

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 13 September 2017 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Monday 25 September at 5.00pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Chair), Shane Hebb (Deputy Chair), Mark Coxshall, James Halden, Deborah Huelin, Brian Little, Susan Little and Aaron Watkins

Apologies: Councillor Sue MacPherson

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Sharon Bayliss, Director of Commercial Services
Sean Clark, Director of Finance & IT
Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Environment and Place
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service
David Lawson, Deputy Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer
Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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.

27. Minutes

The Minutes of Cabinet, held on 12 July 2017, were approved as a correct record.

28. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

29. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

30. Statements by the Leader

The Leader addressed Portfolio Holders updating them on the Clean it, Cut it and Fill it Scheme, that since April 2017 the Council had continued to invest in these important services. Work completed included:

- The 10 extra street cleansing rounds, collecting nearly 900 tonnes of rubbish;

- 10 new ride on grass mowers enabling 8,900 acres of grass to have been cut and;
- £2million invested in road repairs and improvements such as resurfacing or treating 44km² of roads and filling over 4,000 potholes.

He further notified Members of the Regular Action Days taking place in Grays Town Centre, with the Police and Council Enforcement Officers tackling street drinking, littering and businesses who do not have trade waste duty of care documents. It was noted since the 7 September 2017:

- 3 Street drinkers had been stopped their alcohol seized and warned not to return within the PSPO zone within 48hours;
- 22 businesses had been visited regarding inspection of their trade waste duty of care documents;
- 9 Waste duty of care notices had been issued as businesses were unable to produce their trade waste duty of care documents at the time of visit and
- 35 fixed penalty notices had been issued to persons who had littered, this was now a total £2,800 of fines.

Councillor Gledhill advised 4 Action Days had been held totalling 44 Fixed Penalty Notices for breaches of the Grays PSPO covering abusive language and failing to comply with alcohol provisions. He continued to explain 3 of the persistent offenders breaching the PSPO were subject to prosecution for persistent breaches.

The Leader mentioned that the Council's street cleaning teams had been trained to identify evidence in fly-tips they encounter around the borough. He reminded residents if their rubbish was found to be fly-tipped they could be fined and not the company who removed the rubbish on their behalf, if the company were unlicensed.

Lastly Councillor Gledhill advised that Councillor MacPherson would be taking a leave of absence to support her son as he trained for the 2024 Olympics. The Leader outlined the following responsibilities and the Portfolio Holders who would now undertake them.

Leader of the Council – Public Protection
 Councillor S.Little – Community Development and Voluntary Sector
 Councillor Watkins – Sports and Leisure
 Councillor B.Little Community Partnership – Police
 Councillor Huelin – Equality and Diversity, Libraries, Registrars, Communications, Legal and Democratic Services and Pay Policy.

31. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Halden addressed Cabinet Members informing them of the feedback from GCSE results. He explained that the exams were tougher and coursework and module exams were being phased out by the Department of Education. Councillor Halden notified Members that Hassenbrook Academy

had a 20% increase in their English exam result. He praised the school for the result and stated they should be very proud.

Councillor Hebb announced that the Council had led on an exercise calling for reform and recall for Elected Councillors, who were not playing by the rules or for significant reasons such as standard breaches. He continued to explain that a piece of work on benchmarking cases and opportunities had been undertaken and outlined proposals suggested by Members. Councillor Hebb advised that Thurrock was one of the first councils to carry out this piece of work and confirmed that Officers had written to the Secretary of State and the DLG to highlight some of the principles, Members discussed at Full Council last year. He commented that it was time for change, however any changes would depend on national government.

32. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

There were no petitions submitted.

33. Questions from Non-Executive Members

The Leader of the Council advised that one question had been submitted and would be held at the relevant item.

34. Matters Referred to the Cabinet for Consideration by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Leader of the Council informed Members that no matters had been referred to the Cabinet by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

35. Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 1 June 2017 (Decision 01104438)

Councillor Gledhill invited Councillor Gerrish to read the question that he had submitted.

