

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 25 February 2015 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Steve Liddiard (Mayor), Sue Gray (Deputy Mayor), Tim Aker, Chris Baker, Jan Baker, Clare Baldwin, Terry Brookes, Mark Coxshall, Charles Curtis, Tony Fish, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, Yash Gupta (MBE), Garry Hague, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Terence Hipsey, Victoria Holloway, Barry Johnson, Roy Jones, Tom Kelly, John Kent, Cathy Kent, Martin Kerin, Charlie Key, Brian Little, Susan Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Val Morris-Cook, Tunde Ojetola, Bukky Okunade, Barry Palmer, Maureen Pearce, John Purkiss, Robert Ray, Joycelyn Redsell, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice, Andrew Roast, Susan Shinnick, Philip Smith, Graham Snell, Richard Speight, Pauline Tolson, Simon Wootton and Lynn Worrall

**Apologies:** Councillor Michael Stone

**In attendance:** Graham Farrant, Chief Executive  
Steve Cox, Assistant Chief Executive  
Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing - Thurrock Council  
David Bull, Director of Planning and Transportation  
Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services  
Roger Harris, Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning  
Sean Clark, Head of Corporate Finance  
Mike Heath, Head of Environment  
Jackie Hinchliffe, Head of HR, OD and Customer Strategy  
Karen Wheeler, Head of Strategy  
David Lawson, Deputy Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer  
Matthew Boulter, Principal Democratic Services Officer  
Stephanie Cox, Senior 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.

The Mayor reminded all Members to behave properly and considerately at all times and warned that if any Member deliberately disrupted the conduct of the meeting he would move that the Member not to be heard further.

The Mayor further encouraged Members to be considerate when using mobile devices for Social Media purposes so as not to become a distraction to others during the meeting.

Before the start of the meeting the Mayor reflected on a recent sad event in which Mr. Wayne Benson, a Thurrock Council employee, sadly passed away as a result of a traffic accident whilst he was at work.

Reverend Barlow led the Chamber in prayer and a minute's silence was observed in Mr. Benson's memory.

#### **96. Minutes**

Councillor Snell questioned why an outburst made by a Member at the previous meeting was not recorded in the minutes.

The Mayor advised that the minutes provided were a narrative record of the business transacted at the meeting, and a copy of the resolutions passed by those present. It was explained that they must comply with legal and procedural requirements whilst being selective and not to attempt a verbatim record. The Mayor further added that for meetings of Council a separate verbatim record of public questions and Members question time were included as Appendix A to the minutes.

The Mayor further informed the Chamber that although the exact comments from this particular outburst were not detailed in the minutes, an audio recording of the last meeting had been made available publicly online through the Council's website.

The Minutes of the Council meeting, held on 28 January 2015, were approved as a correct record.

#### **97. Items of Urgent Business**

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

#### **98. Declaration of Interests**

There were no interests declared.

#### **99. Announcements on behalf of the Mayor or the Leader of the Council.**

The Mayor informed the Chamber that he did not wish to make any announcements this month.

The Leader of the Council had no announcements that he wished to make.

#### **100. Questions from Members of the Public**

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

## **101. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors**

The Mayor informed Members that, in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, the requisite notice had been given by one member of the public and four Councillors who wished to present a petition at the meeting.

Mrs McPherson presented a petition on behalf of residents, which called on the Council to investigate imaginative library provision rather than the suggestions included in the 'Future of Library Service' survey and outlined that they were against the proposal for the closure of libraries, including the mobile library.

Councillor Speight presented a petition on behalf of 3148 residents, which called on the Council not to close any libraries in Thurrock. In presenting the petition Councillor Speight read out a letter that had been received from a young library user which praised the service for the opportunities it provided.

Councillor Baldwin presented a petition on behalf of residents of London Road, which called on the Council to improve residents parking facilities in London Road, Tilbury due to problems caused by parking from users of the Sure Start Centre and local Doctor's Surgery.

Councillor Purkiss presented a petition on behalf of residents which called on the Council not to close East Tilbury Library.

Councillor Purkiss further advised that he wished to submit a further petition regarding the proposal to withdraw the 374 bus service but that he would raise this later in the meeting.

Councillor S. Little presented a petition on behalf of Horndon residents, which called on the Council to continue to run the 374 bus service which was a lifeline to residents travelling to Basildon and Orsett Hospitals. In presenting the petition Councillor Little explained that 67 signatures had been obtained on one bus journey.

## **102. 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.

## **103. 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.

The Leader of the UKIP Group informed the Chamber that he wished to make the following changes:

- for Councillor Snell to be appointed as a member of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Ray.
- for Councillor J. Baker to be appointed as a substitute member of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Snell.
- for Councillor C. Baker to be appointed as a member of the General Services Committee to replace Councillor Ray.
- for Councillor Snell to be appointed as a substitute member of the General Services Committee to replace Councillor C. Baker.
- for Councillor Jones to be appointed as a member of the Joint Appointments Committee to replace Councillor Ray.
- for Councillor Snell to be appointed as a member of the Licensing Committee to replace Councillor Ray.
- for Councillor J. Baker to be appointed as a substitute member of the Licensing Committee to replace Councillor Snell.
- for Councillor Snell to be appointed as a substitute member of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Ray.

The leaders of the Labour, Conservative and Independent Groups confirmed that they did not wish to make any changes to appointments that had previously been made.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That Councillor Snell be appointed as a member of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 2. That Councillor J. Baker be appointed as a substitute member of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 3. That Councillor C. Baker be appointed as a member of the General Services Committee.**
- 4. That Councillor Snell be appointed as a substitute member of the General Services Committee.**
- 5. That Councillor Jones be appointed as a member of the Joint Appointments Committee.**
- 6. That Councillor Snell be appointed as a member of the Licensing Committee.**
- 7. That Councillor J. Baker be appointed as a substitute member of the Licensing Committee.**
- 8. That Councillor Snell be appointed as a substitute member of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

**104. Borrowing and Investment Annual Strategy and the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2015/16**

Councillor J. Kent, the Leader of the Council, introduced the report which set out the proposals for the Prudential Indicators, reviewed the borrowing and investment strategies, amended the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Statement and outlined a draft Treasury Management Budget for 2015/16. He advised the Chamber that the report had been debated at Cabinet.

In response the Leader of the Opposition raised concerns about the year on year increase in taxpayers underwriting borrowing and opposed the proposed delegation to Cabinet for borrowing and Prudential Indicators in relation to Gloriana.

