

26 March 2014	ITEM: 14(i)
Council	
Cabinet Member Report – Regeneration, Highways and Transportation	
Report of: Councillor Andrew Smith	
This report is: Public.	

I am pleased to be able to introduce this report as lead portfolio holder for Regeneration, Highways and Transportation, as these services lie at the heart of the delivery of the Council's ambitions for transforming the lives of our residents. Over the past 3 years, I have placed real emphasis on delivering the outcomes necessary to achieve the regeneration of our communities.

This report is essentially split into two parts. The first part outlines the responsibilities of the key areas of the Portfolio and some of the key successes. The second part focuses on the main challenges over the remainder of the year.

1. THE KEY SERVICE AREAS – RESPONSIBILITIES, PERFORMANCE AND PRIORITIES

The Portfolio is divided into the following 5 areas:

- Strategic Planning and Growth
- Regeneration
- Development Management
- Transportation and Highways

Strategic Planning

Strategic Planning is responsible for Planning Strategy and Policy which includes the following key areas of work:

- The preparation, consultation and production of the Local Plan (including Supplementary Planning Documents, the Local Development Scheme, Statement of Community Involvement and Annual Monitoring Report).
- Assistance and involvement in other corporate plans and strategies (such as Asset Management, Community Strategy, Housing Strategy, Green Grid/Open Space Strategy, Local Transport Plan, Municipal Waste Strategy).
- Involvement in sub-regional strategies and plans (including the work of Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership and studies by Government agencies).

- Provision of planning information, including population and housing statistics, planning fact sheets and development monitor publications.
- Policy input into planning applications and appeals.

The Thurrock Core Strategy, adopted in 2011, has had a key role to play in supporting growth and regeneration and in the determination of planning applications.

As set out in the report to Cabinet in February, a review of the Core Strategy is now required to address recent changes in Government planning policy and to deliver a 'step change' in the progress being made by in driving forward the Council's vision and ambitious growth agenda for Thurrock.

To date the Core Strategy has been instrumental in helping to bring forward proposals for the creation of over 30,000 new jobs and £2.6bn of new investment in the Borough's 5 established Regeneration Hubs together with the development of a 6th and new Regeneration Hub at Thames Enterprise Park.

The review of the Core Strategy will further accelerate the growing momentum behind the regeneration of Thurrock by ensuring that right development opportunities and infrastructure are available in the right place, and at the right time, to make the most of proposed improvements to the Borough's strategic accessibility and as a focus for growth across the wider Thames Gateway South Essex area.

It is important to recognise that the Core Strategy is "*not broken*" – it simply requires up-dating to build upon the enormous growth potential and opportunities that have been delivered under the current strategy.

Until its replacement the Core Strategy will remain in place and play a crucial role in maintaining investor confidence and economic growth in Thurrock as recently demonstrated the recent planning permissions for £230million of new retail and leisure floorspace at Lakeside and the delivery of the largest ever development consent in the country via the Local Development Order at London Gateway.

In order to shorten the process of preparing the new local plan, work already undertaken to date in preparing the Site Allocations Local Plan and the Focused Review of the Core Strategy Broad Locations and Strategic Sites will automatically be "banked" and rolled forward in the production of the new Local Plan.

Regeneration

The Regeneration Service was created in March 2013 following a restructure to incorporate the transferred functions from the Development Corporation. The Service, which has recently completed its first full year of operation, is located within the Chief Executive's Delivery Unit and is responsible for leading a broad range of the Council's regeneration, growth and economic development work from policy/strategy through to implementation. The key areas of work are:

- Providing the Corporate lead on all regeneration activity including partnership and cross boundary working, establishing policy priorities, programme governance, championing neighbourhood renewal and unlocking barriers to physical regeneration;
- Development and delivery of regeneration programmes to realise the Council's visions for the six growth hubs – Grays, Tilbury, Purfleet, Lakeside, London Gateway and Thames Enterprise Park;
- Delivery of major regeneration projects including Purfleet Centre, Thurrock Learning Campus, Grays South and High House Production Park;
- Economic Development including business support and engagement, inward investment and marketing and the delivery of economic programmes and projects; and
- Maximising funding opportunities in support of the regeneration agenda through public and private routes.

Over the past 12-18 months, the Regeneration Service has focussed on securing real, tangible progress in the delivery of the Council's growth ambitions within the six Growth Hubs. This has resulted in the development and, through Cabinet, adoption of high level visions for Purfleet, Grays and Tilbury which now direct the authorities work in those locations.

Our efforts have increasingly taken our work outside of the Borough's boundaries in order to secure the resources necessary to support delivery. Notable successes include the Council's leading roles in establishing a Business Rate Pool with the London Borough's of Havering and Barking and Dagenham and Basildon which we expect will generate approximately £6m over the next four years and the £3.0m extension of ERDF funded Low Carbon Business Programme which we now deliver over mid-Essex as well as South Essex.

