

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 31 July 2014 at 7.00 pm**

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**Present:** Councillors Cathy Kent (Chair), Pauline Tolson (Vice-Chair), Andrew Roast, Susan Shinnick and Michael Stone

**In attendance:** Councillor Tony Fish - Portfolio Holder for Environment  
Gavin Dennett - Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager  
Grant Greatrex - Sport and Leisure Policy Development Manager  
Mike Heath - Head of Environment  
Matthew Boulter - Principal Democratic Services Officer

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

### **1. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 4 February 2014, were approved as a correct record.

### **2. Items of Urgent Business**

There was none.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Roast declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item 5 as he has gym membership at Impulse Leisure.

Councillor Shinnick declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item 5 as she has gym membership at Impulse Leisure.

Councillor Kent declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item 5 as she is a member of the Coalhouse Fort Project and a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 7 as she is a member of the Community Safety Partnership Board due to her position on the Essex Fire Authority.

### **4. Budget Update and Savings Proposals**

The Committee heard that in relation to the Environment department, a large amount of their budget was tied up in waste contracts and could not be reviewed for savings. As a result, those areas outside this were adversely affected. For example, grounds Maintenance was proposed to be reduced by 57%. Officers briefly outlines those savings that had already been agreed by Cabinet including a senior management restructure and the closing of certain

depots, including Curzon Drive. Councillor Roast felt that more detailed and probing questions needed to be asked on each proposal throughout the next few weeks and Members should follow up on queries to ensure they fully understood and investigated the proposals. This should be followed by a public consultation.

#### Revisions to waste collection and disposal arrangements

A number of proposals were being made. Firstly, there was a proposal to reroute food waste in residual waste collection and charge for garden waste collection. This charge would be around £30 or £40 per year and would consist of fortnightly collections in the summer months and monthly collections in the winter. Other proposals included reducing the operating hours of the Linford refuse site and reducing the cost of waste disposal.

Some Councillors expressed their opposition to reducing the hours at the Linford site on the basis it was a very busy site and shorter hours could create traffic problems. Officers agreed and stated that the company running the site had said no savings could be made by operating the site less days. Therefore, there were other proposals being considered which included limiting rubble waste and charging for vans.

Through the discussion it was highlighted that three enforcement officers would be employed for a year to enforce the new changes in waste collection to ensure residents did not use their residual waste bins for garden waste. It was added that the bins could easily be checked for waste content as they were unloaded onto the truck.

#### Restructure and review all grounds maintenance operations

It was proposed to reduce the following services:

- Reduce maintenance of play areas to ten key sites.
- Reduce grass cutting from monthly in the summer to two or three times a year.
- Remove the ranger service from Coalhouse Fort and Langdon Hills, making them self managed public spaces.
- Reduce or cease the level of maintenance for football, bowls and cricket pitches.
- Cease winter shrub maintenance and floral planting in town centres except for war memorials.

The Committee expressed their concern over reducing these greening services and felt that Thurrock's visual image and street scene would suffer. Officers did respond to a comment that they may look at responding to grass cutting on a 'as needed' basis rather than a prescribed schedule.

The Committee identified forty two job losses and Councillor Roast asked whether a service could be provided to private companies to generate income and kept the staff. Officers responded that they did offer limited services in this

area already but the savings were so pressing and there was no guarantee money could be generated. The savings had to be made.

With regards to sports pitches, officers stated that they were working with community groups to encourage them to undertake maintenance on their own initiative. Some councillors felt this could be too much to ask on residents who were already paying money to be part of the sport already. Officers said there was scope to provide a service in this area by reducing the quality of maintenance or hiring maintenance equipment instead of purchasing it.

Councillor Kent was concerned about reductions in cemetery maintenance and asked whether a reduction in ranger presence at Coalhouse Fort could jeopardise its future Lottery funding and blue flag status.

In relations to playgrounds, officers explained that the ten key sites would be identified through a criterion of most used and also those that had newer equipment and were not vandalised regularly.

Reduce frequencies of street cleansing and partially mitigate impact through implementing area based working and optimising routes

The impact on the street cleansing service would include no weekend service, a more reactive service, less mechanical sweepers in the fleet and a reduction in replacing damaged or old street bins. Officers stressed there would be the same amount of litter dropped, simply less rounds to clear it up. For example, Grays high street would be cleaned once every day in the morning and would not have a continuous twelve hour presence as it currently had.