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 every elected Member had an opportunity to scrutinise these decisions at full Council. As a result he proposed that recommendation 1.1 b) be amended to negate any delegated decision.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition echoed the sentiments raised regarding delegating decisions to Cabinet and felt that all Members had a right to vote on any budgetary measure. He added that he did not want to see further decisions delegated to Cabinet and that these should instead be taken at Council.

Councillor Johnson further echoed the sentiments raised and felt that more detailed budgetary information should have been provided so that Members could be clear on how the money would be spent.

In response the Leader of the Council emphasised that the Constitution, which had been agreed by all Members, clearly set out the rules and scheme of delegation and that Opposition Members had an opportunity to be involved in decision making and governance in relation to Gloriana through the cross-party Partnering Board.

The Leader of the Council further reported that detailed reports relating to the budget, borrowing strategies and Gloriana had regularly been submitted to Cabinet and relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees and as a result there had been considerable opportunity for Members to submit questions or call-in decisions if they objected to any of the proposals.

The Leader of the Opposition felt that asking questions at Cabinet had little effect and that the Call-In process was diluted because of the fact that Labour Group Members held the positions of Chair on Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Leader of the Opposition further reported that all Members should better understand the risks and proposed that recommendation 1.1 b) be removed, which was seconded by Councillor Halden.

Councillor Worrall, Cabinet Member for Housing, commended the work and aims of Gloriana and expressed her frustration that this was being challenged at such a late stage, when there had been significant opportunity to raise any objections through the cross-party Partnering Board for Gloriana, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Ojetola advised Members that he was not in objection of the work of Gloriana, but he questioned the financial control responsibilities of Cabinet and stated that decisions should rest with all Members rather than just 9 Cabinet Members.

Councillor Morris-Cook felt that if the original recommendation was not agreed it was cause unnecessary delays for Gloriana, and encouraged all Members to engage with the established Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny and Partnering Board process.

The Mayor put the substantive recommendations 1.1 (a), (c), (d) and (e) to the vote, upon which Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations, whereupon the Mayor declared these to be carried.

Thereafter the Mayor put recommendation 1.1 (b) to the vote, upon which 21 Members voted in favour of the recommendation and 26 Members voted against, whereupon the Mayor declared this to be lost.

#### **RESOLVED:**

##### **1. That the Council:**

- (a) Agree the Prudential Indicators as set out in Appendix 1;**
- (b) Agree the Annual Borrowing and Investment Strategy in paragraph 2.29;**
- (c) Approve the Annual Borrowing and Investment Strategy and the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement for 2015/16 and amends the existing 2014/15 Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Statement to the following:**
  - The Council will set aside an amount each year which it deems to be prudent and appropriate, having regard to statutory requirements and relevant guidance issued by DCLG; and**

- (d) **Note the revised 2014/15 and 2015/16 borrowing and investment projections as set out in the report (paragraph 2.31).**

## **105. 2015/16 General Fund Budget Report**

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. This is the 5th budget that I have had the privilege of introducing in this Chamber and before I started drafting what it was I wanted to say this evening, I thought it be just instructive to look back at the Agenda for this meeting in February 2010. I did so, because I am often accused from going on about the government cuts because this is a labour administration dealing with a conservative government. In February 2010, we of course had a conservative administration and a labour government. So it is interesting to look and see what the situation was like then.*

*While it is always difficult to compare directly because governments change the way in which they hand out grants and councils get new responsibilities given to them, at some times but not always with extra money attached, the language used in that report is always interesting.*

*So in 2010 the Agenda stated, and I quote "the formula grant for 2010/11 is £59.76 million, this is a 3% or £1.75 million increase over 2009/10 on a like for like basis". A 3% increase. Mr Mayor a 3% increase. It continues, in 2010/11 the Council is anticipating the receipt of £9.998 million of area based grant and £25.132 million of specific and special grants. This is a like for like increase of approximately 2.3% and 11.1% respectively over 2009/10. Mr Mayor a like for like increase of approximately 2.3% and 11.1% and even then conservative members complained that the government wasn't being generous enough to Thurrock Council.*

*Now I am not saying that the word increase isn't used this year, it is. Here is an example - in this settlement, £9 million of health related funding previously financed by the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group has been included within the 2015/16 spending power, thus increasing the headline amount available for local authority services despite most of this money going to fund NHS services locally rather than being available to the Council.*

*My favourite increase reference is in the recommendation, that this council confirms the Council Tax Band D for 2015/16 at £1,124.64 representing a 0% increase. Mr Mayor, that was a difficult decision. In fact, probably the last in a very long line of difficult decisions that we have had to take in the past few months in setting this budget. I believe that this budget is balanced and has been the toughest that I have ever been involved in setting here at the Council and yes, I will say it again, instead of increases, the past 5 years have been a non-stop catalogue of cut after cut after cut.*

*If we look back at that settlement in 2010 and even leave aside the other grants that this Authority received back then, we today, get over £30 million less in government funding than in 2010 and next year we get a further £10 million less in that government funding. In fact the cut in government funding to Thurrock Council since 2010 will have been £35 million and the government offers little respite telling us to expect a similar cut next year and the year after.*

*Despite this, we are tonight, putting forward a balanced budget for next year and we have worked hard to identify funding so we are able to protect Thurrock's hard working council tax payers from another increased bill. So Mr Mayor, at this point, I would like to thank all those Council Officers who have worked long and hard over the past months to get us to this point and I would also like to thank my fellow cabinet portfolio holders for the work that they have put in too. Perhaps more importantly, I want to thank members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees who have also put their time and effort into helping us formulate the budget that we are proposing this evening.*

*Some of that work has been in the headlines, so for instance: Councillor Hebb's efforts with the voluntary sector as an example. His chairing of the special overview and scrutiny meeting enabled voluntary groups to have their say and for the Council to respond and more importantly each of us to gain a better understanding of the others position. This has led to changes to the proposals that have been agreed by all. Equally, Councillor Kelly chaired the Member Group with Councillor Snell and Councillor Gray looking into issues surrounding TransVol and its funding. This again brought about a sensible compromise leading to TransVol seeking new funding routes and added to the savings needed by the Council. Excellent work by all involved. I also want to highlight the work and the contribution of Councillor Johnson, specifically on Council Tax Exemptions. His non-partisan common sense and workable proposals are also very much appreciated and of course the Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their work looking at the possibility of moving towards a fortnightly bin collections.*

