

MINUTES of the meeting of the Council held on 26 February 2014 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillors Tony Fish (Mayor), Wendy Curtis (Deputy Mayor), Phil Anderson, Clare Baldwin (to 8.55pm), Lynn Carr, Mark Coxshall, Charles Curtis, Angie Gaywood, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, Sue Gray, Yash Gupta, Garry Hague, James Halden, Martin Healy, Shane Hebb, Wendy Herd, Terence Hipse, Victoria Holloway, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent (to 9.00pm), John Kent, Charlie Key, Aaron Kiely, Steve Liddiard, Susan Little, Suzanne MacPherson, Ben Maney, Val Morris-Cook (from 7.04pm to 8.51pm), Tunde Ojetola, Bukky Okunade, Barry Palmer (to 9.25pm), Maureen Pearce, John Purkiss, Robert Ray, Joycelyn Redsell, Michael Revell (to 9.28pm), Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice (from 7.01pm to 9.07pm), Andrew Roast, Sue Shinnick, Andy Smith, Philip Smith, Richard Speight, Michael Stone (to 9.38pm), Pauline Tolson, Simon Wootton and Lynn Worrall.

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.

The Mayor informed all in attendance that he had agreed to a request to film the meeting from Your Thurrock.

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

112 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Council meeting, held on 22 January 2014, were approved as a correct record.

113 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

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

114 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Shinnick declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item 12, as she was employed by Serco.

Councillor Wendy Curtis declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 6, Questions from Members of the Public, in that she was a member of the Mardyke Woods Project Advisory Group.

Councillor Gaywood declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item 19, as a member of her family worked at the school.

Councillor Hebb advised the Chamber that whilst he did not wish to declare an interest, he wished to note that, in respect of Agenda Item 19, a member of his family worked at the school.

During the course of item 19, Councillor Fish declared a non-pecuniary interest, as he was a governor of Beacon Hill School and the school had been mentioned during debate.

115 ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor informed the Chamber that since January, he had continued to attend Mayoral engagements and that by the end of February he would have attended in excess of 300 engagements.

The Mayor informed Members that he had attended events held on holocaust Memorial Day and had the honour of laying the first pebble at the new memorial at the garden in Highview Avenue in Grays.

Members were informed that the Mayor had the privilege of meeting the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall during their recent visit to High House Production Park at Purfleet.

The Mayor reported that he had attended the Civic Awards, also held at the High House Production Park, and observed that this was a great success which celebrated the unsung heroes of the Borough.

The Leader of the Council was then invited to make any announcements he wished to make.

The Leader advised the Chamber on the progress that had been made on Education in Thurrock and the good work that had been undertaken to improve results. Members were informed that four years ago a third of Thurrock primary schools were “good” or “outstanding” and that at the end of 2013 this figure had improved to 59% of primary schools and 80% of secondary schools.

It was reported that although much progress had been made, there were still improvements to make, particularly at Primary School level, as recognised by Ofsted.

Members were informed that according to the new measure which assessed the percentage of pupils who achieved a good level in reading, maths and writing, Thurrock Schools achieved 60% compared with 63% nationally, 61% in Southend and 62% across Essex.

It was reported that in writing 92% of Thurrock pupils made good progress, compared to 91% nationally and Thurrock pupils achieved 87% in maths compared with 88% nationally – which was better than both Southend and Essex. He recognised that this was a positive news story for Thurrock Schools and pupils.

The Leader noted that although Thurrock was making significant progress the Borough was not at the standard that it wanted to be yet, and that it was important to embrace Ofsted comments and reports and use this information to ensure Thurrock's schools and colleges improved.

The Leader informed the Chamber that a positive meeting had been held between council officers and School and Academy Head Teachers from across the Borough, where it was agreed that the date for the first Thurrock Schools Awards event was to be held during the first term of the new school year. Members were advised that further details would be available soon.

116 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/thurrock>

117 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 not been given by any councillors or members of the public that they wished to present a petition at the meeting.

118 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.

119 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.

It was confirmed by the Leader, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Independent Group that no changes to appointments were to be made.

120 BORROWING AND INVESTMENT ANNUAL STRATEGY AND THE ANNUAL MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION STATEMENT 2014/15

Councillor J Kent introduced the report which set out the borrowing and investment activities for the forthcoming year, and highlighted that it was important that any borrowing activities were both affordable and sustainable and supported the approved Capital Programme.

The Leader explained that the report set the scene for the Council's borrowing strategy in order to fund the Wholly Owned Housing Company, Gloriana, in addition to the Council's own new housing building schemes within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

Members were reminded that in August 2010 a Debt Rescheduling Exercise had been conducted whereby the Council's fixed rate public works loans board's debts, which totalled £84 million, were repaid and replaced with a short date temporary debt that was continually reviewed. It was reported that this was expected to save the authority in the region of £11.5 million by the end of 2013/14 and a further £6.5 million of savings when the debt would be re-fixed in 2015/16.

Members were informed that this exercise would deliver £18 million of savings and placed the authority in a stronger position, and, that this had been achieved from a starting point of reserves totalling £2 million.

Councillor J Kent noted that this report had already been approved by Cabinet and referred to the Council for approval.

In response, the Leader of the Opposition welcomed the report and echoed the sentiments that were contained within it. He commented that the changes to the Treasury Management approach were underpinned by the Central Government Economic Strategy.

However he expressed concern that the report, together with others on the agenda, proposed decisions regarding Gloriana to be delegated to Cabinet. Members were informed that this would in effect give Cabinet the powers they required in order to set up and make decisions regarding Gloriana, which included the lending on a yet undetermined figure thought to be in the region of £60 million.

The Leader of the Opposition advised the Chamber that he felt uncomfortable delegating such decisions and that when borrowing and

lending significant sums to Gloriana, it was important that there was an opportunity to scrutinise these decisions.

He expressed support for Gloriana in principle and the work that had been achieved so far in creating a vision for new affordable homes provision and flexible tenancies in Thurrock. However, the Chamber were informed that Council should have the opportunity to debate Gloriana in full so that a clear mandate with cross party support could be achieved.