It was added that there would be capacity for the service to respond to resident complaints and requests of there was a particularly bad area. Some councillors felt this would not be effective because residents would not make these requests but officers stated the 'report it' app the Council had introduced had been well used.

Transfer Highways Maintenance to Planning and Transportation

This was an efficiency allowing the right department to manage a workload more effectively. Members made no comment.

Cessation of funding to Impulse Leisure

The discretionary grant paid to Impulse Leisure had started in 2000 at £1.2 million and had since reduced to £350,000. The Council and Impulse Leisure had always been working towards ceasing this funding but the current proposals brought that forward much more than expected. The Council was working with Impulse Leisure to ensure it became sustainable.

Upon questioning, officers confirmed that Impulse Leisure did not intend to close any of its sites and that there were no penalties for the council

withdrawing the funds, however a six month notice period was required. It was added that the outreach activities the company made with certain community groups could cease once funding was withdrawn.

Cessation of Council Funding to the Community Safety Partnership (CSP)  
The funding proposed for withdrawal was an additional discretionary fund. The level of activity of the Partnership could reduce as a result but officers would work to obtain external funding from the Police Crime Commissioner for certain related projects. Members clarified the position of Thurrock CSP amongst Southend CSP and Essex CSP.

Trading Standards – Cessation of duties in relation to trademarks and counterfeiting

This proposal would see a cessation of duties surrounding counterfeit goods at places such as boot fairs. This was a statutory duty and the chance of being censured for not carrying out the duty would most likely come from the brand companies themselves. There was a potential for electrical or cosmetic counterfeit goods to be unsafe for residents. A further cessation in this category would relate to animal welfare and the checking of cattle and farm livestock.

The Committee recognised this reduction in one officer's role and learnt that because of the specialisms involved, it was very difficult to retrain existing staff. The proposal could lead to a redundancy or a reduction in an officer's contracted hours.

The Committee debated whether officers from other councils could be shared. It was explained that the specialisms were covered across Thurrock and Barking and Dagenham but due to the amount of work each field officer had in each council, it was not a viable option to have them working across both sites.

Environmental Protection – Reduction in Duties:

There was a proposed cessation in:

- Inspecting commercial and industrial pollution permits
- Prevention of damage by pests
- Services related to verminous properties and noxious waste.

Officers confirmed they undertook around seventy two commercial pollution inspections per year and although these would stop, the council would still issue pollution permits to the companies because they paid for the service and it was vital to their operation. Officers felt that these companies would not support paying more money to support an inspection service. It was added that most of the companies operated very stringent safety measures in this area.

This proposal would see the removal of one post that co-ordinated and supported the team in legal and freedom of information administration.

**RESOLVED: That:**

1. **The above comments be sent to Cabinet for consideration.**
2. **Meetings between committee members and officers be arranged outside the meeting to explore the proposals in further detail. Results of these meetings be reported back to Committee.**

**5. Local Air Quality Management**

Members asked why it had taken three years for the pollution levels to be acted upon from their initial assessment in 2011. Officers explained that the levels had to be checked through a national average and therefore the process to identify rising pollution levels took a long time.

**RESOLVED That the committee recommend to Cabinet that a new air quality management area is declared along Dock Road, Calcutta Road and part of St. Chad's Road.**

**6. Report on Thurrock Community Safety Partnership**

Councillor Roast felt that fifteen anti-social behaviour (ASB) reports per day was a significant amount. Officers agreed that although all ASB reports were taken seriously, there was a potential for multiple reports to distort the figure and also that some of the activities were not indeed ASB but perceived to be.

**RESOLVED that:**

1. **The performance of the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership for the year 2013/14 be noted.**
2. **The recommendations within the strategic assessment for 2013 be noted.**
3. **The four priorities of the Community Safety Partnership for the year 2014/15 be supported.**
4. **The links that have been made to support delivery of the Police Crime Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan be noted.**

**7. Work Programme**

A brief discussion was had on badger snaring and officers agreed they would look into adding the relevant wording into the Animal Welfare Charter.

**RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.**

**The meeting finished at 9.06 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**