

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 25 November 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Terry Piccolo (Mayor), Sue Shinnick (Deputy Mayor), Qaisar Abbas, Abbie Akinbohun, John Allen, Alex Anderson, Chris Baker, Gary Byrne, Daniel Chukwu, Colin Churchman, Gary Collins, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Mike Fletcher, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, Garry Hague, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Victoria Holloway, Sue Hooper, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Angela Lawrence, Steve Liddiard, Susan Little, Ben Maney, Fraser Massey, Allen Mayes, Sara Muldowney, Bukky Okunade, Jane Pothecary, David Potter, Shane Ralph, Joycelyn Redsell, Gerard Rice, Elizabeth Rigby, Sue Sammons, Jennifer Smith, Luke Spillman, David Van Day, Aaron Watkins and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillor Mark Coxshall

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed to the Council's online webcast channel.

172. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on the 28 October 2020 were approved as a correct record.

On matters arising from the minutes, Councillor Worrall asked for an update from Councillor Jefferies following his portfolio holder at last month's meeting on whether he had considered implementing a working group to look at enforcing the 20mph outside schools and to ensure that parking restrictions were enforced.

173. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

174. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

175. Announcements on behalf of the Mayor or the Leader of the Council

The Mayor made thanks to the continued support being received from residents and businesses through these extraordinary difficult times.

The Mayor stated that although his engagements had been limited he had attended a few virtual engagements with other mayors and some social distanced events.

The Mayor announced that he had given some thought on how money could be raised for his chosen charity GiFT and further details would follow shortly.

The Mayor stated that although there had been some technical difficulties previously he had been reassured that those difficulties had been overcome.

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

In regards to COVID 19, we are due to come out of this lockdown exactly one week today and thanked the residents of Thurrock for continuing to show such great community spirit and resilience as they had done throughout this pandemic. As many of you would have seen from the figures we published in the Council's e-newsletter last week we had seen an increase in the number of people testing positive for COVID 19 but this was not unique to Thurrock, we were seeing a similar picture in all the surrounding Council areas.

We continued to see some outbreaks at schools, which were being dealt with by the schools themselves with support from our Public Health Team, and an outbreak in a care home. But most worryingly we were seeing an increase in infections spread and caught in the community. That was why it was so important that we all try hard to make sure that we were doing all that we can to protect ourselves and indeed each other. The advice was almost deceptively simple: we need to make sure to follow hands, face and space advice. We will learn for certain tomorrow what tier Thurrock would be placed in and to what extent there would be an easing of restrictions for us but we must continue to work together to follow advice, protect and support our most vulnerable residents and most importantly self-isolate when we need to do so. The Leader provided some COVID- 9 stats as of Wednesday 18 November, there were (actual positive test results by age brackets):

- Under 18s – 32
- 18-49 years – 219
- 50-59 years – 43
- 60-69 years – 23
- Over 70s – 30
- Total: 347
- Total number of tests carried out in the previous 7 days = 4085
- 7 day rate of positive test per 100,000 = 199
- Local authority rank (where 2 was highest, 149 was the lowest): 99th

The Leader referred to the additional support for residents and businesses that this winter we would be supporting vulnerable families with food, energy and utility bills thanks to more than half a million pounds in funding received from the Government.

We were also amongst the first in the country to launch a new discretionary businesses support fund last week which had been created by Thurrock Council, using £3.5 million of Government funding, to help smaller businesses which had been affected by COVID 19 restrictions which had not been eligible for previous funding because they worked from home or provided services from rented halls or other similar premises. These were just two examples of the help we and the Government had given residents and businesses as we had collectively faced this pandemic these last few months.

Including business rate relief, local businesses had benefitted from more than £70 million in funding and that was before the latest restriction support and discretionary grants were distributed.

The Leader announced that the Council was committed to supporting local traders and businesses and would once again offer free car parking every Saturday in December in all Council owned car parks and pay and display on-street parking. The high street shops and local businesses had faced many challenges over the past nine months, unlike anything they had seen before. This initiative, which was being implemented for the fourth consecutive year, would offer them a welcome boost when they needed it most, and as they begin to reopen when national lockdown measures come to an end and we entered into an updated tier system.

