

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 16 September 2020 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-in is Wednesday 30 September 2020 at 5.00pm

Present: Councillors Shane Hebb (Deputy Leader), Mark Coxshall, James Halden, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Allen Mayes and Aaron Watkins

Apologies: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Leader) and Ben Maney

In attendance: Les Billingham, Interim Director of Adult Social Care and Community Development
Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Sean Clark, Director of Finance, Governance and Property
Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Andrew Millard, Director of Place
Ian Wake, Director of Public Health
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed onto the Council's YouTube channel.

25. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 22 July 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

26. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

27. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

28. Statements by the Leader

The Deputy Leader explained that the Leader's statement would be discussed at the upcoming meeting of Full Council.

29. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

The Deputy Leader stated that an initial investment committee scoping meeting had taken place earlier in the week, and had been attended by a number of Members including himself, the Leader, Councillors John Kent,

Fraser Massy and Gary Byrne; as well as senior officers including the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer. He felt this had been a good session where they had discussed the work undertaken by external advisors since July, and what potential democratic oversight of investments could look like, including an investment briefing. He commented that a shadow investment board would be set up to cover the remaining municipal year and would discuss the Terms of Reference for the committee to ensure it had the right aims and targets. He stated that any Members who sat on the investment committee would receive appropriate training and briefings, so the committee could move forward knowing how to handle investments and the governance surrounding this process.

30. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

31. Questions from Non-Executive Members

No questions had been submitted from non-Executive Members.

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

No matters had been referred to Cabinet for consideration by an overview and scrutiny committee.

33. Stanford-le-Hope Station Redevelopment (Decision: 110527)

Councillor Coxshall introduced the report and stated that the project was now moving forward after a brief pause and reflect period, which had made the scheme more deliverable. He explained that the project was now looking to go to market to tender main works contractors, which would be at a fixed price to stop 'mission creep' within the project. He added that as the scheme had changed, new planning permission would need to be sought but felt that this would be worthwhile as the new scheme had more improvements for local residents and commuters. He summarised and stated that the project should begin work sometime in 2021.

The Deputy Leader stated that he was a resident in Stanford-le-Hope as well as a Councillor for the area and felt that all local residents wished to see the project completed, and this report would help this goal. He stated that one of the reasons why the project would need new planning permission was because it increased commuter parking at the station, but felt this would help reduce pressure on the local road network, which was a local issue for residents who lived close to the station.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed the strategy and approach to progress the scheme as set out in the report.

2. Gave approval to commence a tendering process for a main works contractor for both Phase 1 and Phase 2.

3. Delegated to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, authority to award the subsequent main works contract subject to compliance with the Council's procurement rules and terms and conditions being approved by the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer

*Reason for decision: as outlined in the report
This decision is subject to call-in*

34. Proposed Consultation on Adult Social Care (Non-Residential) Fees and Charges 2021/22 (Decision: 110528)

Councillor Halden introduced the report and stated that this was the first step in helping to stabilise the adult social care budget for the long-term, particularly in a post-COVID world, to ensure the most vulnerable residents were protected. He explained that it currently cost users £13 per hour for domiciliary care, but this service actually cost the Council £17.06 per hour, which meant that the service was not recovering costs. Councillor Halden added that there were currently 1200 service users, of which almost 1000 users only paid a portion of the costs or nothing at all. He added that the adult social care market was experiencing increased financial pressures because of COVID, which included the added expense of appropriate PPE. He mentioned that Thurrock also had to remain in parity with Essex County Council, which currently paid 90p per hour more than Thurrock, which could leave Thurrock uncompetitive. Councillor Halden stated there were three options going to consultation, which were being presented to Cabinet, which included taking no action; increasing to the maximum charges immediately; or increasing the charges over a period of three years. He mentioned that increasing the charges gradually was the proposed course of action so residents had time to adjust to the changes whilst ensuring that the service was stable and reliable in the future. He stated that this report recommended the Council go out to consultation on these three options to ensure residents could have their say. He explained that the Council would listen to any feedback carefully and was keen to hear views from those using the service and those on the edge of care, for example family and friends of care users. He stated that Cabinet had listened to overview and scrutiny and had extended the consultation from 30 days to 8 weeks to ensure that as many residents could take part as possible.