Given the forecast overspend for the year is already over one million pounds, does the Leader still have confidence in his service budgets?

In response the Leader of the Council advised "*Thank you, Councillor Gerrish. Before I give my answer, let's remind ourselves of what we inherited when we took administration and indeed the same report at this time in 2015. That was the last similar report of the previous, Labour Administration. That 2015 report showed a first quarter pressure of £1.269million comprising of a number of issues such as shortfall from recharges, impact of environment contracts failing, overspends in environment and transformation budgets to name a few. Indeed, most of us will see some of the similarities to this evening. That Cabinet assured residents that it would be cleared by the end of the financial year, however by the end of that financial year we inherited from the Labour Administration a forecast net pressures of over £4million in 2016. Yes, £4million shortfall that we had to address before starting on our own priorities.*

Now, at the end of the last financial year, and that was the first of the Conservative Administration, bearing in mind we had the same amount of tax payers' money to spend as the previous Administration and induced the Clean it, Cut it, Fill it Programme. We reduced the pressures caused by the number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children, we saved a small fortune in penalties from the Government by using the right to buy receipts to cover the cost of the new council homes your administration commissioned at a cost that was so massive to build they wouldn't have sold on the open market without making a loss, we introduced a new, proactive environmental enforcement team but most of all we finished the year with minor underspends in both the general and housing revenue accounts.

I would also like to point you in the direction of the external auditor's assessment that is set out in the Annual Results Report to be considered by the Standards and Audit Committee next week. Not only does it give a positive value for money conclusion – this is their independent assessment of the Council's financial position and plans for the future – but in reaching that conclusion they carried out testing on a number of the budget assumptions and savings proposals, and said they were good.

So, I can assure you, Councillor Gerrish that the Cabinet are working closely with our Directors in identifying ways to bridge this gap and are sure that future reports will show the progress being made. So, based on the last year of the Labour Administration versus the first year of the Conservative Administration, I think any objective minded individual would have as much confidence as I do in delivering a balanced budget, so the short answer: yes."

Councillor Gerrish was offered a supplementary question in which he asked: "Thank you very much, Councillor Gledhill. Putting aside for a second the fact that it's disappointing to see some savings not delivered like the £80,000 from the library review that's not set up yet, or the £25,000 that was forecast on the waste contract which turned into an additional cost of £75,000, no I agree that £1m overspend at this point in the year can be corrected and controlled, if there's a clear, precise plan on how spending will be managed early on that we then stick to through the year. Would the Leader please explain his plan to bring spending back under control and precisely break down where and how the £1m of mitigating action will be delivered?"

The Leader reported "I'll give you a very short answer on that because I know Councillor Hebb has a very direct answer, as he goes through his report coming up as the next item. As I say we work very closely with our Directors, I will use an example of Councillor Sue Little reducing the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers and the added pressures has reduced the amount of unexpected costs within the service. Including, reducing the amount of temporary staff and Social Care Staff.

All reviews that we are carrying out for the next year, everyone single of them will lead to some form of induction savings, we do obviously, as you know have expected pressures as everybody does such as grass cutting, sickness

within the waste team, all of these get managed throughout the year to seek any natural savings such as not advertising jobs. As I say where we are this year is a much better position than you were in the year 2015/16 and I can assure you that by the end of this year we will not only be putting more money into reserves which is what we have been doing, which you didn't, but we will be coming in on budget."

Councillor Gledhill thanked Councillor Gerrish for his question.

Councillor Hebb, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services introduced the report explaining that since 2016 when the Conservatives were elected to the Administration they had inherited a £4million overspend in Children Services. Since then they had been finding ways to make savings and bring the budget in on target.

The Portfolio Holder commented it was important to focus on where the Council was currently and the response from the Peer Review. He continued that the Peer Review consisted of interviews of senior management and looking over the council's budget plans. Councillor Hebb advised the outcome of the Peer Review was for the Council to continue working the way it was.