The Leader of the Opposition called for recommendation 1.2 to be deferred until after debate had taken place at Full Council.

The Leader did not agree to accept this proposal.

The Leader of the Opposition therefore proposed an amendment to recommendation 1.2 which read as follows:

‘That the Council defer any decision on any changes to the Prudential Indicators to Cabinet where changes are required due to the delivery mechanism for affordable homes in the borough as outlined in paragraph 2.16 until such time as a full debate on the mandate and policy for the establishment of Gloriana has been conducted at Full Council.’

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Gledhill spoke in support of the proposal and raised the following points:

- That he identified with the positive benefits of Gloriana;
- He was concerned with the impact of the £60 million borrowing strategy, which would have an anticipated interest repayment in the region of £140 per household in Thurrock in 2017/18.
- He acknowledged that there would be money coming back from Gloriana to cover this cost but until a time when all Members were fully informed of the impact, including a full benefits and risk analysis, the decision should be deferred.

Councillor Revell stated that as the money to fund Gloriana directly or indirectly would come from the Thurrock taxpayer, the Council was required to demonstrate value for money and that currently he felt the information supplied was too vague.

The Leader of the Opposition, as the mover of the amendment, stated that in his opinion it was prudent that such a significant financial decision ought to be debated by the Council, rather than delegated in trust to Cabinet.

In response the Leader emphasised that:

- Work had been undertaken on the Wholly Owned Company (Gloriana) for the best part of a year;
- Briefings had been scheduled with officers during this time which allowed Elected Members to ask sufficient questions;
- Detailed reports relating to Gloriana had been submitted to Cabinet and relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees and as a result there had been the opportunity for decisions to be called in;
- The average cost of a house in Thurrock had risen from £57,000 in 1997 to £182,000 in 2012 whilst annual income during the same period had only risen from £16,000 to under £21,000. This made the prospect of Thurrock residents owning their own home out of reach for many.
- To delay Gloriana was to delay positive opportunities for Thurrock residents and the construction of new homes.

The amendment was put to the vote, upon which 24 Members voted in favour and 25 Members voted against, whereupon the Mayor declared that the amendment was lost.

Thereafter the Mayor put the substantive recommendations to the vote, upon which 25 Members voted in favour of the recommendation and 24 Members voted against, whereupon the Mayor declared this to be carried.

RESOLVED:

That Council:

- 1.1 Agree the Prudential Indicators as set out in Appendix 1;**
- 1.2 Delegate any changes to the Prudential Indicators to Cabinet where changes are required due to the delivery mechanism for affordable homes in the borough as outlined in paragraph 2.16;**
- 1.3 Agree the Annual Borrowing and Investment Strategy starting from paragraph 2.32;**
- 1.4 Approve the Annual Borrowing and Investment Strategy and the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement for 2014/15 as follows;**
 - (a) For debt where the government provides revenue support the Council will set aside 4% of the notional debt relating to capital investment, but excluding capital investment on the HRA housing stock (known as the non-HRA capital financing requirement;**

- (b) For debt where the government provides no revenue support: - where the debt relates to an asset the Council will set aside a sum equivalent to repaying debt over the life of the asset in equal instalments, or where the debt relates to expenditure which is subject to a capitalisation direction issued by the government, the Council will set aside a sum equivalent to repaying debt over a period consistent with the nature of the expenditure except where the Head of Corporate Finance believes that the expenditure will result in a capital receipt that will repay the debt at some point in the future; and**

1.5 Note the revised 2013/14 and 2014/15 borrowing and investment projections as set out in the report.

121 BUDGET 2014/15 - PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES

The Mayor advised the Chamber that a new recommendation was to be proposed by the Leader of the Opposition and that a copy of this had been circulated at the meeting.

The Leader introduced the report which had been referred to the Council by the Cabinet. In doing so, he accepted the new recommendation, to be proposed by the Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition informed Members that there was considerable detail contained within the report and that a lot of good work had been carried out. However, he expressed the opinion that the level of detail contained within the report was inappropriate, and cited references to charges for refreshments and catering at the Culver Centre Cafe, bouncy castle and DVD hire.

The Leader of the Opposition advised the Chamber that he felt that the process for setting catering charges at a session of full Council was onerous and that commercially viable establishments, such as the Culver Centre Cafe and the Grays Beach Cafe, should set their own fees in line with competitors. It was further reported that next year, the fees and charges report should focus on the minimum level of charges that the Council was required and allowed to set and that these ought to be at a level that could be scrutinised, rather than focussing on charges for items that are commercially traded.

The Leader of the Opposition concluded that an informal working party should be established with Council Officers and Members to scrutinise the fees and charges report and establish the appropriate items that should be included within the report for the following year. It was indicated that this would allow officers the freedom and flexibility to run services efficiently and in a more commercially minded manner.

Councillor Gaywood welcomed the report and praised the inclusion of the pledge that the first two parking permits for Thurrock residents living in commuter areas were free. She called for Members of the Opposition to make the same pledge.

Councillor Gledhill echoed the sentiments of the Leader of the Opposition and advised Members that he would like to see the working group be tasked to also examine statutory fees and charges. He explained that it needed to be investigated whether Thurrock's statutory charges were too low or high and that a move to localism and local determination of fees and charges was required. Members were informed that it was hoped that the results of the working group could demonstrate this argument to Central Government to call for Thurrock to have the power and flexibility to charge the appropriate amount in order to make services profitable but also fair for residents.

Councillor Purkiss observed that the enforcement fees for offences relating to vehicles for sale on a public highway needed to be examined more closely, as he felt that this was a real issue in Thurrock.

In his summing up, the Leader empathised with the sentiments expressed by Councillor Gledhill regarding localism. In response to Councillor Purkiss, he acknowledged that nuisance parking was a problem and believed that the charges were statutory but this would be investigated and an update provided in due course.

The Leader agreed to accept the additional recommendation to be proposed by Councillor Anderson and seconded by Councillor Gledhill as set out below:

'That a joint working group of officers and Members be established to review fees and charges and refresh the fees and charges policy with a view to removing commercially traded services from the schedule.'

Upon being put to the vote, Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations, including the new additional recommendation outlined above, whereupon the Mayor declared these to be carried.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

- 1.1 Agree the changes to discretionary fees and charges; and**
- 1.2 Note the changes in statutory fees and charges for 2014/15 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.**
- 1.3 That a joint working group of officers and Members be established to review fees and charges and refresh the fees**

and charges policy with a view to removing commercially traded services from the schedule.

122 2014/15 GENERAL FUND BUDGET REPORT

The Mayor informed the Chamber that recommendation 1.11 had been amended from that printed in the report, following details of the precept that had been set by the Essex Police and Crime Panel. The new amended wording was circulated to Members in hard copy.

The Mayor invited the Leader of the Council to introduce the budget and advised that he had 20 minutes to do so.

Councillor J Kent

'Thank you Mr Mayor and I think 20 minutes is very generous, but I am sure everybody will be glad to know that I don't intend to use all of the 20 minutes. Part of the reason for that of course is that much of the work for 2014/15 budget was done a year ago when this Council made the sensible decision to set in principle at least a 2 year budget. There have had to be some changes but we were prepared for them. Our sound financial management had seen us put money aside for emergencies. So we were prepared for the £2.4m hit that we have had to take from the closure of the Tilbury Power Station. Last year, Mr Mayor, some said that we were silly, some even said that we were stupid to money into reserves when we are having to make cuts, at the time I said that we were being prudent and so it has proved.

In addition Mr Mayor, our hard work to raise reserves to a sensible level has allowed us to protect the ordinary working men and women of Thurrock from another increase in Council Tax. The Fire Service has followed suit, so it is only the Essex Police part of the bill that will be going up this year and you will not be surprised to learn that they are putting their part of the bill up by very nearly 2%. Last year Mr Mayor, when we were considering the two year budget, we agreed to plan for a 1.9% increase in Council Tax, as time went on it became ever more obvious that whatever national politicians may say, wages are still not keeping up with inflation, train tickets, heating and lighting costs, the weekly shop, the cost of childcare are all going up and making even deeper inroads into our pockets, so it was important that we did the little that we can in the fight against the cost of living crisis that is affecting so many.

Mr Mayor the government has changed the way its council tax freeze grant works, so that the money given will not drop out of the calculation in a year or two, that meant that we were able to top up the budget by £400,000 from reserves and ask officers to make appropriate savings that were scheduled for 2015 onwards and bring them forward. Because that is what we have been able to do, the two year budget has meant that we have been able to look further ahead into the huge

challenges that are yet to come. That does not mean that we have stood still this past year, we have been working hard to deliver savings.

For instance Mr Mayor, by renegotiating with water companies, they now pay us an extra £200,000 for collecting their water rates. We have cut housing management costs by £230,000, we have saved a £1000 per day by more efficient management of our assets and we stand to keep an extra £6m of business rates income over the next four years by negotiating our pooling arrangements with neighbouring authorities, Basildon and Havering and yes, with Barking and Dagenham. Mr Mayor when it comes to B&D (as its known) we have to talk about shared management and shared services. Of course we share with many other authorities, we even now share a service with the government itself as we announced a couple of weeks ago. We will have saved over £0.5m (an estimated £560,000) in 2013/14 compared to £350,000 a year before. In public health we successfully fought and battled for months to get the £1.1m shortfall in the public health grant that we should have received at the start of the year back. We have saved over £150,000 by bringing the number of people with learning disabilities back home to Thurrock from expensive out of borough placements. That is better for them and it is better for their families.

We have reduced the use of temporary accommodation including bed and breakfast for the most vulnerable, saving so far, £100,000. All the more important, Mr Mayor, when we know the amount of people sleeping rough in the United Kingdom has risen by a third under this government. We have moved teenage students onto the popular post 16 bus pass, allowing them to travel around the borough throughout the week, and us to deliver over £100,000 of savings. By making our work with young people not in education, employment or training, the so call NEETs, everyone's job, we have not only saved over £80,000 but our performance has improved too. Our NEET figures are now at 5.5% a reduction of 1.1 percentage points from 1 year ago. The amount of our young people not know to the system is down to 0.3% that is a reduction of 6.1% from December 12 and the best performance from anywhere in the country.

Mr Mayor, I also want to take this opportunity to highlight some proposals that could have a major impact, a really positive impact on our borough and our lives. Two of them will be discussed at overview and scrutiny next week, and I would ask the members of the overview and scrutiny committee to look carefully at the plans and to report their thoughts to Cabinet. We will be examining them ourselves a fortnight later.

The first is a really important and potentially exciting plan for Purfleet. We have spoken many times over the years about the future of Purfleet and how it will lead the west of the borough into the future. The proposal that the committee is being asked to scrutinise, if we were to agree to it, would do far more than that. Yes, it would deliver the new

homes and jobs that we are looking for, but also the proposal from a consortium headed by Sir Tim Laurence would look to build of the amazing creative industries rapidly being established just down the road at High House. To provide a half million square feet of high tech film and television studios. Now Mr Mayor, I am really looking forward to the Committee's deliberations and hearing their recommendations, but that is not all. They are also being asked to examine the latest proposals for Grays South and the Railway Station, another exciting project. Not on the same scale perhaps, but it is a key part of our hopes to turn Grays into a thriving and bustling and exciting town that will attract new business, now shoppers and even new and first time visitors to the area. Again, it is important that the committee looks over these proposals with a keen eye and lets the cabinet know exactly what it thinks.

It is important that we get these decisions right and it is important that everybody looks closely and speaks out about them. These are not small decisions, they are decisions which could affect everyone in the Borough for decades to come. Film and television studios, the Royal Opera House scenery headquarters, the Royal Opera Houses costume store, factory, museum coming soon, the National Centre for backstage theatre training, all Mr Mayor in Purfleet.