*I am loathed to mention everybody, but these examples show that it has been a truly cross-party effort with members from every political group having an input and I am pleased to say that each of those scrutiny recommendations has been fully accepted by the Cabinet. The work at Overview and Scrutiny shows that proposals that we put forward have had a proper and vigorous scrutiny from democratically elected members and are not issues that have been sprung on members suddenly. They have been carefully costed and carefully scrutinised. They have been in the public domain in some cases for the best part of the year and often they have been discussed in the media too. There have also been a dozen opportunities for portfolio holders to be questioned directly about their plans, at 7 cabinet and 5 council meetings since May. That is why I am confident that we have created the right package for Thurrock, but I must also emphasise that this is also the starting gun for both the coming election campaign and for us to seriously start looking at the*



*savings needed to ensure that the 2016/17 budget will be equally discussed and once again of course balanced.*

*Just for a moment now, I want to move away from the controversial revenue budget and talk about capital. Those of us here in the Chamber of course understand the difference, but many voters and council tax payers ask why it is that the Council calls foul and complains about spending cuts in one area, yet seems to have no problem in spending in another. As I have said before at Cabinet that capital spending is for building and creating. The money in this pot is not legally allowed to be used to subsidise the general fund. The example I often use is that if at home you buy a new car, that is capital spending and you may well have to borrow to buy that car, but filling it up with petrol so that it doesn't just sit in the garage is revenue spending. We are not allowed to use capital to support revenue, although oddly, we can use revenue to support capital.*

*So there are some things tonight that I would like to highlight in the capital budget. The first is the extra funding for highways. The improvements at the Treacle Mine roundabout are simply painting lines and arrows has been quite marked, and next we will permanently sort out the flooding issue at that roundabout. By investing an extra £4 million in highways, other roundabouts, mini roundabouts and zebra crossings will be targeted for improvements too. We will be able to resurface more roads, starting with stretches on the A128, Daiglen Drive and Long Lane in Stifford. We will be upgrading traffic lights to LED and improving highway drainage in places such as Muckingford Road and Ship Lane. Of course, we will invest £6 million to upgrade our street lights to energy efficient LED lamps to help us cut costs and keep the lights on. Unlike our friends and neighbours in conservative run Essex.*

*One of the things I mentioned in passing Mr Mayor at the start of this was extra and new responsibilities. In April the Care Act will start to come into force and at first glance it looks like a good piece of legislation. Indeed there is a lot to be commended, but there are also concerns. The Act introduces the Care Cap, but this does not mean that the people in care will stop paying once their total costs reaches a certain level, it is a care cap, not a board and lodging cap and those costs will continue and the Act has severe financial implications for the Council too. The government says that the costs will be covered but I think that we will have to wait and see. Once the cap is reached for example, who then pays the bills and from this coming April, we will have new duties and responsibilities. We will be assessing care and support needs differently. We will be assessing carers support needs differently and we will be working on keeping people healthy and independent in their own homes for longer. All good stuff Mr Mayor, but also paid for at the same time as a £10 million reduction in our funding. Of course, the government says that we have extra money as mentioned before around £9 million of health related funding. But this is not extra money, it is National Health Service Funding now classified as belonging jointly to the Health Service and the Council. It is these slights of hand that leads to the government claiming that our spending power is being cut by a mere 2.2%. I would advise the government Mr Mayor to listen to a former labour chancellor that said sagely that when you are in a*

*hole, stop digging. I fear this governments mantra, when you are in a hole, keep spinning and just hope the hole will become big enough to hide what it is you are doing.*

*Mr Mayor, I now want to turn to the future, the medium and the long term. Here in Thurrock, we have been relatively successful over the past 5 years in making savings and efficiencies although this year there is no doubt that the cuts are starting to bite. Across the country, Local Councils are starting to say they cannot take much more and I really do fear that we are starting to see the first bankrupt Authorities or the first truly unacceptable reductions in service. The time is approaching when Central Government will have to take action, take action before hospitals are literally full of people who should leave, but have nowhere to go. The time is fast approaching when Local Authorities will have to say, if we have to do it by statute, we will try, but if it is something that we do simply because local people want it, then the answer will have to be no. I sincerely believe that cuts on the scale that we have seen simply cannot continue and we must look at other options for funding local services in the future. That is why I now want to look at some of the real achievements that Thurrock Council has made in the current financial year and some of the plans that we have for the 12 months from April.*

*I will make no apology for starting with Education and Childrens' Services. I think I have made it clear that it is not only my passion, it is something that we have to get right to ensure the future prosperity of Thurrock. It is not long ago Mr Mayor, that members opposite constantly talked down our children and our efforts to improve their lives. Even now, they admit that things have changed, because they have. Here in Thurrock, we have a record number of schools as rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. Not everyone yet, which just demonstrates that the job is not done. But nobody can doubt that our hard work supporting all schools in the Borough has paid dividends.*

*On top of that, we have seen the expansion of classrooms at Quarry Hill, Bonnygate, Little Thurrock and Graham James School and we are not finished. We will be investing in the creation of a brand new Pupil Referral Unit in Tilbury, moving from the outdated Culver Centre. Expanding classes at Woodside and Thameside Schools and creating the building of a new 5 form entry school to serve Chafford Hundred and the West Grays area.*

*In addition, we have created and opened a multi-agency safeguarding hub, the MASH, with 19 partners doing what we can to ensure a safe future for our children and young people. We have in addition, two 100% to boast about. Each and everyone of our targeted families have been to use the bureaucratic jargon, turned around through the Troubled Families programme and Thurrock is alone in the country, knowing where every single young person who is not in Education or Employment or Training is. That means we can target them all, and none should be slipping through the net.*

*I am also passionate Mr Mayor of the regeneration of Thurrock and the way that we are changing perceptions about the area, not just locally but nationally too. The new campus across the road here in Grays, is probably the most*

*obvious to all of us. As we have watched it grow, day by day, into what is now an incredibly busy and exciting education hub. That is not all, the Royal Opera House Costume centre at High House will be completed next month, imbedding that worldwide cultural icon deep into Thurrock's life as a Borough as individuals living here and in the perceptions of those looking at us from outside.*

*We have secured £97 million for Thurrock through the Local Growth Fund. Over a 5th of the Local Enterprise Partnerships total! There were those Mr Mayor who said that we couldn't fight above our weight, but I think we have demonstrated to them, that they were wrong. The Purfleet Centre Regeneration Company has been appointed as our development partner for the amazing Purfleet Scheme, plans are being developed for tv and film studios as well as homes, shops and offices and of course, Mr Mayor a new library. A second community hub is opening in Chadwell St Mary and over £0.5 million in grants has been secured to develop the network further in the years to come.*