Councillor Coxshall questioned how the consultation would work and make sure that all residents had the opportunity to take part, as overview and scrutiny and Full Council often commented that consultations regularly received low turnout. Councillor Halden responded that due to COVID face-to-face consultation was limited, but that the consultation was being designed with HealthWatch, who were an independent third party organisation, and would help to make sure that the consultation was up to standard. He added that a paper consultation questionnaire would be delivered to all service users,

and a link to the online consultation would be added to the Council's newsletter. He stated that the Local Plan consultation had used direct phone questionnaires, and this would also be considered for this consultation. He added that the Council were also currently looking at ways in which socially distanced consultation events could occur. Councillor Johnson asked how the Council would protect vulnerable residents who were not able to pay. Councillor Halden clarified that the full charge increase would only apply to 160 service users out of 1200, who were means assessed and able to pay or who had not filled out the means test self-assessment form. He stated that 148 service users did not pay for the service at all, and the remainder only paid a portion. He felt that therefore the maximum charge increase only had a limited scope and officers would retain the ability to use their discretion to offset the charge in exceptional circumstances. He stated that the means test criteria would not change, but was open to resident's feedback in the consultation.

The Deputy Leader summarised and felt it was good to see the consultation had been extended to eight weeks based on the views of overview and scrutiny.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Reviewed the three options for charging regarding the services in scope detailed in section 3.1.**
- 2. Approved that the three options go out to public consultation.**
- 3. Approved that the consultation with providers can start as soon as possible regarding the rates the Council pays with the presumption of an above inflation increase to stabilise the market and reflect the increased costs arising from COVID.**

*Reason for decision: as outlined in the report
This decision is subject to call-in*

35. Procurement to Provide Autism Specialist Support - Medina Road (Decision: 110529)

Councillor Halden introduced the report and stated that this was a good report that would provide specialist autism support in the borough. He felt proud of Thurrock's special schools which were both rated as outstanding, and led to a higher proportion of people with disabled children moving to the borough. He stated that in 17 years Thurrock would see an increase of 30% of people in the borough with autism, and therefore the Council were looking at supported accommodation to ensure those people received the care they needed. Councillor Halden stated that this was both a housing and a pastoral offer, as it would also provide help with training, jobs and education. He explained that the centre contained six specialist units, a garden, and a common room and

services provided would be weighted towards increasing independent living. He summarised and stated that whoever was tendered would need to work with Thurrock and other agencies such as Aspire to ensure the highest level of care and support was provided.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed the future design of the service model to support people living in Medina Road.

2. Agreed to commence the procurement of support for Medina Road and delegated authority to award the contract to the Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.

*Reason for decision: as outlined in the report
This decision is subject to call-in*

36. Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2019/20 - Serious Youth Violence and Vulnerability (Decision: 110530)

Councillor Mayes introduced the report and thanked the Director of Public Health and his team for their excellent report, which focussed on youth violence and vulnerability. He stated that from a public health perspective this included surveillance, identifying risks, intervening to reduce those risk factors and implementation. He outlined that the report covered the first three stages and worked to move to the implementation stage. He stated that the report outlined youth violence as a communicable disease which could infect a community and needed a whole system approach, including multiple agencies, to tackle. He described that the report considered trends in youth violence which had been increasing since 2013, but Thurrock's work with Essex Police and the C17 gang injunction had helped to keep figures down. He felt it was disappointing to see high levels of youth violence with weapons, but on a ward basis only six wards within Thurrock had higher than average youth violence, and these were wards where there was easy access to the C2C train line, which led to criminal migration. He commented that the public health team were working with the British Transport Police to tackle the problem of criminal migration. Councillor Mayes moved on to describe how deprivation was a poor predictor of youth violence and explained the crime paradox, which meant that young people who were convicted of crimes and sent to juvenile detention centres were more likely to come from a deprived background, but those from a deprived background were not any more likely to commit crimes. He explained the casual variables which could also affect increased youth violence such as exposure to criminal activity; time spent unsupervised in town centres; low morality; and low self-control. He felt that Thurrock were good at working with some external agencies such as Aspire as well as promoting good family outcomes and quality primary education; but needed to work better with NHS services and other agencies to improve upon the good work already being undertaken.

Councillor Halden thanked the public health team and Director of Public Health and stated that the report presented a clear picture on what areas the Council were doing well at and which areas needed improvement. He felt that Thurrock had achieved in areas such as the C17 gang injunction, which had helped put gang members in prison for a total of 42 years, and working with Essex Police on operations such as Operation Compass, as well as the utilisation of targeted stop and searches. He added that Thurrock were also increasing resources such as increasing the Youth Offending Service team and introducing a specific gang officer. He felt that external contracts with public health partners needed to be improved, but this report would add weight to contractual discussions such as with NELFT and EPUT.