Members were advised the pressures on Children Services consisted of unique cases which in turn had cost implications. One of the pressures was the number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children. Councillor Hebb explained over the last nine months the number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children had reduced from 108 to 30.

It was highlighted that the Environment Service had a high overspend which included the waste disposal contract extension costs and the tender process for a new fleet which had now completed. Councillor Hebb explained that the aging vehicles working beyond their life expectancy had posed a potential financial risk.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services commented he was confident Commercial Services would be at a breakeven position by the end of the year and he assured Members that self-sufficient ways of working would continue to be identified.

Councillor Halden, Portfolio Holder for Education and Health remarked that the pressure indicated within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) of £1.9million was being worked on by the Director of Children's Services and hoped to be balanced within 3 years.

Councillor S. Little thanked Councillor Hebb for his report. She continued by stating overspend within Children's Services was due to complex cases, such as special need cases which were expensive. The Portfolio Holder for Adult and Children Social Care further commented that she was working with the Director of Children's Services and Officers to bring cases which were situated out of Borough back to Thurrock.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment welcomed the report and stated that the fleet of refuse vehicles had been purchased to reduce breakdowns of vehicles and disruption of services. Councillor Watkins commented that 27 vehicles had been purchased, alongside investment into 4 current vehicles the total fleet was now 31 vehicles.

Councillor Gledhill, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Housing mentioned the Homelessness function received £0.3million from the Flexible Homelessness Support Grant, he stated the he was working with the Director for Housing to address homelessness.

He continued to comment on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) identifying that three times the amount of properties were subject to repairs and maintenance as part of the Transforming Home Scheme. Councillor Gledhill advised that certain programmes would be delayed until such time as the Councils stock survey had been completed.

The Leader finally highlighted the pressures caused by outside organisations such as the Coroners Court, where Essex Police had pulled out of the funding agreement.

Resolved:

That Cabinet noted the forecast outturn position for 2017/18 and that further mitigation is required to outturn within the agreed budget envelope.

Reason for Decision – as stated in the report
This decision is subject to call-in

36. 2017/18 Capital Monitoring Report – Quarter 1 (Decision 01104439)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Legal Services addressed Members providing an update on the financial position of the capital programme. Councillor Hebb advised there was £69million currently in the capital programme, with current works on hold estimated £3.9 million, he continued there were reasons for a number of reasons for example the expansion of East Tilbury Primary School was not a case of if but when the work to be completed.

The Portfolio Holder commented that the Aveley Hub would be presented to Cabinet later in the year and highlighted the schemes and allocations which had Council approval, however were dependent on development or third parties, such as the A13 Widening.

Councillor Halden notified Members the East Tilbury expansion was to assist with the closure of the Primary Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). He continued to advise Cabinet that the School alongside the St Clere's Trust offered assist by expanding the school and enrolling the Children from the PRU.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transportation commented that the A13 Widening scheme was due to start work in November 2017, with the aim to complete in 2018/19.

Councillor Coxshall commented that it was thanks to investment from the Government that such programmes were being completed. He continued by stating that Grays Town Centre was dirty and dated, it was now a place that residents wanted to work and live in.

The Leader of the Council mentioned the Housing Revenue Account Schemes and highlighted the programme also delivered major works to void properties which was required to bring them up to a rentable standard. He stated it was easier to complete the works necessary on properties when they were void rather than when residents had moved in.

Resolved that Cabinet:

- 1. Note the General Fund capital programme is projected to have available resources of £3.999m as at 31 March 2018 with this funding carried forward to 2018/19 to fund schemes currently in progress;**
- 2. In addition, there is a further £116.740m in the approved programme that is under development and/or dependent on third party actions as set out in paragraph 3.6;**
- 3. Note the Housing Revenue Account capital programme is projected to have no unused resources in 2017/18.**

Reason for Decision – as stated in the report
This decision is subject to call-in

The meeting finished at 7.53pm
Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk