-to-date set of accounts showing the money spent so far and how this has been spent. He asked the Cabinet Member to provide a comprehensive reply to his question.

Councillor Worrall informed Members that she met with her officers on a weekly basis and that finance was on the agenda for each of those meetings. Councillor Worrall advised Members that she would be happy to share the financial information she had been given with any Member who wished to receive this.

- Councillor Little noted that the written report made no mention of the broadband scheme for rural communities in Thurrock. She asked what the Cabinet Member had done to secure the funding that was available from the government for this, as bids had to be sent in by 1 March.

Councillor Worrall informed Members that she recalled that this matter had been brought to her attention by Councillor Little some months ago and that she had facilitated a meeting between Councillor Little and the relevant officer to discuss the best way to take this forward for her community. Councillor Worrall advised Members that as she had not heard anything further from Councillor Little in this regard, she was not aware that Councillor Little was unhappy with the answer that had been provided by the relevant officer.

- Councillor Johnson commented that from the report presented to the meeting, it was clear that a technology transformation was taking place. He stated that a true transformation needed to be based around a zero based budget, which was something promised by the Leader of the Council in 2010, and requested the Portfolio Holder speak to the Leader to see when this will happen and report back to the Council.

Councillor Worrall informed Members that she would be happy to meet with the Leader on this matter and report back.

117. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

A copy of the transcript of questions and answers can be viewed on CMIS at <http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/cmiswebpublic/>.

118. REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Purkiss informed Members that the Mucking Visitor Centre for Essex Wildlife Trust had been a success and an asset to the Borough and encouraged Members to visit the Centre.

Councillor Gledhill informed Members that he had now begun to receive updates from the Local Government Information Unit and that he had forwarded these to Cabinet Members and Shadow Cabinet Members.

119. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES AND SUB-COMMITTEES

The Minutes of Committees and Sub Committees, as set out in the Agenda, were received.

120. MOTIONS UPDATE REPORT

Members received an information report updating them on progress in respect of Motions resolved at Council over the past year.

Councillor Ojetola requested an update on the motion that he had put to Council on 28 November 2012. He advised Members that he had received an assurance that the Council would work with agencies but requested information as to what had actually been done.

The Mayor informed Councillor Ojetola that an update would be provided to him.

121. MOTIONS

The Mayor informed the Chamber that one motion had been submitted for consideration at the meeting.

Motion 1

The motion, as printed on the Agenda, was proposed by Councillor Halden and seconded by Councillor Revell.

A number of Members from all sides of the Chamber spoke to express their support for the Motion.

During the course of debate, it was noted that the purpose of the motion was for Cabinet Members to monitor budgets and provide more transparency for residents.

Whilst supporting the Motion, some Members were of the view that it was the responsibility of overview and scrutiny committees to scrutinise financial information, whilst others felt that the Cabinet Member should be able to present financial information and answer questions on this.

The view was also expressed that a report provided by the Cabinet Member should focus on their portfolio and that these should not be too prescriptive. Furthermore, concern was raised that the report could become the subject of financial questions only, effectively ignoring the other aspects of the work done by the Cabinet Member.

It was suggested that a template could be designed to capture financial information, such as the budget at the beginning of the year, the budget to date and any variance on the budget.

Upon being put to the vote, Members voted in favour of the Motion, whereupon the Mayor declared this to be carried.

RESOLVED:

It is the will of council that members should defend their taxpayers. As such, council requires a specific section on every portfolio holder report to full council (delivered under the provisions of chapter 2 part 2 section 3.8 of the constitution) be dedicated to financial matters.

This financial section of the report should cover all finance and budget issues of the portfolio that the portfolio holder considers relevant, including (but not limited to): fiscal management; budget responsibility of the cabinet member; receipts and actual spend vs. predicted spend; the levels of virements; and value for money.

The meeting finished at 8.46 p.m.

Approved as a true and correct record

MAYOR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Steve Jones, telephone (01375) 652107,
or alternatively e-mail sjones@thurrock.gov.uk**