If we put that together with the proposals for Grays and we put it with the fact that we have secured £4m funding for local businesses and interest free loans through the Tiger scheme, the fact that we lead across half of Essex on helping business reduce their carbon footprint from their costs, the fact that we have supported Grays based businesses to create a town team, the support that we are given to help create jobs at Thames Oil Port and Enterprise Park, plus all the work we are doing to encourage businesses small, medium and large to flourish, clearly demonstrates that we are a very business friendly authority and that Thurrock is open for business.

There is Mr Mayor an exciting future ahead, but equally we have to remember that we are still in extremely challenging times. The government has already announced £25m of cuts for this Authority over the three years from April 2015 and that is without increased pressures on Adult Social Care, because we are all living longer, childrens' services, we need to ensure our young people are safe, environmental services, more people are coming to live here, transport, we all know that our roads need a lot of work to get them up to scratch.

We reckon Mr Mayor that the savings needed by 2018 will be in the region of £35m-£40m. That is somewhere between a quarter and a third of our total budget. A quarter and a third Mr Mayor, I do ask, imagine what you would have to do at home if your income was cut in that way! Now members would have seen posters around the building showing that we have been asking staff to come forward with money saving ideas and they have been doing that. Elected members also

need to think carefully about what they ask for and to put their minds to where savings can be made.

We are putting together an online programme that allows people to see the consequences of taking £40m out of the budget. The areas and services that will be hit, and the problems that we are facing. There will also, Mr Mayor, be an opportunity for local people to put forward their own money saving ideas to suggest new ways of working, to look at areas where the Council may be able to increase its income or work more closely with other authorities or organisations.

So Mr Mayor, in closing, Council tax has been frozen at the lowest rate in Essex, reserves rebuilt, innovative ways of working, the most exciting regeneration agenda anywhere in the country and a council that is ready to meet the huge financial challenges to come. Mr Mayor I move the recommendations.'

The Mayor then invited the Leader of the Opposition to respond and advised that he had 15 minutes to do so.

Councillor P Anderson

'Thank you Mr Mayor. I am not planning on using it either, but I thought I would just check the time anyway.

People sometimes try and compare the budget for a local council to the budget for a business or a household.

In some ways that comparison is valid. Just like any home or any business, the council has to live within its means, and ensure that the incomings and outgoings are in balance. But in one important respect the council's budget is very different. If a business is run inefficiently or tries to charge too much for its products, its customers will desert it and it will go bust. If a council does the same, it can simply pass on the costs so local council tax payers who have no choice but to pay up.

Just two weeks ago, the Cabinet was presented with a proposed budget which included a 2% increase in council tax. This, despite the fact that the government was offering a £600,000 grant to Thurrock if we agreed to again to freeze our council tax this year. Mr Mayor, to refuse that freeze grant again and raise council tax would have been the wrong decision. It would have sent a message to Thurrock taxpayers, who are themselves having to deal with static wages and rising household bills that the council will look after its own and leave you to pick up the tab.

Then, in an announcement which seemed to come as a surprise to everyone from myself to, I suspect, even the council's finance department, we were told that the administration had changed their minds and had now decided to accept the freeze grant after all. No-

one seems quite sure how this came about. Maybe the leader of the council had some kind of revelation that fairness has to include fairness to the hard working local people who pay the bills. Maybe it was some kind of political survival instinct cutting in. Either way, I do congratulate the administration over their change of heart on this matter and confirm our whole hearted support for the fact that Thurrock's share of the Council Tax will now be frozen this year.

Then we come to the matter of the expenditure budget. Just like a household or a business, once we know how much income we expect the council to receive, we can then determine who that money will be spent. In previous years we have spent many hours in scrutiny committees and in the council chamber debating the merits of proposals for increases in some services and cuts to others. Sometimes we have become involved in detail to the point of distraction. I clearly remember a long and hard fought debate about whether the council should continue to lock local parks at night, a service which cost less than £10,000 per year. At less than 0.01% of the council's annual budget, we would perhaps have been justified in saying 'just get on with it'. But it shows how seriously balancing the books was taken.

But not this year. Instead of a detailed set of proposals, we have been presented with a cursory couple of pages which basically amount to 'do the same as last year and hope it works out'. In fact, Councillor Kent has given far more detail in the speech he has given us, than the actual recommendations in the actual documents that we are being asked to vote on tonight.

Even worse, the proposed budget does not balance. On page 129 it clearly shows that the budget will be financed in part by taking £2.4 million out of reserves, just to keep day to day services running. It is being suggested that instead of offering a plan for how this shortfall will be made up, we should leave it to officers to try and come up with something in-year.

Mr Mayor, the lack of political leadership this shows, is breathtaking. The administration has tonight invited us to consider and vote on the price of a sausage sandwich, but expects us to gloss over a £2.4m hole in the budget with a vague 'trust us, it will be OK'. For the record that amounts to 519,518 and-a-half sausage sandwiches; something which even the stalwart staff of the Culver Centre canteen would struggle to serve up.

Using reserves in-year is sometimes necessary; that is why we have them. In fact, over £2 million intended to go into future reserves was actually used to prop up overspends in last year's budget. But to start the year planning to depend on reserves even before the in-year pressures have happened is reckless and wrong. It is also cowardly. To list it out in full would reveal the extent to which the council is living

beyond its means, and to identify exactly where those savings are going to be made, and we are saying they will have to be made this year, would require tough decisions and political courage. The administration would have to face the hard truth that its social care model is not financially sustainable, its centralised education function no longer fits the modern world of academies and free schools, and its approach to managing leisure and cultural facilities is driven by nostalgia rather than good business sense.

But rather than risk a few challenging headlines and negative election leaflets, this administration has tried to gloss over the problem and pretend that the savings don't have to be made or that deciding where to make them is somebody else's responsibility.

Deciding on those £2.4m of savings is not officers' responsibility; it is yours. If you don't want to shoulder it then the answer is simple: stand down and we will do it for you. Residents of Thurrock know what needs to be done with public finances, they know that the work isn't finished yet, and although no-one likes having to live with less they know who they can trust to get the job done and that is the Conservative party.