This free parking scheme would make it easier for residents to shop locally and have a positive impact on our local economy as shoppers to do their Christmas shopping in the wide range of local businesses that the borough had to offer.

At 7.18pm, Councillor Jefferies called a Point of Order stating that Members were unable to hear or see and questioned whether this was the right way to do business.

Councillor J Kent stated he had heard very little of meeting so far and questioned whether there was anything that could be done to improve on this.

At 7.21pm the Mayor suspended the meeting.

At 7.30pm the meeting was reconvened.

The Mayor announced that due to some technical difficulties, some Members were having problems accessing the meeting and proposed that one item of urgent business on the agenda, Item 10 - Senior Management Appointment Report, be heard and then following that report he would adjourn the meeting to another date. The Mayor apologised to Mr Perrin that his question would not be heard this evening.

At 7.32pm, Councillor Jefferies called a Point of Order stating that this was an important item which all members should have the opportunity to debate on.

At 7.34pm the Mayor suspended the meeting.

At 7.54pm, within the suspended period, Councillor Byrne was removed from the meeting.

At 7.57pm the meeting was reconvened.

The Monitoring Officer stated that the majority of Members had a good MST connection to the meeting so the presentation of the senior management appointments report would proceed.

176. Senior Management Appointments

Councillor Gledhill introduced the report and sought the approval from Council to appoint to the Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health and Assistant Director Economic Growth and Partnerships. That following a robust search and selection process, General Services Committee interviewed on the 16 November 2020 and recommended the appointment of Ian Wake as Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health and the appointment of Gerard McCleave as the Assistant Director Economic Growth and Partnerships.

Councillor J Kent seconded the report and was happy to move to the vote.

Councillor Massey was happy to move to the vote.

Councillor Allen was happy to proceed.

Councillor Little stated that she was pleased with the two appointments made.

The Mayor called a vote on recommendations 1 and 2 to which the recommendations were carried. It was noted for the minutes that Councillor Potter abstained his vote.

RESOLVED

- 1. Approved in accordance with the Council's Constitution the appointment of Ian Wake as the permanent Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health.**
- 2. To approve in accordance with the Council's Constitution the appointment of Gerard McCleave as the permanent Assistant Director Economic Growth and Partnerships.**

At 8.06pm the Mayor adjourned the meeting and would reschedule to another date to allow time for any technical issues within the Council or with Member's individual connections to be resolved.

The meeting reconvened on Wednesday 13 January 2021 at 7.30pm.

Apologies had been received from Councillors Hague and Worrall for this reconvened session.

Councillor Coxshall was in attendance for this reconvened session.

177. Questions from Members of the Public

A copy of the transcript of question and answer can be viewed under the relevant meeting date at <http://democracy.thurrock.co.uk/thurrock> and are attached at Appendix A at these minutes.

178. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

The Mayor informed Members that in accordance with the Council's petition scheme, no requisition of notice had been given to present a petition at the meeting.

179. Petitions Update Report

Members received a report on the status of those petitions handed in at Council meetings and Council offices.

180. 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 by Committees and Outside Bodies, statutory and other panels.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Gledhill, informed the Chamber he had no changes to make.

Councillor J Kent, Leader of the Labour Group, informed the Chamber he had no changes to make.

Councillor Byrne, Leader of the Thurrock Independent Group informed the Chamber he had no changes to make.

Councillors Massey and Allen informed the Chamber they had no changes to make.

181. Report of the Cabinet Member for Housing

Councillor Johnson, as Portfolio Holder for Housing, was proud to be presenting this third portfolio holder report and began by thanking all officers, council partners and volunteers who had come together to do such a marvellous job in providing the housing services in such difficult times.

