

Thurrock - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **16 November 2021**

Training Room, The Beehive Community Resource Centre, West Street, Grays, RM17 6XP

Membership:

Councillors Susan Little (Chair), Colin Churchman (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, James Halden, John Kent and Bukky Okunade

Substitutes:

Councillors Abbie Akinbohun, Gary Collins, Sara Muldowney and Graham Snell

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7 September 2021.	
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To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972. To agree any relevant briefing notes submitted to the Committee.	
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Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **8 November 2021**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- **Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;**
- **Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and**
- **leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon**

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
 - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
 - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
 - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
 - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
 - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
 - Fewer public buildings with better services

3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
 - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
 - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
 - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 September 2021 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Susan Little (Chair), Adam Carter, Gary Collins (*substitute*), John Kent, Sara Muldowney (*substitute*), and Graham Snell (*substitute*)
- Councillor Shane Hebb, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance
- Apologies:** Councillors Colin Churchman (Vice-Chair), James Halden, and Bukky Okunade
- In attendance:** Mary Patricia Flynn, Strategic Lead Communications
Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills
Karen Wheeler, Director Strategy, Engagement and Growth
Sarah Welton, Strategy & Performance Officer
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, and live-streamed onto the Council's website.

6. Minutes

The Chair noted that at the previous meeting Councillor Kent had felt concerned about the timescales of the Work Programme, and felt that this had not been addressed. Councillor Kent added that there had only been one meeting of the Shadow Investment Board, and felt the Board had not been formally established as suggested in the minutes. Councillor Hebb replied that the Board had met twice, once in September 2020 and once in December 2020. He clarified that the first meeting had simply been an introductory session for Members and consultants.

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 June 2021 were approved as a correct record.

7. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

8. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

9. Communications Strategy 2021-24

The Strategic Lead Communications introduced the report and stated that it outlined how the Council's communications would align over the next three years, and was designed to build on the work previously undertaken by the Communications Strategy 2017-20. She explained that the new strategy focussed on brand recognition that would enhance the Thurrock narrative, as well as providing a strategic approach that aligned with Thurrock's corporate priorities. She summarised and stated that the strategy would also provide a more modern communications service, including increased use of direct digital communications tools.

Councillor Kent thanked officers for their report and questioned if the Local Government Association health check recommendations had been included in the strategy. He gave the example of an external workshop between Members and officers; a new sign-off process to reduce the number of people and timeframes involved; new media briefings rather than press releases; and a priority triage system for communication enquiries. He also queried if the communications team had introduced a new system to cut out errors in press releases, as recommended by the Local Government Association. He summarised and asked if a system for including local faces in video content had also been rolled out.

The Strategic Lead Communications responded and stated that a workshop between Members, senior managers and members of the communications team had occurred in line with the Local Government Association recommendation. She added that other elements of work with local media, such as sign-off processes for queries, were operational aspects of the communications team and were therefore not included in the strategy. She explained that the team were looking into media briefings, for example utilising a hybrid briefing system, potentially both in person and online, that would allow local media to directly ask questions on key topics. She added that the communications team had also introduced a system of double proofing work to ensure errors in press releases did not occur. She mentioned that the communications team were also including residents in video content more, and gave the example of a local GP who participated in a recent COVID video, and local business owners who were currently filming for future content.

The Chair thanked the team for their hard work and felt that lots of reporting was being undertaken, but asked for more evidence and feedback on outcomes from the strategy. Councillor Collins highlighted page 25 of the agenda and questioned what positive behaviour change in the population would look like. He also queried the use of TikTok to spread the Council's messages. Councillor Collins then highlighted page 27 of the agenda and asked if the Council offices would be reopening, which would help boost the local economy in Grays. The Strategic Lead Communications replied that communications teams in a variety of sectors regularly used behavioural science to encourage good behaviour in local residents, for example by encouraging them to recycle or not drop cigarette butts. She stated that some Council's used footsteps leading to the nearest bins to encourage residents to dispose of waste properly, or by installing question bins for cigarette butts.

She then moved on and stated that Thurrock were looking at a variety of digital channels from across the world, and whilst that included the TikTok platform, no decisions had yet been made on which channels to pursue. The Chair questioned how much money Thurrock Council had spent on pursuing the use of TikTok as a media platform and the Strategic Lead Communications responded that so far no money had been spent.

Councillor Muldowney stated that approximately 10% of the adult population did not have access to the internet, and asked how they would be included and engaged within the strategy. She felt that people who did not have access to the internet tended to be more vulnerable, such as elderly people. The Strategic Lead Communications replied that additional options were available to those residents who were not online, and these options were built into the strategy. She explained that Thurrock were moving towards a more digital communications approach, and digital messages could be passed on through community forums to people who could not access the internet. She added the Council still produced leaflets and posters, for example for information regarding sheltered housing, and that easy-to-read posters in high footfall areas were useful for communicating with residents for whom English was a second language. The Strategic Lead Communications mentioned that the communications team also regularly liaised with community groups for their support on projects, which would help people who did not have access to the internet, engage with the Council. She added that using digital channels was also a more cost effective option than printing leaflets, but for large campaigns or the council tax leaflet, printed information was utilised.

The Chair questioned how the strategy would encourage people in rural areas to engage with the Council. She also queried how the team were working to improve engagement as a whole, as currently only 35% of Thurrock residents were actively engaging. The Strategic Lead Communications responded that people in rural areas would have access to digital campaigns. She added that the figure of 35% engagement related to Thurrock Council's newsletter, but engagement was higher for other elements of communications including campaigns. She stated that the communications team would never focus solely on digital channels, and the team would try to find the balance between digital channels and print media. Councillor Muldowney questioned what the balance currently was between digital and non-digital channels. The Strategic Lead Communications felt that the balance between digital and non-digital engagement differed from issue to issue. She stated as an example that if an issue disproportionately affected people aged over 80, the communications team would focus on print media.

Councillor Muldowney highlighted appendix two of the report and stated that although the Thurrock Thanks campaign had had a good digital reach, the proportion of those residents retweeting and clicking through the link was low. She questioned how the communications team was measuring the quality of engagement, and the proportion of people who were taking in the information. The Strategic Lead Communications replied that it was sometimes difficult to measure the level of engagement, particularly with awareness campaigns such as Thurrock Thanks. She stated that if the campaign set out a call to

action, such as campaigns regarding rent, then specific engagement targets would be set. She stated that this was monitored through the number of people calling the contact centre after a specific campaign, or the number of click throughs on a link. She stated that for Thurrock's fostering campaign, people that made enquiries were asked where they had heard about fostering and those answers were recorded. She commented that all campaigns were linked to service priorities, but there were lots of people simply passive scrolling on social media who would see content but not necessarily engage with it.

Councillor Carter asked if the recent fostering campaign had led to an increased number of fostering enquiries. The Strategic Lead Communications replied that she understood this would be discussed at the next Corporate Parenting Committee and she did not have the information to hand. She explained that the Council were currently beginning the second phase of the fostering campaign, which would highlight the need of local children, compared to the first phase which had focussed on the council tax rebate. The Chair added that it would be important for the Corporate Parenting Committee to see how many fostering enquiries had become accepted foster carers.

Councillor Snell thanked officers for their hard work on the report and felt that it would be difficult to increase active social media engagement, as the majority of social media users simply scrolled past posts. He felt that communications within Thurrock had recently improved, for example he was receiving more regular emails and saw more regular Facebook posts. He thanked officers for their work on utilising digital tools, as he felt this was the direction the world was moving in. Councillor Snell suggested that social media posts became more targeted towards certain users, and more entertaining to increase engagement. The Chair echoed Councillor Snell's comments and felt that the communications team did lots of good work. She felt there was room for improvement in some areas, and wished to see the good communications work that was started during the pandemic continued. She expressed her concern that the Civic Offices and some libraries and hubs were still not open, and felt that this restricted vulnerable or elderly people that could not access services online.

Councillor Kent questioned the differing social media engagement figures quoted on page 24 of the report, and within the report introduction, and queried which figure was correct. He also highlighted page 5 of the report and asked what the new Statement of Intent involved. He then highlighted the recommendation from the Local Government Association listed on page 40 of the report, stating that Members felt removed from the communications team, and asked what steps were in place to improve this. Councillor Kent also outlined page 42 of the report which stated that the time taken to answer local media questions needed to be improved, as only 50% of queries were answered in target time. He asked how the strategy responded to these issues. The Strategic Lead Communications replied that the figure on page 24 was different from the report introduction, as the first figure discussed which people received their information from the Council, and the second figure

related to the number of people who saw the Council's content. She explained that approximately 65,000 people saw Thurrock's post related to COVID and these included people who did not follow Thurrock on social media, due to the number of people sharing and commenting on the post. She added that Thurrock also used boosted posts, which ensured Thurrock Council posts appeared on people's timelines even if they did not follow the Council's page. She moved on and stated that the team would be introducing a monthly evaluation report for Members to ensure they were kept up to date on the work of the communications team. She explained that this would be uploaded to the Council's intranet page, but had not yet been started. Councillor Kent queried if Members could access the intranet from home, and the Strategic Lead Communications replied that she would look into this.

The Strategic Lead Communications added that new internal processes had been introduced to ensure good communication between Thurrock Council and the local media. She mentioned that local media often reported on Thurrock press releases and on positive news stories from the Council. She stated that the team worked hard to answer local media questions but some questions did not have an answer. The Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth added that the Statement of Intent was a new piece of work being started that would outline the tangible outcomes of investment and regeneration within the borough by 2030, including new job opportunities and upskilling. She explained that as this was a new piece of work, it was still in the development phase but would be brought back to Committee as part of the process. Councillor Kent expressed concern that Members had not heard of this piece of work until the meeting. He also queried if local media partners had been included in the development of the strategy. The Strategic Lead Communications replied that local media partners had been emailed inviting them to share and take part in the survey which informed the strategy development. The Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth added that as the recommendations from the Local Government Association health check had been operational, these had not been included in the Communications Strategy.

Councillor Kent thanked officers for their work on the report and stated that whilst he understood the Communications Strategy needed to work for a variety of people, on a variety of platforms, he had hoped to see more engagement with the local media. He stated that committee members had been contacted by one local media editor and he had sought the views of another. Both felt that the partnership between Thurrock Council and themselves could be improved, and a better balance could be struck. He felt that the Communications Strategy needed to look at local media outlets as partners, and be given the help to grow as local businesses. The Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth stated that local media had an important role to play in conveying information to local residents, and this had been supported by independent research outlining where residents received their news. She explained that day to day processes relating to the local media had not been included in the Communications Strategy, as this fell into the operational remit of the communications team. She added that the Council and local media outlets worked together on a daily basis, and new media

briefings would help to improve the relationship. She stated that the Local Government Association health check had been presented in full to the Committee, and the majority of comments had been positive, particularly surrounding Thurrock's COVID response. She acknowledged that there was still some work to do, but Thurrock worked well with local, national and trade newspapers on a regular basis.

Councillor Muldowney queried how the impact of the strategy would be measured. She felt that residents needed to have direct contact with the Council, and this could only be undertaken once the Civic Offices had been reopened. She also wished to see the monthly evaluation report emailed directly to Members for the feedback, rather than being posted on the intranet.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Commented on the proposed Communications Strategy 2021-24 as the principle policy document for communication with residents, businesses, stakeholders and staff.

10. Fair Debt Summit - Supporting Vulnerable Residents

The Assistant Director Education and Skills introduced the report and stated that it outlined the work undertaken in September 2018 on the Fair Debt Summit, which had been cross-party and cross-directorate. She stated that the Summit had considered how best to support residents, young people and schools with financial literacy, and a pilot scheme had been developed by Thurrock Adult Community College. She added that the work had now been embedded into Thurrock's Inspire programme, which worked with both young people not in education, employment or training and vulnerable adults. The Assistant Director Education and Skills mentioned that work on the project had been paused due to COVID and school closures, but was now being re-energised, and the team would be going back into schools to deliver the programme. She stated that the team would also be using the programme as a challenge for Thurrock's Next Top Boss, and felt it was particularly important to help young people understand financial resilience post-COVID.

Councillor Carter questioned if the programme would be available to the most vulnerable young people in Thurrock, including those in foster care. The Assistant Director Education and Skills replied that the scheme would be run for all young people to take part in, which included those Looked After Children. She added that care leavers also had separate money management schemes that had been working well. She explained that all young people could find it easy to get into debt, and the programme would help these people understand the wider financial economy and the skills they would need to remain debt free. She highlighted the appendix to the report that showed they had received positive feedback from schools that had run the pilot scheme, and this feedback would be developed into a programme by Thurrock Adult Community College.

Councillor Muldowney questioned if the scheme was being targeted correctly. She stated that the pilot scheme had been run for year 9 and 10 students, who would not necessarily have experience with debt at that age. She felt that although the current scheme would be a good preventative measure, it would be beneficial to target the scheme at older people who were already in debt, and would therefore reduce child poverty rates in the borough. The Chair also queried if the scheme was targeted correctly, and felt it should be targeted at younger children to enable them to understand money at an earlier age. The Assistant Director Education and Skills explained that although the scheme did target young people, it also targeted vulnerable groups through Inspire, such as young people not in education, employment or training, some of whom were already in debt. She added that the scheme would also work with vulnerable families, and could be adapted to work for adults on a wider scale. She stated that the work in schools was preventative and would help to embed the key principles of debt management from a young age. She summarised and stated that she would consider all feedback from the Committee, including the targeted age ranges.

Councillor Snell thanked the team and the director for their hard work on the report. He felt that early targeted intervention would help young people with their financial preparedness and stop people entering into debt later in life. He queried if the scheme would teach young people about the use of IT and money, as the UK moved toward a cashless society. The Assistant Director Education and Skills replied that the scheme would look into online banking and IT, as it became more easy to spend money online and on mobile phones. She explained that the Adult Community College had recognised the changes in money management and would work to develop this into the programme.

Councillor Hebb echoed comments made by Councillor Snell and thanked the team for their hard work. He stated that the paper had been designed to share the work so far and get more ideas from Members. He felt that the scheme would help to promote financial independence and would build financial capability at an early age, to ensure young people avoided debt. He stated that during the summit young people had seemed interested in the programme and had asked a variety of questions from mortgages to interest rates. He added that the scheme would also look at financial technology, as it became easier to spend money and be approved for loans online.

Councillor Kent welcomed the idea of a Fair Debt Summit and financial inclusion education. He felt that this would be a long term programme, the benefits of which would not be seen until the young people currently at school reached adulthood. He added that some banks offered financial advice and activities in schools currently, and asked if the Council could link up and utilise some of these services. He echoed the points raised by Councillor Muldowney and felt that adult poverty and debt management also needed to be addressed, particularly as the government's furlough scheme drew to a close and tax rates increased. He felt that these people needed to be considered as part of the scheme, as they could be at risk from debt or financial mismanagement. Councillor Hebb explained that a report would be

coming to the Committee in November which would focus on debt collection by the Council, and had involved the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Councillor Collins felt the report was positive, and asked what other vulnerable groups the scheme would be considering. The Assistant Director Education and Skills replied that the scheme would focus on those in school; young people not in education, employment or training; and young people on benefits, who would be picked up by the Inspire team. She explained that the scheme would also look into problems associated with online gaming and gambling, which often led people into financial difficulty. She stated that a piece of work could also be undertaken that would focus on money management for those young adults over the age of 25 who were not included in Inspire. The Chair asked if young people and adults with learning difficulties could be included in the scheme. Councillor Collins added that it would be useful if young people leaving for university could also receive a bespoke course regarding money management at university.

Councillor Muldowney stated that one third of young people currently lived in poverty, and asked what could be included in the strategy to help them directly. Councillor Hebb stated that the scheme had been divided into three sections, which included: education; people who could pay debts but refused; and people who could not pay debts but wanted to. He explained that the report coming to the Committee in November would cover compassionate collections, and would go into detail regarding poverty and how to tackle the issue.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Reviewed the approach, and provided any relevant feedback, with a view of supporting a joint working approach between Finance and Education to provide holistic opportunities to address debt management/avoidance in schools.

2. Recommended to Cabinet the continuing support for financial literacy to remain a key focus of the curriculum offer across schools and colleges.

3. Recommended that the debt management activities continue to be delivered across directorates, as well as making use of external agencies/services to support this programme of activity.

11. Quarter 1 (April-September) Corporate Performance Report 2021/22 and Corporate Performance Framework

The Strategy Manager introduced the report and stated that it covered the first quarter of the 2021-22 municipal year. She explained that each Key Performance Indicator was either red or green, and those that were currently red included detail commentary as well as a 'route to green'. She stated that COVID restrictions had only been stepped down in July 2021, so this quarter

had still been effected by COVID regulations, and this had been outlined in the report where relevant.

Councillor Kent highlighted point 3.8 on page 54 of the agenda and the Key Performance Indicator relating to the average full time wage in Thurrock. He queried whether this was the wage for Thurrock residents or for Thurrock jobs. He also highlighted the Key Performance Indicator relating to the business rate base, and questioned why this would fall by £6million. He also outlined the number of homes permitted through planning, which only equalled 195, and queried if this year's target of 950 homes permitted through planning was achievable. He also drew the Committee's attention to the Key Performance Indicator relating to families presenting at risk of homelessness. He stated that 1836 families had presented themselves to the Council as being at risk of homelessness, but only 211 had been accepted, which equated to 11.5% of those presenting. He sought clarification that the families not accepted as being at risk of homelessness had been helped in other ways, for example had been able to keep their homes.

The Strategy Manager explained that she would need to seek clarification on the more detailed Key Performance Indicator questions. She added that the number of homes permitted through planning last year was correct at 195. Councillor Hebb stated that the Key Performance Indicator relating to business rate base currently included some post-COVID assumptions, such as in the hospitality and retail sectors, as some markets had not yet been re-established. He explained that the most recent Cabinet report showed the funding gap had been closed by £2million, but the Council did not yet know how the end of the furlough scheme would impact upon residents and businesses. He stated that the Council would continue to monitor employment levels across the borough, and had already seen some positive improvement over the past three months. He summarised and stated that only £1million of council tax had not been collected, compared to £70million of council tax that had been collected post-COVID.

The Chair queried how Key Performance Indicators were measured, and asked if queries made over the phone and online were cross-referenced. The Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth replied that all resident queries were logged as part of the Key Performance Indicator. She explained that if a Member or MP logged a query, this would be cross-referenced to ensure it had not already been reported by a resident. She stated that this would ensure queries were not double counted as part of the KPI. The Chair also questioned how online system maintenance occurred, as she had received some resident concerns regarding maintenance during the day. The Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth replied that maintenance during the day was limited to essential maintenance only, and tried to avoid peak hours. She explained that where possible advance notice was given to residents of maintenance, through digital channels, and the contact centre were also made aware.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

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 required additional consideration.

3. Commented on the areas of focus for 2021/22 that will support delivery of the overall vision and priorities.

12. Work Programme

The Chair stated that there were numerous reports scheduled for November's meeting, and she would therefore look into an extraordinary meeting if required.

Members did not have any items to add to the Work Programme.

The meeting finished at 8.48 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

16 November 2021	Item: 5
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals	
Wards affected: All	Key Decision: N/A
Report of: Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Resources and Place Delivery	
Accountable Assistant Director: Jonathan Wilson, Assistant Director Finance, Corporate Finance	
Accountable Director: Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Resources and Place Delivery	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

There have been several reports to Members over the last year that have set out the financial challenges that the Council faces. The most recent position presented to Cabinet in September 2021 highlighted a budget gap of £34.3m over the next two years alongside a summary of the proposed actions to deliver savings to address this gap. This report sets out the latest position to the Committee and highlights there is a remaining gap of £3.9m, which is also subject to the delivery of significant staff savings.

The financial challenge faced by the Council will be further challenged by the longer-term impacts of Covid-19, which includes significant demand increases in children's and adults' social care; an issue growing across the entire local government sector.

Furthermore, the Council is 'unwinding' the previously agreed investment approach, and hence investments that were planned and agreed have been removed and existing investments will not be replaced. The removal of this funding support mechanism increases the funding gaps faced by the Council over the short to medium term.

This report also highlights the headlines from the budget announcement on 27 October 2021. This set the parameters for Council Tax increases and indicates a further allocation of funding from central government. It is expected that when added to the MTFs the additional funding will be allocated to social care pressures.

This report sets out the detail of the savings identified to date to address the funding gaps in the MTFs (including those previously identified). These have been classified into:

- Income generation;
- Providing services differently; and
- Operational efficiencies.

There are a number of other savings that are subject to approval from Cabinet in December 2021 and these are set out in Appendix 1.

1. Recommendations:

1.1 That the Committee note and comment on the financial forecasts included within this report; and

1.2 That the Committee consider the proposals set out in Appendix 1 and provide comments to Cabinet.

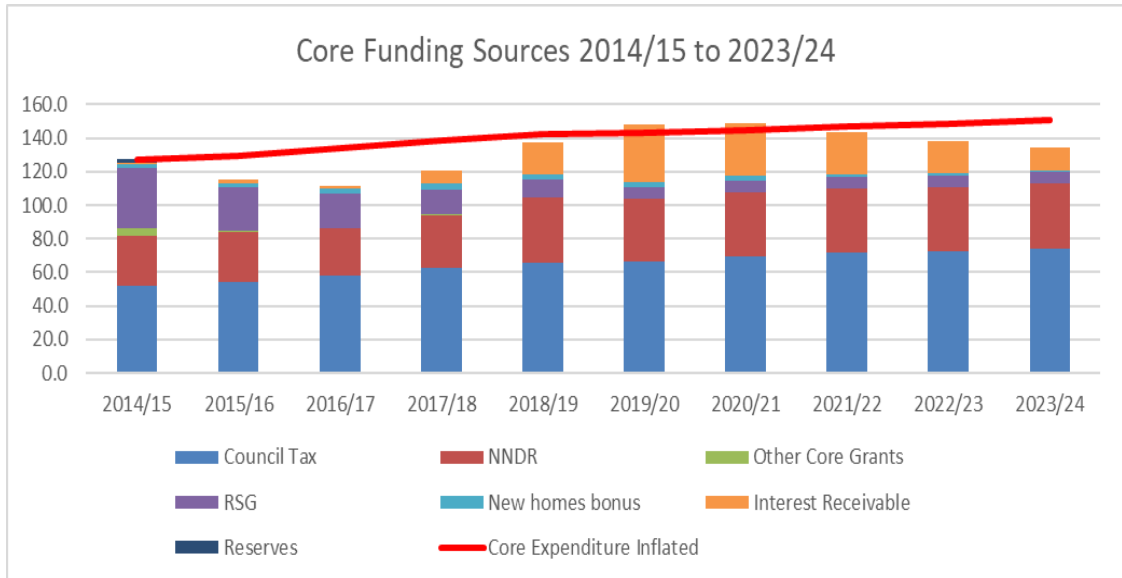
2. Thurrock Council's Financial Base

2.1. Officers have consistently reported that the Council operates from a low financial base in terms of core funding:

- The Council had the third lowest band D council tax compared with other unitary councils (only Windsor & Maidenhead and Isles of Scilly were lower; who themselves have a unique local financial context in terms of receivable income and spending requirements);
- The average band D council tax in Essex in 2020/21 was £1,503.10 compared with the Thurrock position of £1,332.81 (lowest in Essex);
- 70% of Thurrock properties are in bands A to C and so raise significantly less than a Band D level. In fact, on average, properties in bands A-D actually attract more spend than the council tax receivable;
- The amount raised from Council Tax in 2020/21 was £69.2m compared with the nearest Unitary neighbour Southend of £84.8m; and
- In 2020/21 Thurrock projected to raise £120.1m of business rates but was only allowed to retain £36.3m or 30% of the amount collected in the area.

2.2. Further perspective is provided by the CIPFA Resilience Index. One measure classifies the amount that Thurrock spends on Adult Social Care is a higher than average percentage of total budget (i.e. a risk) – despite national benchmark reporting Thurrock Council as one of the lowest ASC spenders in the country and the total budget being low compared to others for the reasons set out in paragraph 2.1.

2.3. Council tax increases to support core services are limited every year and an annual increase of 1.99% was assumed in the MTFS. This has now been confirmed for 2022/23 (along with a further 1% specifically for Social Care). Increases to business rates are set by the government and are usually increased annually by inflation.



- 2.4. There are a number of discussions taking place within government that could impact on the council's core funding over the medium term and these are set out below

Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR)

- 2.5. The CSR has set out the outline detail supporting over the three year spending review period. Core Spending Power will increase by £8.5bn. This change includes grant funding from central government alongside assumptions made in respect of amounts that are expect to be raised locally from Council Tax and Business Rates.
- 2.6. The government has indicated that it projects that Core Spending Power will increase in the sector by £3.3bn in 2022/23, a real-terms increase of 3.4%. This increase is based on the assumption that the maximum level of Council Tax will be raised by local authorities. For the Council that equates to a 1.99% general increase and an additional 1% adult social care precept. The precept is allocated specifically to fund growth in adult social care.
- 2.7. The government has indicated the increase to Core Spending Power will include £1.6bn of new grant funding for Social Care and Other Services in 2022/23. The allocation of this funding to individual authorities is to be confirmed. It is expected this funding will largely address additional demand in respect of adults' and children's social care. Members should also note that this additional funding will need to meet the pressure created by the 1% increase in national insurance (circa £1m).
- 2.8. There is a further £0.2bn of social care funding in 2022/23 (from the Health and Social Care Levy) which is allocated to address the initial impacts of the proposed changes to the funding of adult social care.
- 2.9. The government also confirmed that business rates multiplier will be frozen and local authorities will receive an equivalent compensation grant. In addition, there will be adjustments to business rates including a temporary relief of £1.7bn across 400,000 retail, hospitality and leisure properties in

2022/23. Broadly this equates to a 50% business rates reduction for those qualifying businesses and local authorities will receive an equivalent grant to compensate them for the loss of income.

- 2.10. The public health grant will be maintained in real terms over the period of the spending review and hence be supported by inflationary increases.
- 2.11. There were a number of announcements in respect of education:
- An increase has been confirmed on the Core Schools Budget of £4.7bn over the Spending Review period, which is equivalent to a cash increase of £1,500 per pupil compared with 2019/20 amounts. In addition, £2.6bn over the period was announced for SEND, which is intended to support 30,000 additional places;
 - The COVID recovery funding has been extended, with an additional £1.8bn. Of this, £1bn will be provided to schools over the next two academic years, with £145 per pupil in primaries, and more for secondary schools; and
 - The Holiday Activities and Food Programme is being extended, with £200m per year to continue the programme which was introduced during the pandemic.

The detail of the impacts of this funding at local authority level will be set out once confirmed by central government.

Fair Funding Review

- 2.12. The Fair Funding review will largely consider the share that any council receives of the sector funding available nationally. As such, there will be winners and losers from any review. This remains on hold with no confirmed date of implementation in the CSR.

Business Rates Retention Reset

- 2.13. This is unlikely to take place in this financial year and the CSR did not include any further announcement on this. There remain two main points to note:
- For the Council to increase the amount of income retained locally from business rates requires a central government reassessment of the baseline funding need of the borough which then determines the tariff level applied. Without this, an increase from the current 49% to either 75% or 100% will not increase the council's share of the business rates it retains owing to its status as a net contributor. For example, an increase from 49% to 75% would just increase the associated tariff level from 19% to 44% and the level of income received from retained rates would be unchanged; and
 - Any change to the business rates system could affect Thurrock Council funding from day one if, as now expected, a baseline reset would be

required. This is because the growth above the current baseline generated since the start of the current system in 2012/13 would be lost as part of the reset.

3. MTFS Assumptions

3.1. The MTFS is collated through a number of assumptions that then forms a net increase in the budget from one year to the next. Additional income or expenditure reductions are then required to meet this increase. The full detail of the CSR at local authority level will be available in December 2021. Alongside further consideration of the current year pressures, the position below will be updated and the expectation is that additional funding will be required to address the emerging social care pressures.

3.2. Key changes over the next two years include:

	2022/23	2023/24	Total
Core Funding – assumes 2% council tax income and increased business rates per annum but then reduced by planned reductions to government grants such as New Homes Bonus	(335)	(1,381)	(1,716)
Pay Awards, increments and other inflation such as waste disposal contracts, utilities, fuel, etc.	4,515	4,665	9,180
Treasury – phasing out of maturing investments, increased interest costs and increased MRP for capital works	7,221	4,948	12,169
Social Care and Other Growth	2,314	2,314	4,628
Covid Grant – removal of 2020/21 grant from base budget	4,853		4,853
Reserves/Capital Receipts – phasing out of temporary approach in 2021/22 budget	2,300	4,000	6,300

3.3. Over the next two years, the net increases are £21.8m for 2022/23 and £12.5m for 2023/24, a total of £34.3m.

3.4. As the Council has one of the lower budgets compared to other local authorities, services are, by definition, largely on the lower than average side in terms of net expenditure. Identifying savings to meet these pressures will continue to be challenging.

3.5. This position is not new to the Council where, over the last decade, MTFS deficits of £20m to £30m were commonplace and as recent as 2016.

3.6. More recent years saw Members agree an investment approach that provided the ability to fund services above the statutory minimum and provide headroom for the council to reform services. However, for reasons previously reported, this is no longer an option.

Further Considerations

- 3.7. The CSR will require a further update to the MTFs once the local authority allocations are confirmed. This will form the basis of the 2022/23 budget and will be reported to Cabinet and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2022.
- 3.8. The updated MTFs will also consider the impact of growth in social care reported to Cabinet in December 2021. The broad expectation for the purpose of this report is that any growth in funding will be absorbed by the increased levels of demand for social care as set out below.
- 3.9. Like other local authorities, there are considerable pressures in Children's Social Care which include a significant increase in the cost of looked after children with the overall numbers increasing over the budgeted level (but within national averages) and with more complex cases requiring significant funding. Furthermore, the average market price for placements has increased significantly in the external residential market locally, which is consistent with the wider national picture. There are currently three cases where there is no residential placement available and alternative higher cost arrangements have been required. The Council is also funding a number of children placed on remand following incidents arising since the lifting of lockdown restrictions.
- 3.10. In Adults' Social Care, funding pressures have arisen in older peoples residential and domiciliary care as the pandemic progressed. This was funded in the short term by central government Covid funding but remains an ongoing pressure as this funding ends. There are wider concerns over the fragility of the residential care market and the impact of changes to the national living wage, national insurance and increased utility costs.
- 3.11. There are additional concerns over the changes proposed under the reform to the funding of adult social care on the local authority and the wider impact on residential care providers. The detail is not yet available to assess the financial impact.
- 3.12. The income levels raised by fees and charges also continues to be monitored where the impacts of the pandemic continue in reductions to income streams such as car parking.

4. Savings Proposals

- 4.1. Officers have been working over recent months to identify ways of reducing net expenditure. These are set out in Appendices 1 and 2 and have been categorised as follows:
 - Those that require Cabinet approval (Appendix 1);
 - Those under operational responsibilities (Appendix 2):
 - Income generation;
 - Those that come from providing services differently;

- Operational Efficiencies; and
 - Reductions to the General Fund Revenue budget of staffing/service reductions.
- 4.2. The Committee should note that the proposal to charge for Garden Waste Collection has now been removed.
- 4.3. Whilst a number of savings are set out within the appendices, there are two categories (staffing and assets) that require a more detailed narrative in this report.
- 4.4. As a large number of the council's budgets are at lower than average cost in comparison nationally, identifying savings of this magnitude are not as simple as identifying a handful of services to cut back or stop. As such, officers looked at the types of expenditure that the council incurs – these are known as the subjective budgets – and can cross a wide number of services.
- 4.5. The Council has 16 subjective budgets in excess of £1m, the largest being employee related. The next two cover adults and children's social care placements, both very difficult to make significant reductions.
- 4.6. There are then a number of budgets where there can be limited impact: the Minimum Revenue Provision (the repayment of debt linked to the historic capital programme); interest costs on debt (long term debt interest linked to the capital programme and other interest relating to investments where a reduction in cost leads to a greater reduction in income); and the Concessionary Fares Scheme.
- 4.7. Others where there is some discretion include Home to School Transport (included in appendix 1) and the running cost of assets.
- 4.8. Salary costs related to service delivery:
- 4.8.1. Members will be aware that one aspect of balancing the 2021/22 budget was to target savings of £4m from vacant posts. The MTFs then assumed that the temporary saving would be turned into a permanent one through the deletion of, an average, 100 posts;
- 4.8.2. As staff costs are by far the largest of the council's budgets, it is obvious that a higher target than £4m needs to be achieved when considering the budget gap. Officers are currently working on an assumption of reducing staff related costs by £10m for each of the next two years. At an average on-costed salary, this equates to a 500FTE reduction over the two years that represents circa 25% of the current workforce. The reduction of permanent positions will see a proportionately leaner management structure;
- 4.8.3. Reductions of costs to the General Fund Revenue Account include the ability to charge the costs to other accounts, such as capital, be met through increased income or through a deletion of the post. Every effort will be made to reduce any impact on services and residents through transformational

changes but there will, undoubtedly, be impacts on services and outcomes-targeted reform will be required;

- 4.8.4. Cabinet have asked senior officers to ensure that working practices are reformed to minimise impact as far as possible on front line services and the ability of back office teams to support services and project delivery. It is, however, understood that reducing permanent staffing numbers at this level will have impacts on service delivery and will inform decisions about what business a council should / should not be performing; and
- 4.8.5. Appendix 2 shows identified staffing reductions of £5.013m over the next two years and there is a further £1.5m through identifying current posts that are vacant that can be deleted, through Phase 1 of this work. As such, there is still £13.5m and related impacts to identify in subsequent phases.
- 4.9. Assets:
 - 4.9.1. Proposals include a target of £0.850m to be achieved through a reduction of property related running expenses;
 - 4.9.2. The Council holds three types of property related assets: operational, community and other. Other includes assets currently leased to tenants as well as assets surplus to requirements;
 - 4.9.3. A number of these assets incur considerable annual running costs that include facility management and security, business rates, utility and insurance costs, and maintenance;
 - 4.9.4. The majority of assets also carry the probable risk, or need, of requiring considerable capital investment with the related revenue cost that this will lead to;
 - 4.9.5. The 3Rs programme of Retain, Re-use, Release is considering all of the council's assets in terms of need, service delivery, cost, capital expenditure requirements; and
 - 4.9.6. A disposal programme identified the first assets for sale and these will provide a capital receipt and contribute towards expenditure reductions.
- 4.10. In summary, assuming that all of these are agreed and implemented, the financial position would be:

	2022/23	2023/24	Total
Gross Budget Pressure	21,826	12,513	34,339
Cabinet Decision (Appendix 1)	(2,218)	(596)	(2,814)
Income Generation	(1,110)	(522)	(1,632)
Provide Services Differently	(2,513)	(522)	(3,035)
Operational Efficiencies	(1,438)	(325)	(1,763)
Staff/Service reductions	(10,000)	(10,000)	(20,000)
Core Funding and TRL Adjustment	(1,207)	-	(1,207)
Balance Still to Identify	3,340	548	3,888

4.11. The table above shows the original budget pressures reduced from £34.3m to £3.9m over the two-year period. However, Members should recognise that all of the identified savings will be challenging in themselves but there are also more challenging reductions in staffing/services and assets to identify.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

5.1. The Council has a statutory requirement to set a balanced budget annually. Action is required in a timely fashion when considering periods of consultation, where necessary, with staff, Overview and Scrutiny Committees and residents. A number of these proposals can be implemented under officer delegations, such as restructures and commercial income opportunities, but others will need to come back to Cabinet in September 2021 after relevant Overview and Scrutiny consideration.

6. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

6.1. This report is based on consultation with the services, Directors' Board and portfolio holders. Proposals included within Appendix 1 will be considered by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee before being considered by Cabinet again later in the year. Public consultation will also take place where applicable.

7. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

7.1. The implementation of previous savings proposals has already reduced service delivery levels and the council's ability to meet statutory requirements, impacting on the community and staff. These proposals will, to a certain degree, add to that. There is a risk that some agreed savings and mitigation may result in increased demand for more costly interventions if needs escalate particularly in social care. The potential impact on the

council's ability to safeguard children and adults will be kept carefully under review and mitigating actions taken where required.

8. Implications

8.1. Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**

Assistant Director Corporate Finance

The financial implications are set out in the body of this report. Council officers have a legal responsibility to ensure that the Council can contain spend within its available resources. Regular budget monitoring reports continue to come to Cabinet and be considered by the Directors' Board and management teams in order to maintain effective controls on expenditure during this period of enhanced risk. Measures in place are continually reinforced across the Council in order to reduce ancillary spend and to ensure that everyone is aware of the importance and value of every pound of the taxpayers money that is spent by the Council.

8.2. Legal

Implications verified by: **Ian Hunt**

**Assistant Director Law and Governance and
Monitoring Officer**

There are no specific direct legal implications set out in the report. There are statutory requirements of the Council's Section 151 Officer in relation to setting a balanced budget. The Local Government Finance Act 1988 (Section 114) prescribes that the responsible financial officer "must make a report if he considers that a decision has been made or is about to be made involving expenditure which is unlawful or which, if pursued to its conclusion, would be unlawful and likely to cause a loss or deficiency to the authority". This includes an unbalanced budget.

Within the report there are a number of proposed savings identified, and there will be a process for consultation with Scrutiny and where relevant the public in line with the Councils duties to consult.

8.3. Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**

**Community Development and Equalities
Manager**

The Equality Act 2010 places a public duty on authorities to consider the impact of proposals on people with protected characteristics so that positive or negative impacts can be understood and enhanced or mitigated as appropriate. Services will be required to consider the impact on any

proposals to reduce service levels through a community equality impact assessment which should seek to involve those directly affected.

8.4. **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

Proposals set out in this report will have an impact on all services across the council through either a direct impact on front line service delivery or through general capacity to support both statutory and discretionary services.

9. **Appendices to the report**

Appendix 1 - Savings Proposals that Require Cabinet Approval

Appendix 2 - Savings Proposals under Directors' Operational Delegations

Report Author

Sean Clark

Corporate Director of Resources and Place Delivery

Savings Proposals Requiring Cabinet Approval

Directorate/Service	Narrative	2022/23 £000's	2023/24 £000's	Total £000's
Corporate	Assets – Some will require Cabinet approval as and when identified	(850)	0	(850)
Adults	ASC Provider Services Transformation	(554)	0	(554)
Children's	A comprehensive review of the Education Service,	(214)	(196)	(410)
Children's	Placements - To increase the number of internal fostering household numbers and to decrease our reliance on more expensive external foster placements.	(300)	(300)	(600)
Public Realm	Introduce Pay & Display into Country Park and some green-space parking areas	(100)	(100)	(200)
Public Realm	Re-prioritisation and review of major routes and	(100)	0	(100)
Public Realm	Town Centre cleansing Review of Grounds Maintenance Programme	(100)	0	(100)

Savings Proposals Under Directors' Delegation

Directorate	Narrative	2022/23 £000's	2023/24 £000's	Total £000's	Saving Type
Adults	Integrated Commissioning	(322)	0	(322)	Transformation
Adults	Review of High Cost Supported Living Placements	(400)	0	(400)	Transformation
Adults	New Model of Care – Supported Living	(200)	(200)	(400)	Transformation
Adults	Population Health Management	(130)	0	(130)	Transformation
Public Realm	Residual waste collections reduced to fortnightly, introduction of food waste collections as outlined in the Waste Strategy. Previously agree by Cabinet	(322)	(322)	(644)	Transformation
Housing GF	Reduce use of Private Sector TA with new model of in borough provision, use of LHA	(1,139)	0	(1,139)	Transformation
Corporate	New Income Streams	0	(200)	(200)	Income
Adults	Implement increased Domiciliary Care Charging Immediately (previously agreed)	(205)	(22)	(227)	Income
Public Realm	Commercial Waste	(50)	0	(50)	Income
Public Realm	Bulky Waste	(20)	0	(20)	Income
Public Realm	Counter Fraud Commercial Income	(500)	0	(500)	Income
Public Realm	Commercially Trade CCTV Capability	(100)	(150)	(250)	Income
Public Realm	Commercial Grounds Maintenance Contracts	(150)	(150)	(300)	Income
Strategy and Engagement	Operational & Finance support for High House Production Park	(85)	0	(85)	Income
Corporate	General Costs	(250)	(200)	(450)	Operational
Adults	Re-tender PH contracts	(200)	0	(200)	Operational
Adults	Efficiencies from ending Section 75	(98)	0	(98)	Operational
Children's	Learning Universal Outcome – Further work is required to ensure service that remains delivers on	(175)	(125)	(300)	Operational

Savings Proposals Under Directors' Delegation

Directorate	Narrative	2022/23 £000's	2023/24 £000's	Total £000's	Saving Type
	SEND and statutory functions only. In 2021/22 savings of £1m will be implemented.				
Public Realm Resources and Place Delivery	Range of Minor Efficiencies	(115)	0	(115)	Operational
	MRP and Treasury	(500)	0	(500)	Operational
Strategy and Engagement HR, OD and Transformation	Review of advertising & publicity, look to use more online platforms	(25)	0	(25)	Operational
	Training	(75)	0	(75)	Operational
All	Targeted Staff Reductions already identified	(2,359)	(535)	(2,894)	Staff
All	Capitalisation and Grant Use	(2,000)	0	(2,000)	Staff

16 November 2021	ITEM: 6
Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee	
Report on Asset Related Savings	
Wards Affected: N/A	Key Decision: N/A
Report of: Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Resources and Place Delivery	
Accountable Assistant Director: Michelle Thompson, Interim Assistant Director Property	
Accountable Director: Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Resources and Place Delivery	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

Cabinet declared a number of operational assets surplus to requirements at their meeting on 7 July 2021 as part of the Retain, Re-use, Release (3Rs) programme. Thurrock Council, like local authorities across the country, are facing financial challenges and are therefore targeting areas of high spend – assets fall into this category and this has informed the 3Rs process.

This report provides updates on the Thameside Building and Grangewaters whilst providing an update on the savings target of £1m set out in the 7 July 2021 Cabinet report.

1. Recommendation:

1.1 That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the report for consideration by Cabinet at their meeting on 8 December 2021.

2. Thurrock Council's Financial Position

2.1. At their meeting on 7 July 2021, the Cabinet received a report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) that showed gross financial pressures of £34m over the two financial years 2022-2024.

2.2. The report also set out that the council only has 16 cross-departmental budgets over £1m and so cost reductions of any significance needs to be

focused on those specific areas. One such budget is the cost of premises that has a budget of circa £3m. A saving of £1m was set.

- 2.3. In addition to revenue costs, both the Cabinet and the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee have received updates on the need to reduce the capital programme to avoid future costs of prudential borrowing.

3. The Thameside Complex

- 3.1. The Thameside Complex houses a number of services and supports various community groups either through direct leases or through access to the theatre provision or other lettable spaces.
- 3.2. Whilst the remit and, therefore, focus for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the cost and condition of the complex itself, updates on the various services are set out below.
- 3.3. The net revenue costs of the complex are now in the region of £600k and are set out below. Costs of the services within the complex, such as the Theatre, Museum, Library and Registrars, have their own separate budgets and so are in addition to these costs:

	Outturn 2020/21	Budget 2021/22
Maintenance	42,887	46,330
Utilities	58,574	128,193
Business Rates	185,573	212,650
Cleaning	96,993	80,776
Insurance	17,688	21,188
Sundry	4,893	724
Income	(3,217)	(49,722)
Direct Staff – Security etc	198,579	189,427
Total	601,970	629,566

- 3.4. In addition, it is clear that there has been a lack of capital investment over at least a decade whilst there has also been various reports and studies on the suitability of the theatre as it is currently.
- 3.5. The following table shows estimated capital expenditure circa £16m that would be required over the short to medium term should the complex remain open. The cost of the Theatre modernisation comes from reports going back to 2015 and 2016 and so could range widely:

ITEM/ELEMENT	TOTAL
Roofs & rainwater goods	£553,000
External walls and cladding	£230,000
Windows doors and joinery	£183,000

ITEM/ELEMENT	TOTAL
Décor and finishes	£209,000
Sanitary fittings	£60,000
Drainage	£40,000
Lifts	£328,000
Theatre modernisation/refurb	£6,600,000
Office and other areas modernisation/refurb	£2,400,000
M&E services	£2,530,000
External areas and boundaries	134,000
Fire precautions	£182,000
Statutory compliance/Planned maintenance	£482,000
Sub-total	£15,556,000
Contingency/risk allowance @ 12%	£1,671,720
Project management fees	£750,000
Total	£16,352,720

3.6. Updates on the various services within the Complex are as follows:

3.6.1. Arts, culture and heritage have an important part to play in place making and the future prosperity of Thurrock through supporting economic growth as well as the positive effects on health and well-being, education and contribution to quality of live. Officers are currently working with stakeholders to co-produce a new cultural strategy and delivery model that repositions cultural services and in particular, our approach to cultural regeneration to better support the Council's place ambitions.

3.6.2. Thameside Theatre and the Thurrock Museum Gallery reopened to the public in September. To support the continued delivery of cultural services officers are exploring with partners alternative options for performances in venues across Thurrock and discussions are underway with interested parties on the potential for community asset transfer of the Thameside Complex. Work is also underway to digitise the museum collection and we are collaborating across services, for example Museum Service and Libraries looking at ways to better display artefacts and archives that are historically significant and important to Thurrock in libraries across the borough similar to the BATA Exhibition display at East Tilbury Library.

3.6.3. The development of a new cultural strategy aims to increase the levels of participation in arts and cultural activity through the delivery of strategic initiatives such as community led cultural provision through programmes like the Creative People and Places (CPP) programme, align with the council's Health and Well-being Strategy by exploring ways to maximise the power of culture and creativity to support the well-being of individuals and communities

as well as support cultural regeneration in Thurrock as part of an integrated plan for economic growth.

- 3.6.4. Should the Complex close, the library would be resituated into the ground floor of the Civic Offices (2); and
- 3.6.5. Provision of the Registrar Services has already been facilitated in the Civic Office extension, CO3.
- 3.7. Should Cabinet confirm the closure of the Thameside Complex, this will not happen before the end of March 2022 to allow further time to develop the above and to re-situate the library.

4. Grangewaters

- 4.1. Grangewaters was identified as surplus to requirements under the challenge of whether it was considered a council's core activity. There has been no immediate decision on the future of the site although the possibility of development is being explored.
- 4.2. Members should note that there has been a successful application to classify Grangewaters as an Asset of Community Value. As such, should the council decide to sell the site within a given period, it must be first offered to the community.
- 4.3. Until such time as a firm decision is made and can be actioned, the site will remain open and operational.

5. Libraries

- 5.1. In discussion with relevant portfolio holders, there are currently no plans to close any libraries.

6. Savings

- 6.1. The closure of the Thameside Complex, along with other savings such as the cancellation of the lease on the multi-storey car park, would achieve circa £850k in savings. As such, the MTFs has been revised to reflect this lower saving level thus increasing the deficit.
- 6.2. Should the Cabinet decide to keep the Complex open, this would add a further pressure of £600k.

7. Reasons for Recommendation

- 7.1. The Council has a statutory requirement to set a balanced budget annually. Specific budget reports have set out the overall pressures in more detail whilst this report sets out the savings that can be made from assets.

8. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 8.1. This report forms part of the consultation process. Consultation is also taking place in the community and with affected staff.

9. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 9.1. Rationalising assets is reflective of good practice and frees up sites for alternative uses in the community.
- 9.2. The closure of the Thameside Complex would impact on the Arts and Culture sector though work continues in developing alternative provision and approaches.

10. Implications

10.1. Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**

Assistant Director Corporate Finance

The financial implications are set out in the body of this report. Council officers have a legal responsibility to ensure that the Council can contain spend within its available resources. Whilst assets are intrinsic to service delivery, disposing of surplus assets both reduces revenue expenditure and raises a capital receipt to invest elsewhere.

10.2. Legal

Implications verified by: **Ian Hunt**

**Assistant Director Law & Governance
and Monitoring Officer**

The Council is generally empowered to dispose of assets which are underperforming or surplus to requirements. Each asset will need to be checked to ensure its formal ownerships and appropriation enable general disposal with terms to be confirmed.

10.3. Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**

**Community Development and Equalities
Manager**

The Asset Disposal Policy sets out considerations for bringing agility to land and property assets so that the delivery of the Council's goals and objectives are realised in a sustainable manner, at the right time and on budget. The policy itself will be the subject of a Community Equality Impact Assessment to mitigate the risk of negative impact on citizens and communities. Where community assets are identified for disposal, the process set out for the implementation of the CAT Policy and principles of the Collaborative Communities Framework will be applied, this includes the completion of CEIA's on a case by case basis, engagement with the voluntary and community sector, and an assessment of social value that includes support for Thurrock's recovery from COVID-19 and building resilience within communities and voluntary sector networks.

- 10.4. **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

Assets are used for a range of purposes including direct service delivery, use by community groups and residents.

11. Appendices to the report

There are no appendices to this report.

Report Author

Sean Clark

Corporate Director of Resources and Place Delivery

16 November 2021	ITEM: 7
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Local Council Tax Scheme	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key
Report of: Andy Brittain, Strategic Lead for Revenues and Benefits	
Accountable Assistant Director: Jonathan Wilson, Assistant Director Finance	
Accountable Director: Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) helps support council taxpayers who have a low income by providing a reduction in the actual amount in Council Tax payable.

On 1 April 2013 LCTS replaced the national Council Tax Benefit Scheme (CTB). Unlike CTB, which was wholly funded by Central Government and administered by local authorities, for LCTS each council was required to design and implement its own scheme against a backdrop of 10% reduction in central funding.

The Council is required to consider its scheme annually and consult on any changes before they are introduced, the current LCTS scheme was implemented on the 1st April 2017 following consultation and has been agreed for each subsequent year up to the current financial year with no changes.

This report provides details of Thurrock’s current scheme and analysis to support the recommendation that the current scheme remains unchanged for 2022/23.

1. Recommendations:

- 1.1 To note the analysis of the current scheme.
- 1.2 To support the recommendation that the current scheme remains unchanged for 2022/23.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The design of each LCTS scheme must be finalised by the 11th March ahead of the relevant year to which it relates. Failure to provide a scheme by this

date will trigger the implementation of a default government scheme. The default scheme would require the council to revert back to the level of support that would have been provided under the national Council Tax Benefit arrangements. With regards to current caseload, reverting to the national scheme would result in an additional cost to Thurrock of circa £1m per annum.

2.2 Some components of the LCTS scheme have been directed by Government such as:

- All low income pensioners will be protected under the national framework as defined by DCLG;
- Consideration for protection for vulnerable working age groups will be allowed for; and

Each authority's scheme will maintain work incentives wherever possible. The Government continues to stress the importance of this principle given the current economic climate and the welfare reform agenda.

2.3 From 2014/15, any specific funding for the LCTS scheme was rolled up into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) as provided to local authorities by the government. It is entirely for local authorities to decide how much they are prepared to spend on their LCTS scheme.

2.4 Local authorities take on the risk that liabilities under LCTS exceed the amount projected for at the start of the relevant financial year. This risk is shared between billing and major precepting authorities with circa 15% of the council tax collected by the council being paid over to the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service and Essex Police.

3. Analysis/ review of current scheme

3.1 Overview of existing Scheme

The existing Scheme contains the following elements:

- To ensure work pays, the first £25 per week of earned income is disregarded when calculating levels of council tax support;
- The maximum capital limit is to be set at £6,000. This means anyone who has savings over £6,000 may not receive support with their council tax;
- For working age claimants, the maximum support allowed is set at 75% of their full council tax bill;
- To assist those with families the Child benefit and child maintenance received is not included as income in the calculation of council tax support;
- The maximum period a claim can be backdated under the scheme is one calendar month. In order to qualify for this the claimant will need to provide good reason for not claiming earlier;
- There is a full disregard of military compensation payments, including War Disablement Pensions, War Widow's Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments;

- The number of dependants assessed in the calculation of claimants needs is a maximum of two; and
- The maximum period of an award when temporarily absent outside the United Kingdom is four weeks.

3.2 Roll out of Universal Credit

In order to keep the process as simple and efficient as possible Thurrock and the majority of other authorities made the decision to keep the Local Scheme aligned as closely as possible to Housing Benefit Legislation, this was to be reconsidered once Universal Credit had been fully rolled out.

Initially Universal Credit was to be fully implemented for all new and existing Working Age claimants by 2017, however this has now been extended nationally and the Governments latest forecast suggests the project will not complete before 2024. In view of this new Housing Benefit legislation is now forming part of the Welfare Reform agenda with this benefit continuing until at least 2024.

The numbers of UC claimants claiming LCTS are being monitored. As at the October 2021 there was a total LCTS case load of 10,003; of this 4,147 claims were for people in receipt of Universal Credit.

At this stage the introduction of Universal Credit in the Authority has not made any significant change to the amount of LCTS awarded to claimants compared to the legacy benefits.

3.3 Accessibility

The application process for LCTS is linked to other national benefits such as Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. This means that people who claim these benefits are directed to make a claim for LCTS where applicable. Applications for LCTS can be made online with assistance via customer services, community hubs and various other organisations for those who need help in completing a claim.

3.4 Level of Support and affordability

Whilst the maximum level of support afforded to eligible working age claimants is entirely at the Council's discretion, in order to maintain fair and effective scheme the council needs to consider both the cost of providing support and the ability of claimants to contribute towards services funded by Council Tax.

Setting the maximum level of support too low would make Council Tax unaffordable for residents on a lower income and would lead to low collection rates which would ultimately benefit no one, whereas an overly generous scheme would increase the burden on wider taxpayers.

The current Thurrock scheme operates a means tested approach, with maximum discounts for working age people set at 75%. The current level of discount provides:

- A high collection rate of council tax billed by claimants with 97.01% collected in the year it is billed.
- Thurrock's LCTS is in line with other Essex authorities along the South Essex Corridor, as outlined in the table below:

Authority	Max. Support Level
Basildon	75%
Castle Point	68%
Southend-on-Sea	75%
Thurrock	75%

3.5 Cost and Caseload

The number of people claiming LCTS increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, however numbers have now returned to pre pandemic levels, although this of course will continue to be closely monitored.

Within Thurrock for the period July 20 to October 21 the number of claims in payment decreased by 350 with an additional cost of £245k, however when factoring in the 4.99% increase in Council Tax for the current financial year, this results in a net reduction in the cost of the scheme of £174k.

Claimant Type	Number of Claimants		Total Awarded	
	As at Oct 2021	Var. to Jul 2020	As at Oct 2021	Var. to Jul 2020
Working age - Employed	1332	-272	£758,434.50	£2,964.50
Working age - Not Employed	5125	64	£4,186,596.70	£220,691.70
Pension Age	3547	-142	£3,717,094.30	£21,689.30
Total	10004	-350	£8,662,125.50	£245,345.50

3.6 Complaints

There have been no specific complaints recorded regarding the councils scheme in recent years.

3.7 Additional Support

Alongside the LCTS scheme various other mandatory and discretionary discounts and exemptions are in place to provide assistance and support to specific groups. These include, Care Leavers exemption to the age of 21 (25 in exceptional circumstances), Severe Mental Health Exemption, Single Persons Discount. The council also considers its wider discretionary power in exceptional cases to reduce the council tax owed where appropriate.

3.8 Further considerations

In addition to the available evidence which suggests the scheme remains fit for purpose, due to the impact of the pandemic, in the interests of maintaining current levels of support and consistency there are no proposals to make changes to the scheme at this time. It is however intended that the scheme will be further considered once the situation stabilises, and future demand/support can be more confidently assessed.

4. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 4.1 The Council is required to have an approved LCTS scheme that has been subject to public consultation where changes are proposed. The recommendations and timeframe outlined in this report will ensure we continue to meet this requirement noting the fact that no changes are proposed for the following municipal year.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Assistant Director Finance

The financial implications are set out in the body of the report.

5.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**
Corporate Governance Lawyer

Section 13A(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, requires the Council as billing authority to make a localised Council Tax Reduction Scheme in accordance with Schedule 1A to the Act. Each financial year the Council must consider whether to revise its scheme, or to replace it with another scheme.

Any revision to its scheme, or any replacement scheme, must be made no later than 11 March in the financial year preceding that for which the revision or replacement scheme is to have effect.

This report proposes no revisions to the LCTS currently in place for 2021/22. Therefore the Council would not be required to conduct the prescribed

consultation process where it is not proposing to make any changes to the LCTS.

Although there are no proposed changes to the Scheme, Full Council is required to agree the adoption of the Scheme to continue as from 01 April 2022 for the Council Tax year 2022/23.

Under Schedule 1A of the Act the Government has the power to make regulations about the prescribed requirements for schemes. Therefore any scheme that the Council adopts must comply with these regulations.

The Council must ensure that it has due regard to its Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act 2010 when considering whether to revise the LCTS or to retain the existing scheme. Prior to making a decision to adopt the LCTS for 2022/23 Members must take into account and give particular consideration to an assessment, outlining the impact of the proposals for persons that share the characteristics protected under S4 of the Act and the proposals made to reduce or mitigate any negative impact associated with the proposal.

5.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead Community Development and Equalities

The Council has a duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010 to consider the equality impact of its policies and decisions, an updated equality assessment will be taken out against the policy.

5.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

N/A

6. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Working Papers held by Corporate Finance and Revenues and Benefits.

7. **Appendices to the report**

None

Report Author:

Andy Brittain

Strategic Lead for Revenues and Benefits

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16 November 2021	ITEM: 8
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Quarter 2 (April to September 2021) Corporate Performance Report 2021/22	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth	
Accountable Assistant Director: n/a	
Accountable Director: Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

This is the second corporate performance monitoring report for 2021/22 covering April to September 2021.

This report provides a progress update in relation to the performance of those KPIs, including a focus on some specific highlights and challenges. It details statistical evidence the council will use to monitor the progress and performance against the council's priorities.

This report shows that 71% of indicators are currently achieving target and 59% are better than the previous year.

During the first three months of the financial year, the country was preparing to open up slowly in line with the government's roadmap, but there were still a number of restrictions in place. Moving into quarter 2, some indicators are still being directly or indirectly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic during this period although national restrictions have now significantly reduced. The report highlights how COVID-19 has disrupted or changed performance and/or priorities and demand levels across a number of services during the year and in some cases continues to have a lasting effect.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **To note and comment upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators in particular those areas which are off target and the impact of COVID-19.**
- 1.2 **To identify any areas which require additional consideration.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1. The performance of the priority activities of the council is monitored through the Corporate Key Performance Indicator (KPI) framework. This provides a mixture of strategic and operational indicators. The indicators have been chosen to be as clear and simple to understand as possible, whilst balancing the need to ensure the council is monitoring those things which are of most importance, both operationally and strategically.
- 2.2. This reflects the demand for council services increasing and being ever more complex, not least due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and the need for a holistic approach to monitoring data and intelligence. Analysis of performance and internal processes at service level by Directors continued monthly throughout 2020/21 and will continue throughout 2021/22.
- 2.3. These corporate indicators will continue to be reported to both Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet on a quarterly basis, throughout 2021/22.
- 2.4. In line with the recommendation from Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2019, throughout 2021/22, where performance is below target, commentary will be included to show the intended improvement plan. This is included in Section 3.5 as the “Route to Green”.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

This report is a monitoring and update report, therefore there is no options analysis.