Mr Mayor, we have repeatedly called for this council to adopt the rigorous discipline of zero base budgeting. Instead we have been offered zero detail budgeting, zero courage budgeting, and zero responsibility budgeting.

I am confident that accepting the government's freeze grant gives us the right financial footing to set a budget for 2014-15. I have no confidence that the proposals before us tonight about expenditure are the best way to manage that budget, and no confidence in this administration's ability either to deliver it or to make the £2.4m of further savings they have tried to bury in the detail.

On that basis, we will of course be supporting the council tax freeze and the statutory resolutions that flow out of it, but we cannot support the detail of the expenditure budget that goes with it.

I had also hoped that we might have been able to reach consensus on the enabling motions for Gloriana, but 1.7(e) again delegates to Cabinet the ability to agree that advances to Gloriana be considered as part of the general fund capital programme. Again, I would have asked that be deferred, it does not seem that it has been, so again I would move that we change that recommendation to say: That the ability to agree advances to Gloriana to be considered as part of the capital fund programme be deferred until a full debate on Gloriana has taken place at full council."

The Mayor asked the Leader of the Opposition whether he proposed a formal amendment. The Leader of the Opposition confirmed that he had proposed an amendment to recommendation 1.7(e).

Councillor Gledhill seconded the proposed amendment to recommendation 1.7(e).

The Mayor invited Councillor J Kent to respond.

Councillor Kent

'Thank you Mr Mayor, I really thought the sausage sandwich game earlier was going to be the funniest bit of the evening tonight, until I heard that. Mr Mayor, Councillor Anderson suggests that we duck difficult decisions, and that we should stand aside and allow the conservatives to take the administration instead, I do have to remind Councillor Anderson that since 2010 we have made savings of over £50m. We did not do that by ducking difficult decisions. He suggested that we should stand aside and let the conservatives have go, we remember what happened the last time the conservatives run the Council. Under this labour administration, Council Tax in real terms would have gone down by 2% and six years of conservatives it went up by 27%. Mr Mayor, at the same time they deluded our reserves down to £2m, manage to overspend the budget by £4m at their year end, having already taken £2m out in the year to prop the budget up.

Mr Mayor, people will never ever forget that. The record of this administration, the auditors have signed our accounts off with no complaints whatsoever, we have balanced the budget every year, and we present a balanced budget this year. Yes, we have taken money from reserves. If you read the accounts you will see that we put £1.7m into a contingency last year, that is the £1.7m of the reserve that we are taking because we were concerned that with the localisation of non domestic rates being localised in the way they were, the closure of a large business would impact us dreadfully. That came to pass. The closure of Tilbury Power Station in this full year will cost the council £2.4m. It is right, proper and prudent to use that reserve a little bit more to fill that void.

Mr Mayor, Councillor Anderson seems to live in some kind of dream world. We have already had our grant cut by somewhere in the region of £20m. The government grant will fall by £16m over the next two years. That is a funding cut worth £500 for every single property in this borough. Yes, we have to make difficult decisions, yes we have to make spending cuts, we know that. Councillor Anderson asks where the detail is in the budget. I have to once again remind him that the detail was agreed a year ago. A year ago, these saving proposals went through overview and scrutiny, a year ago he stood there and criticised them, but as I recall did not vote against them. Didn't vote against the principle of putting a 1.9% council tax increase this year in for planning purposes, but he does seem to have totally forgotten that.

I would remind him that once again the working papers for this budget have been to Cabinet on many occasions, but he has given up coming to Cabinet not only does he not bother to ask questions about the budget at Cabinet, but he does not even bother to attend anymore. The big ticket items went through overview and scrutiny at the end of last year, in the normal way, which is how we get here today. You know Mr Mayor, the fact is that he knows that in very very trying circumstances, very difficult circumstances, this is a good budget. It is a balanced budget that delivers the council tax freeze to the people of Thurrock, something the conservatives didn't manage to do in six years running the authority, and they don't like it.'

The Mayor then invited debate on the whole subject of the item, including the amendment and the original motion.

Councillor G Rice congratulated the Leader and Cabinet for their good work and noted that all Members had the opportunity to scrutinise the decision. It was further noted that the Conservative Group had left £2 million in reserves and an over spend when they were in power, and observed that if Thurrock had continued with this overspend they would have become like Liverpool City Council.

Councillor B Rice also congratulated Councillor Kent for delivering what she felt was an amazing budget in times of austerity. She observed that Thurrock had delivered over £50 million worth of savings in the past four years and congratulated everyone in her directorate of Adults, Health and Commissioning who had forecast to break even for the financial year. She explained that this was a significant achievement since the service had delivered £1 million of savings due to government cuts and noted that the forthcoming year would be a bigger challenge in order to deliver a further £1.5 million of savings.

Councillor Gledhill used his right to speak and observed that the Labour Group called financial pressures within year "pressures" but when the Conservative Group were in administration they called them "overspends". He felt that the fact that £4.7 million had been taken out of other budgets and services in order to meet shortfalls had been overlooked. It was stated that the Conservatives did not freeze council tax when they were in power because the Labour Government had not given them the opportunity to freeze it. In relation to the government cuts, it was expressed that the only way to redress the balance was to do what should be done and that was reduce spending across the board.

However Councillor Gledhill welcomed the fact that Councillor Kent was going to investigate to change the way the Council spends tax payers money, and called for a zero based budget.

Councillor T Ojetola explained that since he had taken over the shadow portfolio of education he had visited schools and listened to head teachers and teaching staff and commended their hard work.

However, he expressed concern about the level of performance of children in Thurrock's primary schools and was concerned that children in Thurrock were not getting access to the best opportunities. It was reported that Ofsted found that Thurrock was at the bottom 3 of all schools in England, were the worst in the East of England for the unauthorised absence and exclusion and that Thurrock was below the national level when it came to pupil attainment for 11 year olds in reading, writing and mathematics. Councillor Ojetola welcomed some of the improvements, such as the introduction of the Thurrock Education Commission but felt that these had not gone far enough. He then proposed that the £1.5 million budget kept centrally should be held by the schools forum and distributed to schools directly.