The past six months have seen our partnership work ramp up considerably with our involvement in the crafting of the Strategic Economic Plan through the South East Local Enterprise Partnership. Thurrock has taken a leading role on behalf of the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership on both the transport and economic development workstreams; placing us at the forefront of efforts to secure £200m for South Essex communities. The final draft of the Strategic Economic Plan is due to be submitted at the end of March 2014 and it is expected that negotiation will continue up until July/August at which time we will know how much resource we will secure through the devolved Local Growth Fund.

Our ask of Government covers a comprehensive package of transport, property, business support and skills measures to support the delivery of our growth agenda through the six growth hubs. However, in advance of this funding decision, we continue to work up proposals in each of these locations and, where possible, implement those projects which can be taken forward by the Council through existing resources. This is borne out through recent reports to PTR Overview and

Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet on exciting proposals including:

- The appointment of a preferred developer for the delivery of the Purfleet Centre proposals including a 500,000sqft film and television studio and more than 2,300 new homes;
- The refurbishment of Grays Magistrates Court to provide affordable managed workspace for start up businesses;
- The redevelopment of Grays South to replace the level crossing with a boulevard underpass incorporating a new rail station and public squares;
- The expansion of the Thurrock Learning Campus in Grays;
- The redevelopment of the Coryton Refinery site to create Thames Enterprise Park - a 400acre centre for Green Technology and Energy firms; and
- Development of long standing proposals for the Transport and Logistics Academy into a tangible business plan for a partnership based virtual offer led by local business.

In addition to these examples, we continue to support High House Production Park with capital project management capacity which has secured the completion of both the National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills and High House Artists Studios over the past 18 months and will shortly support the delivery of the Royal Opera House's Costume Store and Archive (which benefits from £1.7M of funding secured through ERDF) which is due to open in March 2015.

Outside of the Growth Hubs and capital projects, the Council continues to provide a highly regarded business engagement and economic development offer in support of local firms. Great effort has been made to closely align the business engagement work with our growth agenda so that local firms can input into the proposals and, critically, the Council can be confident that its agenda benefits from broad local support. Successes since the last report have included.

- Delivery of the annual business conference with the last event in November 2013 attended by 200 local firms with over 85% saying that it would benefit their business;
- Established the Business Board as the key forum for local business to engage with the Council on a range of strategic issues;
- Delivery of the £4.3m TIGER programme with around £400k of loans to local businesses approved and a pipeline of a further £2.6m in development;
- Provision of 17 workshops supporting more than 350 local firms to find new customers and grow their businesses;
- Delivery of events to support businesses with networking, the Green Deal and access to finance which were attended by 250 local firms; and
- Delivery of business support through the low carbon business programme which has now been extended to cover mid Essex as well as South Essex.

The Council has grown confidently into its leading role on the regeneration agenda and the priorities for the remainder of the year are focussed on strengthening our position through the Strategic Economic Plan, exploring opportunities for funding future regeneration and maintaining the delivery of our existing priority programmes.

Development Management

The Development Management Service is responsible for the following:

- The determination of Planning Applications;
- Pre-application enquiries and advice service;
- Appeals;
- Discharge of conditions;
- Enforcement of planning controls.

The Service's performance is assessed using a set of performance indicators. These relate to existing National Indicators (or former BVPIs) and show that extremely high performance levels have recently been achieved across the whole of this service. Indeed, I am pleased to report that our Development Management Service is, according to the most recent DCLG figures (2012/13) one of the most efficient in the Country. This is particularly important in a regeneration area, as it is an important factor in generating investor confidence.

Volumes of work have increased this year, both in terms of the number of applications received (1200) and the number of enforcement cases investigated. At the same time, the key performance indicators continue to be improved and the number of planning applications approved remains high (80%).

Looking ahead, my priority will be on maintaining and improving these levels of performance wherever possible, and working on initiatives to improve the quality of service delivery so as to make Thurrock an even more attractive place for investment. Having a strong, competitive Building Control service is also important to achieving these aims, as that function has a fundamental part to play in the development process.

Transportation

The Transportation Group comprises of three sections that fall within this Portfolio: Sustainable Transport, Highways Development Control and Passenger Transport. These teams jointly provide a strategic transport service which co-ordinates, funds and delivers transport improvements to make Thurrock a safe, accessible and attractive place to live, work and visit.

The team (Group) also deals with day to day transportation related enquiries from the public, businesses and Members. In addition, the team provides advice and support to other Thurrock Council services and other local authorities.