*On the work front Grays Magistrates Courts conversion to business units is making excellent progress and is due to open in the summer and the demand is already strong. We are looking at expanding the business offer at Tilbury and at High House Production Park, not only creating jobs but bringing in business rates and injecting more cash to support local economies as workers there need to eat, drink and socialise.*

*Perhaps our most effective programme last year was our award winning Beat the Streets campaign, which got thousands of young people, and adults exercising regularly. A great partnership between public health, our transport team and schools. We should also be proud of our hospital social worker team which means that Thurrock is one of the very few local authorities in the country to have no delayed discharges from Basildon Hospital. That is none in a whole year. Looking ahead Mr Mayor, we are well on track for setting up a better care fund that is a pooled account of over £18 million, with the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group to deliver more integrated services for older people across Health and Adult Social Care.*

*I do not want to steal any of the Councillor Worrall's thunder, as she has her report later this evening, so I will keep my praise around housing short. 800 fences repaired, 2,900 new kitchens, 2,700 new bathrooms, 1,250 new front and back doors delivered to our tenants. We have rehoused 691 tenants and their families and created 350 new probationary tenancies that's 350 off of our waiting list and helped prevent hundreds of cases of homelessness. You then only need to look around to see the council house building starting and it won't be long before Gloriana starts building for the private sector too, having won planning permission for 127 new family homes in Tilbury.*

*Mr Mayor I have already touched on transport, improving our roads, backing beat the streets, but we have also gained about £115 million over the next 3-4 years for improvements to lighting, highways, the A13 widening, Stanford Le*

*Hope railway station, cycling paths, working on the new and improved one way system in and around Grays.*

*We should not forget just how the Council has worked with local communities to keep up the fight to prevent another river crossing ruining our green belt and ruining the air that we breathe as well as guaranteeing local people years of continued congestion. Our campaigning has had a major impact on government, forcing it to think again and to delay decisions. Last month I was at the Transport Select Committee making our case. We are making the Department for Transport and Highways Agency take us seriously. Even if the Secretary of State still refuses to re-open the Option D proposal, so far anyway, I am ever hopeful that common sense will win through.*

*On the planning side, we have now won a national award for Planning Excellence for Growth and Employment, come second in the country for development management and are consistently in the top 5% of Authorities for planning performance. Mr Mayor, it is not a bad list. We have done all this despite seeing cuts going so deep, that no matter where you compared things with, being 2010 or the current financial year, the figures are horrific. £10 million down on this year. A cut in grant of a quarter. £35 million down on 2010, well over half the grant and next year we are expecting another £10 million reduction, taking our support from government down £30m to £20m or a £45 million cut since 2010. Yet we are still investing in local people, we are still investing in local skills and we are still investing in making Thurrock the place to be. On top of this, we are also looking at new and innovative ways of making and saving money, for instance the Chief Executive is due on Monday to start working for two days a week with the Essex District of Brentwood. We are in close talks with Southend over creating a combined Authority, so our joint voices will be heard even louder in the corridors of Westminster as we talk up the South Essex expansion and regeneration plans. We are also in close talks with the Districts along the northern bank of the Thames, Basildon, Castlepoint and Rochford to make sure we maintain our joint working in the Local Enterprise Partnership and we are working hard to convince County Hall that the best thing for the whole of Essex is to allow the Southern Authorities to work together. There are threats of course Mr Mayor, but I am confident that we can overcome them and I want everyone here this evening to realise that the future starts tonight. Mr Mayor a vote in favour of this budget and all that I have laid out supported all of our unanimously agreed priorities will continue to be supported. Vote against this tonight Mr Mayor and I have to say that all that we have worked for will be put at risk. Thank you.*

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

Councillor Gledhill

*Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your very extended speech covering pretty much everything the council does. I was very pleased to hear the names that you mentioned as special thank you's. I noticed that*

*all of them, chairs of those committees which you described as being non-partisan were all conservative names and I would hope that this will ring true later on this year when we come back after the elections and then when we are appointing Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny whoever is in the charge at that point, decides not to appoint people from their own party to take those chairs.*

*It is also good to see that you are taking a council tax freeze. This is yet another bundle of money that comes from Central Government that comes from our tax payers pocket to Central Government, my apologies, that is given back here. This is money that they will not have to pay out again by paying us extra Council Tax. I thank you and I indeed agree with the council tax freeze.*

*You have also mentioned this evening that approximately £0.5 million a week, sorry that we are spending approximately £0.5 million a week less of tax payers money to provide the services for Thurrock. Yes, we do have fewer services, the grass doesn't get cut as often, more importantly some critical services are a bit tougher to get access to, we have reduced the ability for people, sorry reduced the accessibility to some of these, we have started to charge for services that we never charged for before and we have increased the charges for services, we did not charge for before.*

*However, tonight's budget isn't just about saying that we are not going to put up council tax again because of the extra government money, this budget tonight is just pretty much being asked to sign off budget envelopes for the council to spend £109 million worth. Behind that are the savings that Councillor Kent has quite rightly been put out for the best part of a year for some of them and a lot of those I agree with, an awful lot of those I agree with. But what I cannot agree to is just blindly signing up for budget envelopes because for doing that, we are blindly signing up to less grass cutting, less street cleaning, probably less library services, cuts to the CAB grant and many many others. These are services that do need to change, and indeed again, Councillor Kent tonight said that the library service needs to change. I could not be in any more agreement with him. All of our services need to change and indeed where we have changed them, we have saved the tax payer nearly £0.5 million a week in Thurrock alone. So no, I will not be voting blindly for budget envelopes. I cannot do that when we spent £10,000 a year or thereabouts on translation services. We do not have to statutorily supply, when we are spending nearly £40,000 on one paid union member. Where we supply nearly £1 million worth of commercial type services and I will use one example only, Grays Beach Café which should break even but costs us £40,000 per year to run! There are many other services like it and need to break even, not to be subsidised from the budget. If you want to delve into this, you will see that the budget lines have no affordable budget for them to operate, so somewhere along the line, budgets in this, budget envelopes within Thurrock are taking a hit to make these commercial services operate, that is not fair.*

*Even worse than that, despite there being nearly £0.5 million a week less for us to spend, we have managed to spend more than £9 million extra a year on*

40 extra staff to supply fewer and fewer services. Only in Local Government and probably only in Thurrock would you have more staff being paid a lot more money to do less and less, that is one good reason I will not be voting for the budget itself.