3.1 Summary of Corporate KPI Performance

Quarter 2 2021/22 Performance against target		Direction of Travel compared to 2020/21	
Achieved	71.43% (25)	↑ BETTER	59.4% (19)
Failed	28.57% (10)	→ STATIC	21.9% (7)
		↓ WORSE	18.7% (6)

3.2 Impact of Covid-19

- 3.2.1 The Quarter 2 (April to September 2021) overall outturn is 71% of indicators achieving their target which is higher than the outturn for 2020/21 of 63%. However, given the significant impact and disruption this time last year at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is difficult to make a meaningful comparison. This report covers April to September 2021, the first three months of which saw the country still in various phases of lockdown. Whilst most restrictions have now eased, it is as yet, too early for some of the indicators and services to predict how performance levels will be impacted over the full course of the year. This will continue to be closely monitored throughout the year.
- 3.2.2 In most cases the targets for 2021/22 have been set based on “normal” circumstances to more clearly analyse the impact of the disruption caused by the pandemic. This is likely to mean that more indicators will not “perform” as well as they did before COVID, and/or the rate of improvement will not be as great. Where an indicator has failed to reach its target during the year, the commentary provided will identify clearly whether this is related to COVID-19 impacts or other factors impacting on performance.
- 3.2.3 It is difficult to predict accurately how long and to what extent service delivery in some areas will continue to be impacted. Some will continue to be affected during the remainder of the year. This is being further affected by the need to mitigate against the wider capacity and financial pressures which COVID has brought about, including the need to hold vacant posts and the ongoing recruitment restrictions as well as transformational changes to the way services are delivered. This is likely to have an increasingly significant impact on service delivery going forward through 2021/22.

3.3 On target performance

71% of available corporate KPIs achieved their targets. (Brackets show actuals where appropriate).

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
Tenant satisfaction with Transforming Homes	Cllr Spillman	86.5%	90.3% (56)				90.3% (56)	ACHIEVED	↑	85%	85%
Number of new Micro Enterprises started since 1 April 2021	Cllr Huelin	20	4				16	ACHIEVED	↑	10	20
% of volunteer placements filled within council	Cllr Huelin	96%	90% (135)				93% (181)	ACHIEVED	↑	92%	96%
Number of events and activities (provided from hubs/libraries) that support engagement in a range of cultural, social and learning opportunities to support well-being and strengthen community connections	Cllr Huelin	437	99				290	ACHIEVED	↑	180	360
Successful completion of treatment in Young People's Drug & Alcohol service	Cllr Mayes	90%	100%				95%	ACHIEVED	↑	70%	70%
% of young people who reoffend after a previously recorded offence	Cllr Johnson	17.0%	17% (Q4)				3% (Q1)	ACHIEVED	↑	20%	20%
% occupancy of council-owned business centres	Cllr Coxshall	71%	75%				75%	ACHIEVED	↑	75%	80%
Value (£) of council owned property disposals	Cllr Hebb	£460k	£537k				£2.797m	ACHIEVED	↑	£1m	£3m
% of refuse bins emptied on correct day	Cllr Jefferies	97.31%	99.87%	99.95%	99.97%	99.95%	99.96%	ACHIEVED	↑	98.5%	98.5%
% of potholes repaired within policy and agreed timeframe	Cllr Maney	98%	99% (1,472)	100% (520)	100% (258)	100% (141)	100% (2,391)	ACHIEVED	↑	98%	98%
% of Major planning applications processed in 13 weeks	Cllr Maney	97%	100% (9)	100% (1)	100% (2)	100% (4)	100% (16)	ACHIEVED	↑	90%	90%
No of new apprenticeships started (incl. staff/ excluding maintained schools)	Cllr Duffin	56	10	5	11	7	33	ACHIEVED	↑	30	62
Street Cleanliness - a) Litter - % of areas surveyed with unacceptable levels of litter	Cllr Jefferies	4.61%	Tranche 1 6.17%					ACHIEVED	↑	9%	9%

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
% Rent collected	Cllr Spillman	98.3%	89.5%	89.7%	91.7%	93.1%	93.1%	ACHIEVED	➔	93%	98%
Overall spend to budget on General Fund (% variance against forecast)	Cllr Hebb	0%	0%				0%	ACHIEVED	➔	0%	0%
Number of applicants with family commitments in Bed & Breakfast for six weeks or more (ie with dependent child(ren) or are pregnant)	Cllr Spillman	0	0	0	0	0	0	ACHIEVED	➔	0	0
Forecast Council Tax collected	Cllr Hebb	97.96%	98.0%	98.0%	98.0%	98.0%	98.0%	ACHIEVED	➔	98.0%	98.0%
Forecast National Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) collected	Cllr Hebb	96.8%	96.8%	96.8%	96.8%	96.8%	96.8%	ACHIEVED	➔	96.8%	96.8%
% of Minor planning applications processed in 8 weeks	Cllr Maney	100%	100% (43)	100% (15)	100% (18)	100% (15)	100% (91)	ACHIEVED	➔	90%	90%
Overall spend to budget on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) (£K variance)	Cllr Spillman	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	ACHIEVED	➔	£0	£0
No of placements available within council for volunteers	Cllr Huelin	224	150				194	ACHIEVED	⬇	165	190
Permanent admissions of older people (65+) to residential and nursing care homes per 100,000 population	Cllr Huelin	618.3 per 100,000	178.4 (43)	257.3 (62)	311.2 (75)	336.1 (81)	336.1 (81)	ACHIEVED	⬇	373.5 (90)	738.7 (178)
% of repairs completed within target	Cllr Spillman	98.3%	97.2% (7,967)	93.4% (2,735)	92.0% (2,558)	95.2% (2,754)	95.3% (16,014)	ACHIEVED	⬇	95%	95%
% of GP practices who have received 1 visit to discuss COVID recovery in relation to GPs Quality of Outcome Framework (QOF)	Cllr Mayes	<i>new KPI</i>	26% (7)				59% (16)	ACHIEVED	n/a	50%	100%
% of GP practices who have received a second visit to review outcomes of first and discuss the cancer quality improvement work	Cllr Mayes	<i>New KPI</i>	This measure, which is a follow up from the indicator above, will be available at year end.								

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days) (rolling 12 months)	Cllr Johnson	<i>new KPI</i>	378				375	ACHIEVED	n/a	426	426

3.4 Off target indicators

At the end of quarter 2, ten of the available indicators failed to meet their target.

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
Proportion of older people (65+) still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement/ rehabilitation	Cllr Huelin	86.40%	91.9%				84.0%	FAILED	↓	86.3%	86.3%
<p>Performance is 2.3% under target. Although under-performing, Thurrock is still performing 4.9% above the latest national average (79.1% 2020/21) and 2.7% above the regional average (81.3% 2020/21). Please note that for the purposes of the national indicator only Quarter 4 (as a snapshot) is taken as the final year-end position for 2021/22. Out of 81 discharges from hospital to reablement in the period, 68 were at home on the 91st day. Of the 13 not at home, 8 had passed away and 5 were in hospital. Whilst reablement aims to improve independence to keep individuals at home for longer, some individuals have health conditions that might mean that full independence is not possible. Individuals can also have a loss of independence after reablement has taken place due to new conditions or changes in circumstances. Therefore even though some individuals may not be at home on the 91st day, this is not necessarily a reflection of the effectiveness of the service.</p>											
Route to GREEN											
Continue to monitor the performance of the reablement services to ensure people are re-abled as much as possible, thus increasing the potential for individuals to remain at home.											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
Proportion of people using social care who receive direct payments	Cllr Huelin	34.4%	33.1%	30.9%	30.9%	31.5%	31.5%	FAILED	↓	33%	33%
<p>This indicator is 1.5% under target. Although under-performing against target, Thurrock is still performing 4.9% above the latest national average (26.6% 2020/21) and 6.4% above the latest regional average (25.1% 2020/21). Out of 1,405 long term community services in place at month end, 443 were direct payments.</p> <p>In order to support hospitals during COVID, new national measures were put in place to provide up to 6 weeks free care (4 weeks from July) to anyone being discharged from hospital, funded under the national Covid Hospital Discharge Policy. As such, individuals leaving hospital were placed in free commissioned services (such as home care). As a consequence, for those individuals who require ongoing care beyond the free period, most are staying with the home care provider they are already receiving support from, rather than moving to a direct payment where they would be required to make their own care arrangements.</p> <p>In addition, the pandemic resulted in fewer personal assistants and other independent services being available, causing difficulties in individuals sourcing their own care, resulting in more individuals moving to council commissioned services.</p> <p>Following the ending of the Section 75 agreement with Essex Partnership University Trust (EPUT), all of the cases being transferred back into the local authority are being reviewed and some cases have been identified where the direct payments are no longer current. This has resulted in a reduction in the overall number of people receiving direct payments.</p>											
Route to GREEN											
<p>Analysis was undertaken of the reduction in direct payments during the Covid period to understand the reasons (as described above).</p> <p>The council continues to ensure that everyone eligible for a direct payment is offered the choice during the assessment and support planning process. Managers are authorising the commissioning of new services to ensure the option of direct payments have been explored with individuals before a commissioned service is authorised. There will be a promotional campaign from January 2022 to improve take up of direct payments after the pressures and continued issues resulting from the pandemic have eased.</p>											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
% General tenant satisfaction with neighbourhoods/services provided by Housing	Cllr Spillman	75.5%	72.8% (361)	72.9% (121)	74.0% (114)	76.8% (126)	73.6% (722)	FAILED	↓	75%	75%
<p>During 2021/22 between April and September 980 tenants have completed a telephone satisfaction survey and have given a rating for satisfaction with the overall service provided by Housing. Of these 980 tenants, 722 tenants gave a "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied" rating which makes up the satisfaction rate of 73.7%. Of the remaining 259 tenants, 111 (11.3%) gave a neutral rating of "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" which means that 147 (15%) tenants gave a dissatisfied rating of "fairly dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied".</p> <p>A number of dissatisfied ratings were accompanied by qualitative feedback relating to refuse collection, street sweeping, Council Tax and Housing Benefit - particularly in April and May. Whilst these are not services delivered by Housing, this has had a negative impact of 1.5% on the satisfaction rate over the year to date.</p> <p>Satisfaction with repairs as a perception measure correlates strongly with overall satisfaction with Housing through key driver mapping which has been undertaken. During July and August, repairs performance was under target which had a negative effect on both repairs perception satisfaction and overall satisfaction with Housing. Repairs performance has recovered in September and is now on target and satisfaction with repairs perception has risen as a result alongside overall satisfaction with Housing which was on target in September.</p>											
Route to GREEN											
<p>Tenant satisfaction with the overall service provided by Housing in September was 76.8% and on target, recovering from lower satisfaction levels in July and August. Tenant satisfaction data is routinely analysed and insight is regularly shared at both an operational and a strategic level which identifies common themes for dissatisfaction from the qualitative feedback tenants provide during the survey. This insight enables the Housing service to understand and take action to address specific themes to improve satisfaction with Housing overall.</p> <p>Data analytics are also used to establish whether there is a strong statistical relationship, or correlation, between satisfaction with individual measures and overall satisfaction which enables the Housing service to identify the most effective measures and areas of the service to focus on in order to improve satisfaction overall through key driver mapping.</p>											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
Average time to turnaround/re-let voids (in days)	Cllr Spillman	47.5 days	30.2 days	35.3 days	29.5 days	34.4 days	31.5 days	FAILED	↑	28 days	28 days
<p>Performance against this indicator is made up of both general needs and sheltered housing voids. General needs voids account for 74% of the overall voids over the year to date and the average re-let time for this void type at the end of quarter two is 27.9 days and on target.</p> <p>Sheltered housing voids account for 26% of the overall voids and the average re-let time for this void type at the end of quarter two is 41.7 days and over the target of 28 days. However there is a clear disparity in performance between sheltered housing voids with an entrance door on the ground floor and those with an entrance door on the first floor or higher (which are harder to let) – with average relet times at end of quarter 2 being 26.9 days and 57.8 days respectively. Sheltered housing voids with an entrance door on the first floor or higher is the clear driver of void re-let time underperformance.</p>											
Route to GREEN											
<p>In order to address the issue with difficulties letting sheltered voids with entrance doors above the ground floor, the service will be engaging with neighbouring local authorities to determine whether this is a problem for other local authorities and to identify any best practice. The service is also undertaking a review of the lettings criteria and exploring the possibility of amending the criteria for these particular properties to make them available to a larger pool of potential bidders.</p>											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
Number of health hazards removed as a direct result of private sector housing team intervention	Cllr Spillman	746	212	33	39	171	455	FAILED	↑	504	1,000
<p>Whilst this has increased significantly in September, over the course of the year to date private landlords have been reporting challenges in carrying out property improvement works following the lifting of COVID restrictions nationally.</p> <p>Some landlords have requested more time to remove hazards and carry out remedial works due to financial or operational difficulties caused by the pandemic in completing works. This includes building material shortages impacting on timescales to remove hazards, material prices causing financial difficulties for some landlords and a shortage of contractors to carry out works. This is assessed and considered on a case by case basis and the latest government advice for local authorities to enforce standards in rented properties. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities continue to recommend a pragmatic approach to support landlords and tenants.</p> <p>Routine Part 1 property inspections were not carried out during the national lockdowns for Category 1 and 2 hazards. Essential inspections were only carried out where there is an imminent risk to a tenant's health due to a serious hazard. Following government advice, routine inspections commenced in May 2021, subject to tenants not self-isolating or refusing to allow access.</p>											
Route to GREEN											
<p>A total of 171 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards were removed in September which has brought the year to date outturn within 45 of the quarter two profiled target of 500 and represents significant progress towards the year-end target of 1,000 HHSRS hazards removed. The private sector housing team are working closely with landlords and tenants to ensure standards in rented properties are maintained.</p> <p>The private housing team is taking formal action when they find the most serious 'category 1' hazards and made aware that a tenant is vulnerable. This includes works in default when a landlord refuses or fails to carry out repairs.</p>											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter-2	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
Of the children who reached their 28th day in care within the reporting period; % that had an Initial Health Assessment (IHA) within 20 working days (28 calendar days) NB definition amended 2021/22	Cllr Johnson	57%	85.2% (23)				61.2% (30)	FAILED	n/a – new definition	80%	80%
<p>The primary reason this has not reached target in Quarter 2 is because of the number of cases where consent has not been agreed by either the young people or the families for the request to be made to our health colleagues (this is due within 5 working days). Where this is the case a court order is required. Any delay to the request being made in timescale negatively impacts the ability to meet the assessment completion within 20 days. For example in Quarter 2, 17 Initial Health Assessment (IHA) requests were made, 9 were made within 5 working days, of the 8 out of time 5 of those were because parental consent was not provided.</p>											
Route to GREEN											
<p>The service is ensuring that the paperwork (where there is consent) is sent within 5 days to health colleagues. The initial appointments for children within Thurrock are usually within the 20 days. There are capacity issues for all health authorities in England for IHAs. Delays are addressed through the weekly IHA meeting and escalated where necessary. There is regular consultation with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and reviews of the data. This is ongoing. There is a renewed focus on the IHA and seeking consent from parents, agreeing with foster carers that they cannot re-arrange appointments and for social workers to attend with the carers.</p>											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
Payment rate of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs)	Cllr Gledhill	49%	45.49%	48.64%	52.84%	46.34%	49.31%	FAILED	↑	70%	70%