The Mayor asked Councillor Ojetola to clarify whether he wanted to put forward this proposal formally, and it was confirmed by the Leader of the Opposition that the Conservative Group did not and that the point had been made.

Councillor Kiely confirmed that he would be voting against the proposed budget because the finances of Thurrock Council were being ruthlessly cut by the Conservatives in Government. He felt that the cuts to benefits and public services hit the poorest sections of society and people had to choose between eating and heating this winter.

Councillor Wootton welcomed the opportunity for a Council Tax freeze, given the fact that he had seen documents that were expected to go to Cabinet which proposed a 2% increase and confirmed that he would be supporting the freeze. He reiterated the opinion that cost pressures were a euphemism for a significant overspend. It was further reported that the overspend of large directorates were being mitigated from other smaller service areas, such as his own shadow portfolio of Environment and Public Protection which had delivered savings of over £200,000 in staff costs. He observed whether Council should allow one part of the authority to significantly overspend and for that to actually be subsidised by one of the smaller spending directorates which in fact dealt with every citizen in the borough.

In response Councillor Gaywood emphasised that the Environment and Public Protection portfolio was a non-statutory area of funding and although front line services had been lost, efficiencies were required from all services areas.

During the debate a number of other Councillors raised the following key points:

- Councillor A Smith expressed disappointment that the opposition group had not commented upon the excellent regeneration plans for Thurrock, which included the Lakeside extension and Purfleet film studios.
- Councillor Healy reiterated the Thurrock still had the lowest Council tax in Essex.
- Councillor Little felt that Gloriana was good and expected it to deliver affordable tenancies and property sales, but was also concerned that a further more detailed debate at Council was required.
- Councillor Hebb observed that Central Government had helped to revolutionise Social Care and was particularly proud of the Care Bill.

The Mayor invited Councillor Kent to sum up his report. The Leader confirmed that he was not prepared to defer item 1.7(e).

The Mayor sought further clarification from the Leader of the Opposition, as to the precise wording of his amendment to recommendation 1.7(e) to which Councillor Anderson advised that the amendment should read:

'To defer the decision that advances to Gloriana Thurrock Ltd be considered as part of the General Fund capital programme until such a time when the matter has been debated in full at Council.'

The Mayor then called for a vote in respect of the amendment that had been proposed, whereupon 22 Members voted in favour of the amendment and 27 Members voted against whereupon the Mayor declared this to be lost.

The Mayor invited the Chamber to vote on recommendations 1.1 to 1.3, as printed in the report.

All Members present voted in favour of the recommendations, whereupon the Mayor declared these to be carried.

The Mayor explained that a recorded vote would take place on recommendations 1.4 to 1.6, the result of which was:

For: Councillors Clare Baldwin, Charles Curtis, Wendy Curtis, Tony Fish, Angie Gaywood, Oliver Gerrish, Sue Gray, Yash Gupta, Martin Healy, Terry Hipse, Victoria Holloway, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Steve Liddiard, Val Morris-Cook, Bukky Okunade, John Purkiss, Robert Ray, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice, Sue Shinnick, Andy Smith, Phil Smith, Richard Speight, Michael Stone and Lynn Worrall. **(26)**

Against: Councillors Phil Anderson, Lynn Carr, Mark Coxshall, Robert Gledhill, Garry Hague, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Wendy Herd, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Charlie Key, Aaron Kiely, Sue Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Tunde Ojetola, Barry Palmer, Maureen Pearce, Joy Redsell, Mike Revell, Andrew Roast, Pauline Tolson, Simon Wootton. **(23)**

The Mayor declared the recommendations carried.

The Mayor invited the Chamber to vote on recommendation 1.7 (a) to (d) as printed in the report. Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendation, whereupon the Mayor declared this to be carried.

The Mayor explained that a recorded vote would take place on recommendations 1.7(e), the result of which was:

For: Councillors Clare Baldwin, Charles Curtis, Wendy Curtis, Tony Fish, Angie Gaywood, Oliver Gerrish, Sue Gray, Yash Gupta, Martin Healy, Terry Hipsey, Victoria Holloway, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Aaron Kiely, Steve Liddiard, Val Morris-Cook, Bukky Okunade, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice, Sue Shinnick, Andy Smith, Phil Smith, Richard Speight, Michael Stone and Lynn Worrall. **(25)**

Against: Councillors Phil Anderson, Lynn Carr, Mark Coxshall, Robert Gledhill, Garry Hague, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Wendy Herd, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Charlie Key, Sue Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Tunde Ojetola, Barry Palmer, Maureen Pearce, John Purkiss, Robert Ray, Joy Redsell, Mike Revell, Andrew Roast, Pauline Tolson, Simon Wootton. **(24)**

The Mayor declared recommendation 1.7(e) to be carried.

The Mayor invited the Chamber to vote recommendations 1.8 to 1.11 as printed in the report and circulated at the meeting. The result of the vote was:

For: Councillors Phil Anderson, Clare Baldwin, Lynn Carr, Mark Coxshall, Charles Curtis, Wendy Curtis, Tony Fish, Angie Gaywood, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, Sue Gray, Yash Gupta, Garry Hague, James Halden, Martin Healy, Shane Hebb, Wendy Herd, Terence Hipsey, Victoria Holloway, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Charlie Key, Aaron Kiely, 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, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice, Andrew Roast, Sue Shinnick, Andy Smith, Philip Smith, Richard Speight, Michael Stone, Pauline Tolson, Simon Wootton and Lynn Worrall. **(49)**