Everybody knows that the conservative group have been trying to push a zero based budget approach to the way in which we collect and spend tax payers money. A zero based budget approach means we know exactly what we need to spend statutory, we know exactly what residents expect us to spend and if it is reasonable we would be spending that money. If we had a zero based budget here tonight, we would be able to see a lot of those things that I have mentioned are costing the tax payer money. If we did not supply those services, we could possibly even be at the point of having a cut in council tax. Or as I would prefer, to have that money spent on more improvements to the road, or more improvements to our libraries, or more improvement to our schools.

I would also like to see free Saturday parking for all council car parks. This will help our small businesses in the form of shops no end. It will mean that they will be able to compete on a more even playing field with places like Lakeside and places like Bluewater. I would also want to see services like that Citizens Advice Bureau, yes it needs to change, yes it needs to get part of the National Citizens Advice Bureau Association, but what it does need is money thereafter to supply those vital services to our residents, who do find themselves being evicted by landlords, who do find themselves in trouble with their council tax, who do find themselves in trouble with money lenders, etc. etc.

We have also heard tonight, of course, that we have got another £10 million of cuts coming. Well guess what, if there was a change of government tomorrow, and our friends across the way there were in charge, nothing would change. Indeed their Chancellor is on record saying, nothing will change, so continue to bash the conservative led Government on cuts, cuts, cuts, when they have no alternative plans to go forward, is just wrong and it is just telling half a truth. That is not quite a lie, but it is a half truth. So no, I can really not agree to this budget this evening, I cannot agree to have £10 million here, £20 million there, £30 million at another source not without details of how that money is spent. As I have said, I agree with a significant amount of the cuts that have been proposed by the Cabinet this year, one of the reasons why we have not gone forward to ask questions and the other reason of course there is no point when you do ask questions anyway, so my stance will be that we will not agree the budget.

I will also not agree, you will have to excuse me so I get the right ones, the 1.8 on page 72, which is the agreement of public buildings capital allocations to be delegated to cabinet, approval of any expenditure including loans to be delegated to Cabinet, ability to agree schemes that can be evidence where there is spend to save opportunities, I am quite happy for that one to remain as a delegate to Cabinet for an expediency purposes, and the approval of any expenditure including loans and equity advances to Gloriana, I cannot agree

*those this evening. So for clarifications that is: 1.8.1, 1.8.2 and 1.8.4 I do not believe Cabinet should have the delegated authority to make those decisions.*

*When we get to the statutory resolutions, these tie in with the budget envelopes – I cannot agree those budget envelopes, as I said I agree with the council tax freeze, I would like to have seen a cut if we had the details to say that we were able to do so, but we cannot agree them. Thank you Mr Mayor.*

The Mayor invited Councillor J. Kent to respond.

Councillor J. Kent

*Mr Mayor I would like to reply, in many ways I am at a loss to know quite how to. I thought that was a rather kind of rambling response to the budget that did not really address any significant points. Councillor Gledhill refers to the budget envelopes. Now those budget envelopes have been put together by Cabinet, month in and month out. There have been 7 Cabinet meetings since May, each of them with a Shaping the Council item detailing the latest budget proposals and setting out how those budget envelopes are being prepared. What the savings are within those budget envelopes and where and how they should be implemented! Obviously over the months things change, those changes were details too and not once, not once, did Councillor Gledhill come to Cabinet and question these proposals. Equally, there have been opportunities at every Council meeting to question me, to question Cabinet colleagues about budget options. Opportunities missed, not taken month in, month out and then as we have said, there is Overview and Scrutiny that have looked in great details of each of the budget envelopes for each of the services, so Cleaner, Greener & Safer have had the budget savings enveloped at two of their three meetings. Children's discussed in July, November and January; Health and Wellbeing, let alone the Health & Wellbeing board have had budget items in July, September and January; Planning, Transport and Regeneration in July and January – you know, there have been plenty of opportunities to see how the budget envelopes were being put together.*

*I really struggle to understand what more information, what more access it is that Councillor Gledhill would have wanted. I really do believe that this year's budget process has been the most open, the most transparent, the most democratic ever and I will just say one thing, you know, this process was fit for purpose, I wonder if it is because Councillor Gledhill's failure to engage with the process that has been the problem here.*

*I would also point out to Councillor Gledhill, that the Section 151 Officer wrote to all Group Leaders to Councillor Palmer to Councillor Snell and to Councillor Gledhill and to me offering to take groups and individuals through the process and through the budget envelopes in great detail. I think we all know that happened, I would ask if Councillor Gledhill took that opportunity or not, because after all, that is what our Officers are paid for. To provide informed non-political advice. We don't have to take that advice, but it is there if it is wanted.*

*Councillor Gledhill says that he does not like the process, yet Mr Mayor he has had plenty of opportunity to challenge it and to say so before tonight. He has had the chance the question the process when it was agreed at Cabinet back in August for example, but again, he didn't. Mr Mayor it does seem that he can't ask questions about the budget. You can't ask question about the process, all he does is blusters, puffs, pants and bullies and hopes that nobody actually examines what he says.*

*On the two specifics that Councillor raise, one is this idea of how comes if we are making all these cuts we have more staff. I will just remind Councillor Gledhill that Public Health was not a function of this Authority 3 years ago and staff have transferred from Public Health here. The Development Corporation was not a function of this Council, those staff have transferred here and we transferred the Highways Management's function back from Europa in the past 12 months, back to this Authority with the staff coming with it. So of course Mr Mayor when you have that number of new responsibilities and new functions of course it brings staff with it.*

*Finally, we have the whole Section 1.8 the delegations to Cabinet. Mr Mayor, we know what is going on here. This is merely an effort to slow down decision making, slow down the responsibilities of this Authority and slow down the opportunity to take opportunities quickly and fleet of foot as and when they arise. Bringing things like this, matters that are frankly of detail back to this Council month in and month out, is not good decision making and it is not good governance. That is why the constitution which has been unanimously agreed in this Chamber sets out the delegations in the way that it does. Thank you Mr Mayor.*

The Mayor then invited debate on the whole subject of the item.

Councillor Snell highlighted that the report presented had been referred to Cabinet where there had been an opportunity for all Members to ask questions, and felt Members should try their best to take politics out of the equation in the budget setting process. He recognised that the budget had been set by the group with the most seats and hoped that next year the UKIP group would be in this position.

Councillor Palmer felt that in previous years more detailed information had been provided when setting the budget, and called for this information to be supplied to Members so that the level of detail could be examined.