The Deputy Leader felt the report was very comprehensive and meaningful, and would help when working with external organisations such as Essex Police, including continuing successes such as holding the C17 gang to account. He was also pleased to see work was being carried out with the British Transport Police to help tackle criminal migration into the borough.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Noted and commented on the content and recommendations contained within the report.**
- 2. Considered how the findings and recommendations contained within the report can be best implemented and used to influence broader council strategy in this area.**

*Reason for decision: as outlined in the report
This decision is subject to call-in*

37. Medium Term Financial Strategy Update and Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 1 2020/21 (Decision: 110531)

The Deputy Leader introduced the report and explained that it outlined the economic impact of COVID-19, as Thurrock moved away from a balanced MTFs budget, which had been in place since 2018, and towards a deficit. He stated that some local authorities were having to bring an in-year emergency budget to Council due to their deficits, but Thurrock were not in that position as the Council were better equipped due to reserves and other income sources. He stated that at the beginning of the 2020/21 municipal year, Thurrock had been in a £4million surplus, but due to COVID, that would be used to reduce the new in-year deficit down to £2million. He stated that central government had given Thurrock £10.8million in support, but the Council would experience £6.3million of pressure above this government support, due to a reduction in fees and charges, the cessation of some capital strategy activity, a reduction in council tax and business rate income, and other COVID-related pressures. He added that last municipal year the Council had reversed deficits of £1.5million, and felt that the Council could do it again

this municipal year.

The Deputy Leader outlined other pressures that the Council would potentially face in the future, and gave examples such as an increased number of Local Council Tax Scheme (LCTS) claimants, an increase in the number of people presenting as homeless, and a reduction in income from Thameside Theatre. He added that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government would be outlining potential additional support for local authorities towards the end of 2020, but as this was not confirmed, was not included in future budget plans. He confirmed that investments were still yielding income as the renewable energy sector had not been influenced by the global pandemic. He mentioned that following the pandemic the Council could see a potential deficit of £19million in 2021/22.

The Deputy Leader moved on and outlined pressures to services which would also potentially reduce the level of Council income, but felt that Thurrock would be in a worse position if surpluses had not increased by 131% since 2016. He stated that council tax and business rates were accounted using national working practices, but Thurrock had made representation to the IRRV and LGA to ensure that accounting practices had been relaxed over the summer to ease with problems associated with lack of receipts. He added that the Council would still experience £13million directly related COVID pressures, and that if COVID had not occurred adult social care would be experiencing £50,000 underspend currently; the Place directorate experiencing £0.2million pressure and other teams such as environment and finance would be breaking even. He summarised and stated that the Council would be in a balanced position if COVID had not happened.

The Deputy Leader outlined the need to look at the social care sector's financial base in a post-COVID world. He stated that Children's Services were expecting to see increased pressure because of COVID as more unknown and new children entered the system, which would lead to potential additional spend of £0.9million, but Thurrock were committed to ensuring that every child was safe and received a positive outcome. He added that the Council had also lost £1million income from education and care providers due to the closure of schools and nurseries during lockdown. He explained why the environment team were experiencing increased pressures, which included lost income from the closure of Impulse Leisure during lockdown, who had now been trading for three weeks. He added that the environment team had also seen increased pressured due to increased PPE spend; reduction of trade waste income; and reduction of car park fees income. He outlined pressures on the place directorate due to COVID, which included lost income from the closure of Thameside during lockdown and reduction in income from planning fees and charges. He stated that Cabinet had approved £1million of the dedicated growth reserve being spent on the third stage of the Local Plan, as this would help boost the local economy through house and infrastructure building.

The Deputy Leader explained that families were experiencing financial struggle in many ways, and the questions families were asking, were the

same questions the council were asking itself. For example, when a family fell into hard financial times they looked to savings to help them. Thurrock also used savings in the form of general reserves and investments, which had been endorsed by Full Council in 2017. He felt that if the Council were prudent with their surpluses then the Council could absorb some COVID pressures, but the current plan was not to let the general fund reserve fall under the 2016 level of £8million. The Deputy Leader added that when a family fell into financial difficulties they tried to increase income, and the Council would need to do the same. He explained that Council tax was modelled as increasing during every year of the MTFs, as it was always modelled, and there were no plans to change that. He added that the Council would also need to consider adopting any future Adult Social Care precept to support sector resilience. He stated that when the market for investments was open, it was the plan to help the Council reform services over the longer-term, and that the Council would need to begin to work towards self-sufficiency from government revenue funding, but was also a Council which was smaller and more rationalised. He stated that the Council Spending Review would be continued and quickened, and that elements of the capital programme were under review, and like households across the borough, the Council needed to look at what could be done in a few years, rather than what it may have planned to do at the start of the year.