With regard to strategy, the Transport Act 2008 places the duty for each Local Highway Authority to produce, develop and implement a Local Transport Plan (LTP). The latest LTP was produced in 2011 and is a vital tool to help Thurrock Council work with its stakeholders to strengthen its place-shaping role and its delivery of transport services to the community.

The Thurrock Transport Strategy (which sits above the LTP) has been developed to ensure that the key strategic objectives for transport are addressed. The Strategy

document was refreshed for the period 2013 – 2026 and was approved by Cabinet in February 2013 to ensure that the Council's key priorities are appropriately emphasised, i.e. free flow tolling at the Dartford Crossing, improvements to J30/31 of the M25 and A13 widening.

The Highways Development Control Team liaises with Thurrock's Planning teams and Developers to help deliver new development projects, ensuring they are properly integrated within the highway and transportation network without risk to safety, efficiency or the environment, in accordance with the Council's and Government policies and guidelines.

Through development proposals, the team promotes the objectives of sustainable transport and optimises opportunities for the funding of transport infrastructure through development projects. The team commissions and project-manages capital transport schemes secured through developer funding. The team also checks engineering drawings and supervises adoptable highway works to ensure that new transport infrastructure is designed and constructed to appropriate standards. The team advises and assists in the preparation of highways and transportation policies, including the Local Development Framework and Thurrock's transport policies.

The Passenger Transport Unit provides a comprehensive passenger transport service in partnership with other service directorates, other local authorities, Transport for London, stakeholders, bus, rail and taxi operators, community transport (Transvol), Port of Tilbury, Schools and infrastructure providers to achieve best value for customers and residents. This is achieved by the development and implementation of policies, the co-ordination, promotion and purchase of passenger transport and infrastructure enhancements and the operation of a fleet of passenger transport vehicles.

The objective is to provide a passenger transport option for people to access work, education, food shopping and health care, offering an improved quality of life, a reduction in traffic congestion and social inclusion.

I am pleased to report the Council are supporting 9 non commercial bus services across the borough that provided services for 500,000 passenger trips.

In addition, the Transportation Group is responsible for identifying and bidding for external funding for transport schemes. In 2011, the Council was successful in its bid for the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) and will receive £5m from the Department for Transport to develop and deliver a package of sustainable transport measures over the next 4 years. We are one of only 5 Councils across the country who received a full award.

Thurrock's LSTF package is focused on enabling a modal shift away from single occupancy car use towards sustainable transport such as walking, cycling and public transport. The dominant element of the package is the delivery of Smarter Choices measures, including workplace travel planning, school travel planning, station travel planning, personalised journey planning, liftsharing, as well as marketing and promotional activities.

These measures will be complemented by targeted improvements in sustainable transport infrastructure for walking, cycling and public transport. Furthermore, we will develop a Freight Quality Partnership and associated measures to improve the economic and environmental performance of local industry in this authority area.

This funding is enabling the Council to deliver a focused package of measures that will encourage and enable people to travel by sustainable modes of transport, thereby reducing dependency on the car.

I am pleased to report that the Council shall be submitting a bid for a recently announced extension of Government LSTF revenue funding for the period 2015-16. If successful, a further £1m may be available to extend the Council's current LSTF programme by one year.

The Government is devolving the funding for local major transport schemes to Local Enterprise Partnerships, via a new Local Growth Fund (LGF) for the period 2015 to 2021. The South East Local Enterprise Partnership is currently finalising their Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) which effectively forms the bid to Government for the LGF allocation. The Transportation Group has prepared details of highways and transport schemes in the Borough to be included in the SEP. The Government will announce the allocation in July 2014 which could provide Thurrock with capital investment over the 6 years measured in tens of millions of pounds.

Highways

The Strategic Partnership with Serco (formerly Vertex) began in 2005 for the delivery of Highways services. However, in 2012/13, a review of this arrangement highlighted a number of deficiencies in the management of the service which meant that Thurrock was not getting value for money. In August 2013, the Council therefore terminated the Strategic Partnership and transferred the outsourced highways service back in-house.

The Council is responsible for 350 miles of carriageway, 19,000 street lights and over 100 structures; all of which are used by the vast majority of Thurrock's residents and visitors. However, recent and continuing growth in Thurrock puts added pressure on this already aging and overloaded infrastructure.

The Council relies on its DfT capital funding allocation for providing capital improvements to its highway infrastructure. This capital investment is very limited and, over the years, the lack of funding has had a profound affect on revenue spending; increasing the number short-term emergency repairs, accelerating public and Member dissatisfaction and increasing the risk of claims brought against Thurrock Council; all of which impact upon the Council's reputation and image for investors. Officers estimate that an additional £72 million is required in order to stabilise the overall highway network infrastructure (£40 million on roads).