Councillor B. Rice thanked the Leader of the Council for what she felt was an excellent report and commended the work of officers and Portfolio Holders in reaching a balanced budget whilst still delivering an excellent service to residents. She informed Members that this had been particularly challenging and highlighted that in her portfolio of Adult Social Care the budget had been reduced from £40 million to £30 million but there was increasing pressure to deliver more.



A brief debate took place between some Members during which the difference between the budget envelope and exactly how the money was spent was deliberated.

Councillor Halden commended the work of colleagues, particularly in relation to generating revenue in education, but highlighted concerns with the proposal to delegate decisions to Cabinet, the structure of the budget and council tax levels.

Councillor Purkiss expressed his concern and disappointment at the proposal to withdraw the rural 374 bus service, which he explained was vital to the residents of Linford, East Tilbury, Horndon on the Hill and Fobbing. He further reported that no consultation had taken place with bus users and called on the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation to work with Members and local residents to identify options in order to retain the service.

During the debate a number of Members advocated the use of Zero Based Budgeting and called for the budget to be determined in this way in future.

Councillor Speight observed that Members had the opportunity to ask questions at Cabinet, and stated that on a number of occasions some Members had not attended to ask their questions in person. He expressed his disappointment at what he felt was stealth constitutional reform during the meeting and emphasised that the appropriate place for such discussions was through the Constitution Working Group.

Councillor Hebb felt that it was not surprising some efficiency savings had been delivered so close to the forthcoming election in order to protect some functions such as the library service, and observed that with a zero based budgeting method it may have been possible to deliver further savings.

Councillor Hebb highlighted a number of areas which he felt the zero based budgeting process could have delivered further opportunities for savings which included £70,000 for Trade Union Services, £10,000 overspend for the translation service and £10 million in agency spend.

A brief discussion took place on how money was collected and retained in the Borough and outcomes from meetings of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Ojetola observed that it was important that the budget setting process was open and transparent, and remarked that the report which had been provided was not detailed enough in order to adequately consider and explain in detail to residents.

Councillor Ojetola further questioned whether a consequential amendment needed to take place following the agreement of the earlier recommendations, to which the Chief Executive confirmed that this was the case.

Councillor Aker observed that the governance of the Council needed to be changed from a Cabinet and Leader model to a Committee System so as to ensure greater transparency and collegiate decision making with regards to the budget.

Councillor Key called for an exhaustive list of accounts to be provided so that Members could be sure what they were expected to vote on, rather than discussing headline figures.

Councillor Gerrish observed that subsidised services such as the Grays Beach Café were hugely important to residents, and that it had been a challenge to both reduce the budget and maintain these services. He reported that it was increasingly difficult to make such decisions and encouraged the engagement of Members in order to identify alternative proposals for change.

The Leader of the Council briefly summed up the report, during which the following key points were raised:

- That he would examine what could be done to mitigate the cut to the 374 rural bus service and that he would work with Councillor Purkiss and Councillor S. Little regarding this.
- That it was easy for opposition members to say that they would reduce Council Tax but that in reality this was a challenge in light of increased cuts to the Council's core grant settlement.
- That the Council spent much less money on temporary staff than had been the case under the previous administration, and that specialist consultants and interim staff were only employed on a fixed term basis to deliver short term projects where expertise and knowledge were required.
- That in 2008 Conservative Members had agreed to withdraw trade union facilitation but that this had never been implemented after it was discovered that it would be more costly to withdraw.

The Chief Executive advised the Chamber that recommendation 1.8.2 had been negated by the vote on the earlier item and proposed that this be removed, to which Members agreed.

The Chief Executive explained that a recorded vote was required to be undertaken in relation to budget and council tax setting.

The Mayor invited the Chamber to vote on recommendations 1.1, 1.4 to 1.7, 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 recommendation 1.2, the result of which was:

For:

Councillors Tim Aker, Chris Baker, Jan Baker, Clare Baldwin, Terry Brookes, Mark Coxshall, Charles Curtis, Tony Fish, Oliver Gerrish,

Robert Gledhill, Yash Gupta, Garry Hague, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Terry Hipsey, Victoria Holloway, Barry Johnson, Roy Jones, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Charlie Key, Brian Little, Sue Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Val Morris-Cook, Tunde Ojetola, Bukky Okunade, Barry Palmer, Maureen Pearce, John Purkiss, Robert Ray, Joy Redsell, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice, Andrew Roast, Sue Shinnick, Philip Smith, Graham Snell, Richard Speight, Pauline Tolson, Simon Wootton, Lynn Worrall, Sue Gray and Steve Liddiard. **(47)**

Against: **(0)**

Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendation 1.2 to be carried.

The Mayor invited the Chamber to undertake a recorded vote on recommendation 1.3 as printed in the report, the result of which was:

For:

Councillors Tim Aker, Chris Baker, Jan Baker, Clare Baldwin, Terry Brookes, Charles Curtis, Tony Fish, Oliver Gerrish, Yash Gupta, Terry Hipsey, Victoria Holloway, Roy Jones, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Val Morris-Cook, Bukky Okunade, Robert Ray, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice, Sue Shinnick, Philip Smith, Graham Snell, Richard Speight, Lynn Worrall, Sue Gray and Steve Liddiard. **(27)**

Against:

Councillors Mark Coxshall, Robert Gledhill, Garry Hague, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Charlie Key, Brian Little, Sue Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Tunde Ojetola, Barry Palmer, Maureen Pearce, John Purkiss, Joy Redsell, Andrew Roast, Pauline Tolson and Simon Wootton **(20)**

Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendation 1.3 to be carried.

The Mayor explained that a recorded vote would take place on recommendations 1.8.1, 1.8.3 and 1.8.4, the result of which was:

For:

Councillors Clare Baldwin, Terry Brookes, Charles Curtis, Tony Fish, Oliver Gerrish, Yash Gupta, Terry Hipsey, Victoria Holloway, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Val Morris-Cook, Bukky Okunade, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice, Sue Shinnick, Philip Smith, Richard Speight, Lynn Worrall, Sue Gray and Steve Liddiard. **(21)**

Against:

Councillors Tim Aker, Chris Baker, Jan Baker, Mark Coxshall, Robert Gledhill, Garry Hague, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Barry Johnson, Roy Jones, Tom Kelly, Charlie Key, Brian Little, Sue Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Tunde Ojetola, Barry Palmer, Maureen

Pearce, John Purkiss, Robert Ray, Joy Redsell, Andrew Roast, Graham Snell, Pauline Tolson and Simon Wootton. **(26)**

Whereupon the Mayor declared that recommendations 1.8.1, 1.8.3 and 1.8.4 to be lost.