Against: None **(0)**

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

- 1.1. Consider and acknowledge the Section 151 Officer's (Head of Corporate Finance's) report on the robustness of the proposed budget, the adequacy of the Council's reserves and the reserves strategy as set out in Appendix 1, including the conditions upon which the following recommendations are made;**
- 1.2. Note that, in accordance the delegated authority given to the Head of Corporate Finance by Council on 22 January 2014, the following has been set:**
 - a) The NNDR Collection Fund Balance as a deficit of £2,065,557 apportioned to Thurrock Council (£1,012,123), Central Government (£1,032,779) and Essex Fire and Rescue (£20,656); and**
 - b) The NNDR 1 at £108,067,652 apportioned to Thurrock Council (£52,953,150), Central Government (£54,033,825) and Essex Fire and Rescue (£1,080,677);**
- 1.3. Confirms the Council Tax Band D for 2014/15 at £1,124.64, representing a zero percent increase (excluding other preceptors);**
- 1.4. Approve a General Fund net revenue budget for 2014/15 of £124,260,414 allocated as set out in paragraph 2.30 with further supporting information in Appendix 2;**
- 1.5. Note the Medium Term Financial Strategy as set out in Appendix 4 and instruct officers to identify significant savings to balance the period 2015/16 to 2017/18;**
- 1.6. Approve the new General Fund Capital Schemes and funding of £17.275m for 2014/15 to be added to the current programme as shown in Appendix 7;**
- 1.7. Delegate to Cabinet:**
 - a) the agreement of those capital schemes marked * subject to a business case/report;**

- b) the allocation of any Transport and Education capital grants;
- c) the ability to agree schemes to be added to the capital programme where it can be evidenced that there is a spend to save opportunity;
- d) the ability to agree that any unbudgeted contributions from third parties in the way of grants or developers' contributions be deemed as part of the capital programme; and
- e) the ability to agree that advances to Gloriana Thurrock Ltd be considered as part of the General Fund capital programme.

Statutory Council Tax Resolution

- 1.8. Calculate that the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2014/15 is £52,232,780.
- 1.9. Calculate the following amounts for the year 2014/15 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - (a) £236,135,899 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act.
 - (b) £183,903,119 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
 - (c) £52,232,780 being the amount by which the aggregate at 1.9(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 1.9(b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
 - (d) £1,124.64 being the amount at 1.9(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (the Council Tax Base of 46,444), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts).
 - (e) £0 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act (as per the attached Appendix B).
 - (f) £1,124.64 being the amount at (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (e) above by Item T (the Council Tax Base of 46,444), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.
- 1.10. Notes that the Police and Crime Panel and the Fire Authority have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with

Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwellings in the Council's area.

1.11. Sets, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the aggregate amounts shown in the table below as the amounts of Council Tax for 2014/15 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.

	Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2014/15							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Police (precept)	96.18	112.21	128.24	144.27	176.33	208.39	240.45	288.54
Fire (precept)	44.28	51.66	59.04	66.42	81.18	95.94	110.70	132.84
Council	749.76	874.72	999.68	1,124.64	1,374.56	1,624.48	1,874.40	2,249.28
TOTAL (aggregate)	890.22	1,038.59	1,186.96	1,335.33	1,632.07	1,928.81	2,225.55	2,670.66

At 8:51pm Councillor Morris-Cook asked permission from the Mayor to leave the meeting early due to an outside commitment and for Councillor J Kent to introduce item 13 on her behalf, which the Mayor permitted.

123 HOUSING BASE ESTIMATES, RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES 2014/15

The Leader introduced the report on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Housing, following which the Mayor invited questions from Members.

Councillor Little referred to the proposed changes to the Service Level Agreement for the Caretaking and Grounds Maintenance service contract and felt that this should be opened up to the wider market in order to ensure residents received value for money.

Councillor Johnson welcomed the fact that the number of voids were being turned around quicker but raised concerns regarding residents being allocated homes not ready to move into and the poor standard of housing repairs. In particular he expressed that the condition of council homes in South Ockendon were unacceptable which was something both himself and Councillor Carr had experience of in the number of complaints they received.

Councillor Anderson raised the following points:

- That the Conservative Group had considered challenging the salary and pay awards figure of £429,000 as this seemed like a considerable amount, however, he reassured both Members and the public that a significant amount of this cost was a result of staff transferring into the Council from Europa.
- That the rent convergence target was complicated but that it was a correct and sensible decision.
- That the increased numbers of voids from 600 to 900 was a result of the work that had been undertaken regarding under-occupancy, and more voids had occurred because the authority had met the needs of residents which allowed people to downsize.
- The Housing Revenue Account was in a stronger position than the General Fund.
- That the standard of council homes in Thurrock was not at a level that they should be in and that more work was required in this area.

Councillor Baldwin left the meeting at 8.55pm.

Councillor B Rice echoed concerns regarding the poor condition of housing, particularly in Chadwell St Mary, and welcomed the fact that £70 million would be invested to renovate Council properties over the next five years.

Councillor C Kent left the meeting at 9.00pm.

Councillor Purkiss reported that both the condition and the waiting list of garages were a significant problem in Thurrock. He recounted that a resident had waited for over one year in order to be allocated an unused garage near his property and felt this was unacceptable. He remarked that the council should set a realistic price for garages and sell them to residents.

Councillor Gledhill supported the housing improvement works and recognised that many local authorities did not invest enough money into their housing stock, however as Thurrock was now in control of its own finances they could now do this.

The Leader summed up the debate and made the following comments:

- That the condition of garages was a problem and that they would investigate any individual problems regarding waiting lists further if required.
- That voids should not be transferred to residents if they are not to an acceptable standard.
- The inspection policy required improvement and to be stronger, a balance was needed to be achieved between responding to

tenants when repairs were reported and allowing tenants to take increased responsibility of their properties.

- The efforts of the Director of Housing were noted and that a lot of good work had been undertaken to get the housing department fit for purpose.

Upon being put to the vote 45 Members voted in favour of the recommendations and 1 Member voted against, whereupon the Mayor declared that recommendations contained within the report were carried.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

- 1.1 Note that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is estimated to generate a surplus of £0.311m as at 31 March 2014;**
- 1.2 Agree that the costs pressures set out in Table 4 be included in the base budget for 2014/15;**
- 1.3 Increase domestic rents by an average of 5.64%, in line with the 30-year HRA business planning following rent restructuring guidance, with effect from 7 April 2014;**
- 1.4 Agree a 3.7% increase in de-pooled service charges;**
- 1.5 Agree a 3.2% increase in garage rents;**
- 1.6 Agree a 3.2% increase central heating charges;**
- 1.7 Agree a 3.2% increase in Travellers Sites Rent;**
- 1.8 Agree a prudential borrowing requirement of £25.040million to finance the HRA Development Programme.**
- 1.9 Agree that the HRA maintains its minimum level of general reserves at £1.7m with a maximum level of general reserves of £3.0m.**

Councillor G Rice left the meeting at 9.07pm.