Some of the key points made were:

- In 2019/20 the housing service had recorded its strongest performance for overall satisfaction for housing services since the tenant satisfaction had first been recorded in 2013/14 with the department finishing a very difficult year very strongly.
- Satisfaction with transforming homes remained high for 2019/20 with repair satisfaction levels demonstrating a consistent level and the three tenant satisfaction measures had shown continued improvement.
- The number of complaints on housing services had seen a year on year reduction and Councillor Johnson was confident that this trend would continue.
- The housing department had worked tirelessly to support and protect the wellbeing of those that accessed the services with an extra 60,000 contact calls made since March 2020.
- Following Government guidance in March 2020 to identify and provide accommodation to all known rough sleepers, Thurrock had by the end of October 2020 accommodated 56 individuals.
- Housing Development had seen new council owned homes being handed over in the current financial year and ongoing building of homes specifically for older people would be handed over during summer 2021.
- Cabinet had agreed in March 2019 to deliver 500 new council homes over the next five to 10 years with the process of identifying potential sites being agreed by Cabinet in 2020.
- Regular progress reports are presented to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Spillman thanked Councillor Johnson for the report and on behalf of members thanked officers in the housing department who had undertaken an amazing job during these terrible times. Councillor Spillman questioned whether any new ways of working had been identified during this period that could be carried forward. Councillor Johnson stated this was the actual number of homeless or potential homeless people who the housing team had managed to accommodate and how the team had worked to ensure that nobody went back on the street as rough sleepers.

Councillor J Kent stated that during the pandemic we had learnt the importance of Thurrock's parks and open spaces and had been disappointed to see that Elm Road open space in Grays still earmarked for development. Councillor J Kent had over 60 letters from local residents objecting to this proposed building and would forward these onto Councillor Johnson. Councillor J Kent asked again to remove the Elm Road open space from this list of site for potential development. Councillor Johnson thanked Councillor J Kent for the feedback and stated this was a consultation process and once the consultation had concluded a decision could be made.

Councillor Byrne echoed Councillor Spillman comments on the great efforts made during this tough year and the great effort made by everyone. It was also important to look at open spaces and keep them as open spaces.

Councillor Allen raised concerns on complaints he had made in regards to damp and mould in Thurrock's high rise blocks and questioned what the portfolio holder was proposing to do to ensure that residents had acceptable living and safety standards in place in all those properties. Councillor Johnson stated that officers had been commissioned to look at the high rise blocks to see whether this was being caused by the way the building was constructed or down to people's lifestyles and reassured Councillor Allen that everything was being done to find a solution.

Councillor Rice referred to the residents of the new bungalows in Chadwell who were very pleased with their new accommodation but he had received complaints in regards to the collection of their refuse bins as on occasions they were being missed. Councillor Johnson agreed to take this action away.

Councillor Muldowney referred to the Government not renewing their commitment to rehoming rough sleepers and the homeless and asked for confirmation that Thurrock would continue to work to rehome all rough sleepers. Councillor Johnson reassured that nobody accommodated would return to rough sleeper and aimed to provide long term accommodation for transition to independent living. That 15 households had moved on from temporary accommodation which had been provided by the Council, 14 of which had found and secured accommodation in the private rental sector, nine households had moved on from the temporary accommodation on their own accord and unfortunately five had returned to prison. Councillor Johnson stated he would endeavour to ensure that we kept as many rough sleepers off the streets as the Council possibly could.

Councillor Fletcher stated that mould was a widespread problem and asked not to limit the investigation work to just high rise blocks as there were a number of areas in South Ockendon where mould was becoming a widespread problem and encouraged officers to speak to council tenants in Ockendon. Councillor Johnson agreed that the investigation work should not be limited to just the high rise blocks but as most of the complaints had been received from residents from those high rise blocks, this would be a good place to start.

Councillor Johnson summed up by stating the Council had continued to provide many key housing services for tenants and residents across the borough where performance in several areas had remained strong and good progress had been made in others. That COVID had impacted the delivery of services but officers, partners and volunteers had worked tirelessly to minimise and mitigate wherever possible to ensure that services continued to be provided to those who were in need.

182. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that the question received to the Leader of the Council and question 5 from Councillor Kerin to Councillor Coxshall had been withdrawn. Those questions not heard would either receive a written response or have the option to withdraw and resubmit.

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

183. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

The Mayor informed the Chamber that no reports had been received.

184. Minutes of Committees

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

185. Motions Update Report

Members received an information report updating the progress in respect of Motions received at Council.

186. Motion submitted by Councillor J Kent

Councillor J Kent withdrew his motion on the night.

The meeting finished at 8.25pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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