The Mayor invited the Chamber to undertake a final recorded vote on recommendations 1.9 to 1.1.4 as printed in the report, the result of which was:

For:

Councillors Tim Aker, Chris Baker, Jan Baker, Clare Baldwin, Terry Brookes, Mark Coxshall, Charles Curtis, Tony Fish, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, Yash Gupta, Garry Hague, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Terry Hipsey, Victoria Holloway, Barry Johnson, Roy Jones, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Charlie Key, Brian Little, Sue Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Val Morris-Cook, Tunde Ojetola, Bukky Okunade, Barry Palmer, Maureen Pearce, John Purkiss, Robert Ray, Joy Redsell, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice, Andrew Roast, Sue Shinnick, Philip Smith, Graham Snell, Richard Speight, Pauline Tolson, Simon Wootton, Lynn Worrall, Sue Gray and Steve Liddiard. **(47)**

Against:**(0)**

Whereupon the Mayor declared these to be carried.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Council:**

- 1. Considers and acknowledges 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;**
- 2. Confirms the Council Tax Band D for 2015/16 at £1,124.64, representing a zero percent increase (excluding other preceptors);**
- 3. Approve a General Fund net revenue budget for 2015/16 of £109,771,385 allocated to services as set out in paragraph 2.33;**
- 4. Note the Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget challenges as set out in paragraphs 2.34 to 2.40 and Appendix 2 and instruct officers to identify the significant savings to balance the period 2016/17 to 2018/19;**
- 5. Approve the Dedicated Schools Grant as set out in paragraphs 2.41 to 2.52 and Appendix 3;**

6. Approve the new General Fund capital schemes as set out in Appendix 4;
7. Agree that any expenditure related to Gloriana Thurrock Ltd be deemed as part of the capital programme and

#### Statutory Council Tax Resolution

8. Calculate that the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2015/16 is £53,857,885 as set out in the table at paragraph 2.33 of this report.
9. That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2015/16 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
  - (a) £341,300,896 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act.
  - (b) £287,443,011 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
  - (c) £53,857,885 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 (Council Tax Base of 47,889), 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.
  - (f) £1,124.64 being the amount at (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (e) above by Item T, 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.
10. To note that the County Council, the Police Authority 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 as indicated in the tables below.

11. That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in the tables below as the amounts of Council Tax for 2015/16 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.

**2015/16 COUNCIL TAX FOR THURROCK PURPOSES EXCLUDING  
ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY AND ESSEX POLICE AUTHORITY**

| Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2015/16 |        |        |          |          |          |          |          |
|---|--------|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| A<br>£                                      | B<br>£ | C<br>£ | D<br>£   | E<br>£   | F<br>£   | G<br>£   | H<br>£   |
| 749.76                                      | 874.72 | 999.68 | 1,124.64 | 1,374.56 | 1,624.48 | 1,874.40 | 2,249.28 |

12. That it be noted that for the year 2015/16 Essex Police Authority has stated the following amounts in precept issued to the Council for each of the categories of dwellings as follows:

| Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2015/16 |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| A<br>£                                      | B<br>£ | C<br>£ | D<br>£ | E<br>£ | F<br>£ | G<br>£ | H<br>£ |
| 98.10                                       | 114.45 | 130.80 | 147.15 | 179.85 | 212.55 | 245.25 | 294.30 |

13. That it be noted that for the year 2015/16 Essex Fire Authority has stated the following amounts in precept issued to the Council for each of the categories of dwellings as follows:

| Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2015/16 |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| A<br>£                                      | B<br>£ | C<br>£ | D<br>£ | E<br>£ | F<br>£ | G<br>£ | H<br>£ |
| 44.28                                       | 51.66  | 59.04  | 66.42  | 81.18  | 95.94  | 110.70 | 132.84 |

**2015/16 COUNCIL TAX (INCLUDING FIRE AND POLICE AUTHORITY  
PRECEPTS)**

| Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2015/16 |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| A<br>£                                      | B<br>£   | C<br>£   | D<br>£   | E<br>£   | F<br>£   | G<br>£   | H<br>£   |
| 892.14                                      | 1,040.83 | 1,189.52 | 1,338.21 | 1,635.59 | 1,932.97 | 2,230.35 | 2,676.42 |

## **106. Housing Base Estimates, Rents and Service Charges 2015/16**

Councillor Lynn Worrall, Cabinet Member for Housing, introduced the report which identified the changes within the base estimates between 2014/15 and 2015/16 and the investment in the planned maintenance programme.

Councillor Gledhill welcomed the report which he felt was open and transparent, but requested that the Cabinet Member further consider:

- The reduction in Central Heating charges by 5% to further assist residents, especially during the cold winter months.
- To reopen the popular assisted gardening scheme, which he believed would incur no additional cost if managed well.
- To explore the possibility of providing one property for 4 homeless ex-service men or women to support them back into the community, as part of the work undertaken in relation to the Veteran's Charter.

At 9.16pm, 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 until 10pm. Members indicated their agreement to the proposal.

Councillor Ojetola welcomed the report and expressed his support for the additional proposals raised by Councillor Gledhill. He asked the Portfolio Holder to provide further information on the success of the downsizing initiative.

Councillor Halden seconded Councillor Gledhill's proposed recommendations and welcomed the comprehensive financial information that was detailed within the report.

The Cabinet Member summed up the debate and made the following comments:

- That she believed she could find the money within the budget to agree the 5% reduction in central heating charges and agreed to reopen the assisted gardening programme, which she recognised was an invaluable resource to some residents.
- That the proposal regarding the dedicated Veteran's House should be referred to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to determine whether the option was viable and scope out the necessary terms and conditions.
- That detailed information on the success of the downsizing programme was regularly reported to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, however that she would instruct officers to circulate a one page update in relation to this initiative to advise Members on the criteria.