124 REPORT FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

Members received a report from Councillor Okunade, Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care, and were then invited to put questions.

The report of the Cabinet Member was set out on pages 179 to 186 of the Agenda.

At 9.15pm, the Mayor moved a motion to suspend Council Procedure Rule 11.1 to allow the meeting to continue beyond the 2 ½ hour time limit. Members indicated their agreement to the proposal.

Members questioned the Cabinet Member and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Roast noted that the numbers of Looked After Children in Thurrock had risen considerably over the past few years and asked whether there was a plan to reduce these numbers.

The Cabinet Member informed members that a number of initiatives had been introduced in order to prevent the escalation of problems and therefore the need for children to enter the care system. It was explained that the Early Officer of Help and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was just one way that this was being achieved and it was hoped that this would help families who required support. However the Cabinet Member reiterated that it was important not to focus on numbers of children entering the care system and therefore the additional costs associated with this, rather it was of the utmost importance to take children into care who were deemed to be at risk and requiring protection regardless of the costs and figures that would be associated with this.

- Councillor Anderson observed that there had been a £2 million increase in the budget during the course of the year and questioned what plans were being formulated in order to ensure that more work could be done in future years with the limited resources available.

In response, the Cabinet Member reiterated her previous point regarding the establishment of the Multi-Safeguarding Hub and the Early Offer of Help Initiative that aimed to detect problems earlier and prevent them from escalating, however there were no firm guarantees that this would reduce the numbers requiring care and the costs associated with that.

- Councillor Gaywood welcomed the fact that the police were working closely with social workers as part of the Multi-Safeguarding Hub and stated that Thurrock had become the first Council in Essex to have a Police Officer working alongside social workers on cases of domestic abuse. It was reported that Police Officers now had body cameras fitted so that they could assist social workers in their work. It was further welcomed that an initiative had been introduced which led on the local strategy to combat violence against women and girls.
- Councillor Redsell questioned when the Council would develop its own community based assessments rather than relying on external reports which could be expensive.

In response the Cabinet Member clarified that external specialist reports were required for court proceedings and that it was important that these were prepared by an outside observer with the required expertise as officers could be seen to be biased.

- Councillor Halden stated that in the previous year money had been set aside to undertake an audit of the service and asked why this audit had not taken place yet.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that the Peer Review with Southend-on-Sea Borough Council had not yet taken place due to problems with staff availability at Southend-on-Sea Council and that an alternative had been found and the Peer Review arranged soon.

Councillor J Halden clarified that it was not the Peer Review to which he was referring to but rather the independent audit. In response the Cabinet Member agreed to speak to Councillor Halden separately regarding this request and investigate this matter further.

- Councillor Kelly acknowledged the important action of increasing payments for foster carers within the Borough. He felt that this was a welcomed addition to try to recruit new foster carers.

In response the Cabinet Member confirmed that this increase in payment made Thurrock more competitive and appealing to foster carers and that there had been a notable increase in foster care enquiries, however it was too early to state whether this had made a significant difference to the number of council foster carers in Thurrock.

The Cabinet Member summed up the report and praised the good work and dedication of the Head of Children's Care and Targeted Outcomes who was shortly expected to retire. This thank you was supported by all members. She also thanked the good work of the Director of Children's Services for all her efforts.

125 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

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

Councillor Revell left the meeting at 9.28pm; Councillor Palmer left the meeting at 9.35pm and Councillor Stone left the meeting at 9.38pm.

126 REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Gaywood provided an update report to Members on the Police and Crime Panel. A copy of the summary was circulated to the Chamber.

Members were reminded of the outcome of the recent PCSO (Police Community Support Officer) Match Funding Review and Councillor A Gaywood confirmed that the match funding by Essex Police would be ceased. Essex Police had made assurances that there would be no redundancies of PCSO's, and in fact there was an expected PCSO pay under spend of £1.1 million due to unfilled vacancies. Councillor Gaywood informed Members that, as a result of the anticipated under spends, she had not supported the Police precept increase.

127 MINUTES OF COMMITTEES AND SUB-COMMITTEES

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

128 MOTIONS UPDATE REPORT

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

129 MOTIONS

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

Motion 1

The motion, as printed on the Agenda, was proposed by Councillor Hipsey and seconded by Councillor Gaywood.

Councillor Worrall spoke in support of the motion and cited a recent school trip to Berlin and Poland which Treetops pupils also attended. She remarked that the pupils were a credit to the school and encouraged other Members to visit Treetops School.

Councillor B Rice observed that Ofsted had declared the school as 'outstanding' and very effective teaching methods.

Councillor Gerrish had recently visited the school and thanked Councillor Hipsey for bringing the motion forward.

Councillor Anderson felt that the authority should do more to celebrate success, and that Treetops School was a genuine example of excellence within the Borough.

Councillor Redsell recognised the hard work and achievements of Treetops School and also noted that there were other excellent special needs schools within the Borough whose good work should also be recognised.

Councillor J Kent indicated that Treetops school was an outstanding school which had a remarkable head teacher, high expectations of students and was a place of not only learning but enjoyment. He cited a recent fire in the drama studio and the praise staff had for the pupil's response.

Councillor Gaywood stated that Treetops was the only school developing APA therapy and worked to ensure that pupils achieved their best. She said the pupils were a testament to the teaching team who also provided outreach support in the Borough.

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

RESOLVED:

Recently national publicity has demonstrated the Treetops school is among the very best schools in the country for children with special needs, (autism). Therefore, council resolves to congratulate the school on its continued fantastic work with our children and young people.

The meeting finished at 10.10 pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

MAYOR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Stephanie Young, telephone (01375) 652831,
or alternatively e-mail syoung@thurrock.gov.uk**