The Deputy Leader summarised and stated that Thurrock were working hard to ensure a balanced budget and an update would be presented at October's Cabinet meeting.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Commented on the MTFs and the forecast outturn position for 2020/21.

*Reason for decision: as outlined in the report
This decision is subject to call-in*

38. Backing Thurrock: A Five Year Strategy for Economic Recovery, Resilience and a Return to Growth

Councillor Coxshall introduced the report and stated that Thurrock had excellent business links and a business community, as the borough was adjacent to London, and had good transport links to the rest of the country and the world. He added that the private sector wanted to invest in the borough over the next twenty years, but highlighted that infrastructure would come first in order to ensure benefits for residents and businesses. He outlined the draft plan, which recognised the strength of local communities, whilst highlighting the impact COVID would have on jobs and prosperity within Thurrock. He commented that Thurrock needed to work collaboratively with other communities and external organisations to deliver the scheme, which would start to be implemented at the same time as consultation to deliver a start time of 2021. He summarised and stated that members, officers and

residents should endeavour to buy locally to support local businesses and boost the economy.

Councillor Halden commented that it was good to see care leavers and learning disabled adults were included in the scheme, and help with retraining or up-skilling would be provided if needed. He felt the report considered the needs of the vulnerable and looked at how health and education can support the strategy. The Deputy Leader added that it was also good to see those in hospitality were included in the report as people working in this sector had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and might financially struggle. Councillor Coxshall replied and stated that all areas of society would be included in the strategy as every resident deserved an opportunity to prosper and have a good job. He thanked the previous administration for developing the original plan, as this had helped bring forward the current proposals.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the draft Backing Thurrock strategy for consultation.

2. Agreed to co-design the related Implementation Plan with anchor institutions, key businesses, the voluntary and community sector and other stakeholders and to return to Cabinet with a further report seeking approval of the final Strategy and Implementation Plan.

39. Quarter 1 (April to June 2020) Corporate Performance Report 2021 and End of Year Corporate Performance Summary 201/20

Councillor Huelin introduced the report and stated that although Council's planned for emergencies, no one had been able to predict the global COVID pandemic and subsequent lockdown. She highlighted that quarter one began a week into lockdown, but despite the pandemic, 2000 council staff and continued to work hard to deliver services. She stated that some services had had to reconfigure their entire way of working, for example bin collections which needed to maintain a 2m social distance for three people in a lorry cab, whilst also training and recruiting new staff in a socially distanced way. She stated that council staff and volunteers had worked hard to help residents, for example care homes received daily check-ins from the council and food packages and prescriptions were delivered to those that needed it. She felt proud that 500 council staff became Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action volunteers within one week of lockdown starting. Councillor Huelin stated that in 2019/20 74% of key performance indicators had met their targets, and although this had decreased to 65.5% in the first quarter of 2020/21, ten out of eleven missed targets were due to COVID. She highlighted some missed targets, such as percentage of waste recycled which had decreased because Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs) had been shut during the pandemic. She stated that the baseline for key performance indicators in 2020/21 would remain at 2019/20 levels, to be able to determine the impact of COVID on council services. She summarised and stated that she felt proud that Thurrock Council had persevered during the pandemic and that overview

and scrutiny had no additional recommendations on the report.

Councillor Watkins thanked the environment team for all their hard work during the pandemic, and highlighted that the environment team were still dealing with effects of COVID such as staff shortages and waste collection issues. He thanked the trade unions for their help in providing agency staff to cover these shortages, and thanked residents for their patience when waste collection services had been delayed due to increased tonnage as more people worked from home. He stated that the HWRC's had been closed throughout the height of lockdown, but were now gradually re-opening in incremental stages. He also felt pleased to announce that the communal bin store recycling project was now live after a successful pilot, and he hoped to see the percentage of waste being recycled in flats increasing because of this. He also added that the report from the Waste Management Working Group would be brought to Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in October.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Noted and commented upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators in particular those areas which are off target and the impact of COVID-19.**
- 2. Identified any areas which require additional consideration.**
- 3. Noted the End of Year outturns 2019/20.**

The meeting finished at 8.09 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**