## **RESOLVED:**

### **That the Council:**

- 1. Agree the budget changes be included in the base budget for 2015/16.**
- 2. Increase domestic rents by an average of 2.2%, in line with the 30-year HRA business plan from 6 April 2015**
- 3. Agree a 2.2% increase in de-pooled service charges for 2015/16**
- 4. Agree a 2.2% increase in garage rents for 2015/16**
- 5. Agree a 5% reduction in charges relating to central heating in 2015/16**
- 6. Agree a 2.2% increase in Travellers sites rents**

*Councillor C. Kent left the meeting at 9.23pm.*

### **107. Report of the Cabinet Member for Central Services**

Councillor Holloway, Cabinet Member for Central Services, introduced the report and, in doing so, highlighted some of the key achievements of the Portfolio, which included:

- The continual improvements to the website which enabled residents to transact more business online.
- The planned roll out for Universal Credit.
- The success of the counter fraud investigation service.
- The success of the shared legal service which was highly commended as a finalist in the Municipal Journal Achievement Awards for 2014.
- That over 1000 staff had been enabled to work flexibly and over 3000 training days had been provided.

Members questioned the Cabinet Member and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Gledhill commended the work of the counter fraud investigation service and questioned how much this service had saved the public purse.

The Cabinet Member appreciated the recognition of the service but advised that she would need to investigate the figures and report back outside of the meeting.

- Councillor Halden commended the fact that Thurrock paid 94.6% of invoices within 30 days and asked whether the Portfolio Holder had



any information on which services were delivered locally in the Borough so that they could be included in tender exercises.

The Cabinet Member advised that she did not have a specific figure of how many invoices were paid to local businesses, but assured Members that all small and medium sized local businesses were encouraged to tender for work that the local authority needed.

- Councillor Hebb acknowledged the good work that had been undertaken to improve the Council's website and questioned what was being done to monitor and act upon feedback from local residents about the performance of the Council.

The Cabinet Member advised that feedback was obtained through a variety of forms, which included online, face to face and telephone transactions and that this was used as a measure against Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) which facilitated change.

- Councillor Ojetola recognised that compliments often went unreported and commended the successes of the service, but raised a concern that the introduction of assessing and categorising 'concerns' in addition to 'complaints' diluted the reporting procedure.

The Cabinet Member felt that it was right to introduce a pre-stage reporting procedure of 'concerns' but assured Members that these were given the same weight as a stage 1 complaint. She felt it was more important that enquiries were categorised better so that appropriate action could be taken more promptly.

- Councillor B. Little supported the Council's move to conduct business online but questioned what was being done to assist residents who may not have access to computers or who struggle with IT.

The Cabinet Member observed that sometimes residents were underestimated in their abilities to use technology and often people of all ages and abilities were happy to transact business online, however for those residents that preferred to contact the Council by phone or post this was still an option.

- Councillor S. Little was concerned that the hot desking arrangements in place were not appropriate for some teams which could negatively affect their performance.

The Cabinet Member advised that the principle of hot desking was working well but recognised that it took time for some staff to adapt.

## 108. Report of the Cabinet Member for Housing

Councillor Lynn Worrall, Cabinet Member for Housing, introduced the report and, in doing so, highlighted some of the key achievements of the Portfolio, which included:

- The improvement in quality of repairs and voids and the reduction of the turnaround of void properties from 100 days to 30 days.
- The success of the transforming homes programme and that 38% of homes had been transformed.
- The work that had been achieved to reduce damp and mould, which included the completion of 1500 damp and mould surveys.
- The improvement of private sector homes through the Well Homes Programme.
- That tenancies were being managed well and 96% of tenants paid rent regularly.
- That 141 residents were working on programmes through the social value initiative, 25 apprenticeships had been completed or underway and 50 young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET's) had completed pathway programmes.

Members questioned the Portfolio Holder and received responses on the following matters:

- Councillor Gledhill commended the work that had achieved but was concerned that although the statistics looked positive it meant that there were still 1 in 5 residents not happy with a repair and 1 in 4 not happy with the Transforming Homes programme. He asked the Portfolio Holder what was being done to improve satisfaction levels.

The Cabinet Member advised that she met with officers on a weekly basis to discuss repairs and examine what needed to be improved. Members were advised that an extensive customer slip system logged enquiries and a strong team was in place to respond to any issues.

- Councillor Aker raised concerns about a homeless resident who required additional support and had no access to a computer.

The Cabinet Member advised that staff would always assist a resident who required help, which included providing assistance to the resident at the Council Offices in order to complete paperwork.

- Councillor Halden asked the Portfolio Holder whether tenants were allowed to carry out repair and maintenance work themselves and not be bound by health and safety myths.

The Cabinet Member advised that she worked hard to dispel inaccuracies regarding health and safety rules.

- Councillor G. Rice congratulated the Portfolio Holder on the work around Gloriana and asked whether additional support could be offered to elderly and vulnerable tenants in Chadwell to ensure that repairs and decoration works were carried out.

The Cabinet Member provided assurances that appropriate support would be provided.

- Councillor Purkiss highlighted concerns with regard to the reporting of complaints and remarked that an individual case had come to his attention of a local resident who suffered from Damp and Mould despite all the appropriate remedial action being taken.

The Cabinet Member observed that the correct reporting of repairs was vital and stated that she would speak to the Member outside of the meeting in relation to the specific case.

In summing up the report the Cabinet Member informed the Chamber that:

- A new process for the reporting of repairs was expected to be introduced on 2 March 2015 which meant that the calls would be directed straight to Mears, rather than the Council call centre.
- It was anticipated that this change would invoke stricter controls and set tighter targets, which would enable for performance to be regularly monitored.
- A performance meeting would be held every fortnight to evaluate progress with repairs and maintenance.
- Improvements to the telephone reporting system included 20 seconds to answer calls and a direct dial number for Members to record and track complaints.

## **109. Questions from Members**

The Mayor informed the Chamber that four questions had been submitted to the Leader and a further five questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee.

Due to time limitations the following Members withdrew their questions.

- Councillor Aker asked to withdraw his questions to the Leader and Councillor Smith and requested that they be included on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Councillors Speight and Jones withdrew their questions to the Leader as both had been answered during the course of the meeting.
- Councillor Gledhill withdrew his question as he had since been updated on progress and did not want to jeopardise the discussions that were taking place with SERCO. He reported that he was in full agreement with the Leader of the Council and that he would

resubmit his question for the following Council meeting if progress had not been made in the interim

- Councillor C. Baker asked to withdraw his questions and requested that they be included on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Councillor Hipsey asked for his question to Councillor Speight to be withdrawn and requested that it be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

A copy of the transcript of questions and answers can be found at Appendix A to these Minutes.

**110. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies**

There were no reports from Members representing the Council on outside bodies.

**111. Minutes of Committees**

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

**112. Update on motions resolved at Council during the previous year**

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

**113. To consider motions from Members in the order in which they were submitted**

No motions had been submitted for debate.

**The meeting finished at 10.01 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)