Investment in our infrastructure is important to Thurrock's growth agenda, safety of the travelling public and promoting healthier lifestyles:

- Growth agenda - Well-maintained infrastructure, in a sustainable funding

environment, is pivotal in achieving the Council's growth agenda. Housing growth, for example, cannot be achieved without sufficient infrastructure to attract development and sustain it once complete.

- **Safety** - A network of roads in poor condition has a direct correlation to highway safety. As the local highway authority, the Council has a legal duty to maintain the network to a reasonable standard. Furthermore, an asset in poor condition is likely to promote a lack of pride in the community, and can be a precursor to crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. Clearly, the Authority and relevant senior managers have a duty of care where any part of the asset is life expired and is prone to failure, which could result in members of the public being seriously injured.
- **Promoting Healthier lifestyles** - An asset in poor condition, particularly footways and cycleways, curtails promotion of sustainable modes of transport such as walking and cycling. Accordingly, assets in good condition increase the safety and attractiveness of these modes, with the resultant health benefits and the reducing need to access healthcare.

2. THE MAIN CHALLENGES MOVING FORWARD

Since taking responsibility for this Portfolio, I have consistently promoted my view that the services within my Portfolio should now concentrate on making the good intentions in all our strategies actually happen. I have emphasised that projects involving job creation for local residents, business support for local businesses and capturing inward investment that improves local infrastructure, must be priorities for the months, and indeed years, ahead.

In this way, I am seeking to ensure that Thurrock is well placed to maximise the opportunities available to it, that we will compete to be an attractive location for investment and that local residents will directly benefit from our successes.

For the remainder of the year, the significant areas of work will be:-

a) Securing maximum benefit through the Local Enterprise Partnership

With all transport funding now contained within the devolved Local Growth Fund it is vital that Thurrock, together with the rest of Thames Gateway South Essex, articulates a compelling case through the Strategic Economic Plan to secure the necessary investment in local roads and infrastructure to support the delivery of our ambitious growth agenda. We will need to be ready to engage fully with Government following the submission of the Strategic Economic Plan to secure the full £200m which we are requesting across Thames Gateway South Essex to deliver critical infrastructure.

b) Progressing the Transportation Agenda

The provision of an effective, free-flowing transportation network is an essential requirement if the Council's regeneration ambitions are going to be achieved. In this regard, there are four key priorities that will be pursued with vigour; the provision of free-flow tolling at the Dartford Crossing, the upgrading of Junction 30/31 of the

M25, the widening of the A13 and resistance to a Lower Thames Crossing in the Borough. In addition, we will be working with the LEP and key partners in the rail sector to seek funding and other opportunities for infrastructure investment.

c) Progressing the Core Strategy Review/Local Plan

Having a clear and positive policy framework in place is critical to the delivery of the Council's wider regeneration ambitions. Thus, there will remain a clear focus on ensuring that the momentum created by the 2011 Core Strategy is maintained in the review that I have recently launched.

d) Leading the delivery of key projects

The recent decisions in respect of Purfleet Centre and Grays South and the work underway in Lakeside and Thames Enterprise Park give a clear indication of the way in which the Council will have to operate in future to secure delivery of its growth agenda. The Authority must continue to take the lead on complicated projects to broker relationships and use its influence, including committing its own resources, to achieve its ambitions.

e) Development of the Community Regeneration Strategy Implementation Plan

The regeneration agenda is a priority for Thurrock and is wide ranging. The development of a clear prioritised implementation plan is vital to ensure we are focussing our resources on an achievable range of short, medium and long term delivery programmes to enable a decade of delivery to be achieved

f) Assisting in the delivery of growth and investment in the Borough

Dealing effectively and efficiently with development proposals is vital to ensuring that Thurrock becomes a key location for investment and growth. The work of the Development Management service enables and assists in this being achieved. Major developments expected to progress over the next 12 months and beyond include commercial developments associated with London Gateway and the Port of Tilbury, retail and leisure developments at Lakeside and major education projects and housing developments including at the new Purfleet Centre.

3. CONCLUSION

I hope that from the contents of my report, Members will acknowledge the scale and breadth of the activities contained within this Portfolio. I am very aware of the importance of each of those services in contributing to the improvement of the quality of life for the residents of Thurrock.

There are particularly difficult challenges to my ambitions to ensure that those improvements are made, but no one should be in any doubt about my determination to deliver this important agenda, whatever the circumstance.

Financial Information:

(A Motion agreed by the Council on 23 January 2013 requires the Cabinet Member to cover all finance and budget issues of their portfolio that they consider 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 Highways and Transportation budgets are being managed carefully to ensure that the services will end the financial year in a neutral position.

There are no finance or budget issues to be reported.