The payment rate of FPNS has been below target for some months. This is due to factors that are outside of the control of the service, including the financial and emotional impact of COVID on residents who are fined. The service has received a high level of representations and appeals over the last 12 months with requests for extended payment periods. The service continues to adopt a supportive approach, agreeing payment plans on a case by case basis.

Route to GREEN

The service have been offering extended periods to pay fines to increase payment compliance as residents emerge from the pandemic and the assisted supported benefits offered by the Government. The service are increasing revisits to offending residents which is assisting in payment compliance, alongside checks to confirm offender's details at point of issuing fixed penalty notices.

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
Street Cleanliness - c) Graffiti % of areas surveyed with unacceptable levels of graffiti	Cllr Jefferies	3.67%	Tranche 1 3.33%					FAILED	↑	3%	3%

Whilst the target was missed this was an improvement over Tranche 3 from last year and the second best score that the council has ever achieved. The team continues to carry out small clearances on street furniture with all operatives carrying out cleansing duties having a small graffiti removal kit. The service also carry out large graffiti clearances when needed.

Route to GREEN

In addition to ongoing vigilance and cleaning of graffiti by the street cleansing teams, Environmental Enforcement Officers are continuing with an ongoing operation [Abercrombie] and recording graffiti offences. This has seen a reduction in offending and the arrest and prosecution of one offender.

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
Total gross external income (fees & charges) (based on sales forecast)	Cllr Hebb	£6.4m	£6.6m	£6.6m	£7.1m	£7.1m	£7.1m	FAILED	↑	£8m	£8m
The position reflects the current projection of fees and charges in the context of the ongoing pandemic.											
Route to GREEN											
It is expected a proportion of the expected reduction will be met from central government funding and there will be some cost reductions associated with specific income losses that further mitigate the overall position. This continues to be closely monitored as part of the wider budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) monitoring with regular reports to Cabinet.											

Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Summer Term 2020/21 (Latest data)				Quarter 2 Target Status	Direction of Travel since 2020/21	Quarter 2 Target	2021/22 Target
% of places accessed for two year olds for early years education (2YE) in the borough	Cllr Johnson	70%	71.68% (562)				FAILED	↑	73%	73%
There has been a marked improvement in take up for the summer term in comparison to this time last year. Parents have more confidence in allowing their children to access two year old entitlement to early education (2YE) funding. And the service has received positive feedback from the Department for Education (DfE) regarding the level of take up.										
During the summer term changes were introduced by the DfE in relation to data protection rules which could impact take up of the 2YE going forward. The process for checking parental eligibility is now more explicit and complicated which has had implications for the direct approach that Thurrock (and many other authorities) have previously developed. This may reduce the take-up. Monitoring of take-up and targeted communications are also more difficult due to the new requirement to delete the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) list of eligible families within 8 weeks of receipt.										
Route to GREEN										
The service continues to monitor closely and is reviewing how the new changes to the system brought in by the DfE impact take up in the short to medium term to determine what mitigations can be made.										

3.5 Other key indicators

3.5.1 Throughout the year the council also monitors some other indicators as part of the corporate scorecard which, whilst not performance related, are important to keep under review

Demand Indicator Definition	Portfolio Holder	2020/21 Outturn	Quarter 1 Year to Date (YTD)	In month July	In month Aug	In month Sept	Quarter 2 Year to Date (YTD)	Direction of Travel since 2020/21
Number of households at risk of homelessness approaching the Council for assistance	Cllr Spillman	1,826	440	144	155	170	909	HIGHER
No of homeless cases accepted	Cllr Spillman	211	35	21	14	31	101	LOWER

At the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2021, the committee sought further clarification that the families not accepted as being at risk of homelessness had been helped in other ways.

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 places a duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness, or relieve homelessness where this is not possible. The number of approaches include all who have approached the council for housing assistance. A number of these cases were prevented and homelessness has been relieved.

The acceptances are low in comparison to approaches because the service deal with a greater number of cases by preventing and relieving homelessness before they reach the "main duty" stage, which is the stage at which acceptances are recorded.

The council primarily uses the private rented sector to source accommodation for applicants which is secured through regular contact with landlords and estate agents. Tenancy Sustainment Officers and Financial Inclusion Officers then work with the tenant to ensure that the relevant benefits are applied for to enable them to sustain their tenancy. In addition to this, the council also utilises the services of the Community and Employment Support Officer to support applicants into training and employment.

The service also prevents homelessness by negotiating and working with landlords and excluders (someone the applicant currently lives with who has asked the applicant to leave their property) to keep the applicants in the property they are approaching us from or negotiating a planned move into suitable accommodation.

3.5.2 KPIs for which data is not currently available due to COVID-19 impact

Number of delayed transfers of care (DToC) - days from hospital (attrib. to NHS, ASC & Joint)	The collection and publication of official DToC figures continue to be suspended by NHS England due to COVID-19 and new Hospital Discharge Policy.
% of primary schools judged "good" or better	No inspections have taken place since the start of COVID-19 pandemic
% of secondary schools judged "good" or better	

3.6 Feedback from Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2021

At the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2021 where the Quarter 1 2021/22 Corporate Performance report was considered, there were a number of questions and comments which required further consideration.

3.6.1 Total number of homes permitted through Planning

The committee asked for clarity regarding the target for the number of homes permitted through planning indicator, which totalled 195 in 2020/21 and queried if this year's target of 950 homes permitted through planning was achievable.

The 950 target is based on the target set to meet the housing delivery test - an annual measurement of housing delivery in the area of relevant plan-making authorities. The 950 target was set at the same as last year which although impacted by COVID, is still in line with the longer term national expectation. It is not yet clear for how long COVID will impact the house building market. As with many other indicators affected by COVID, the decision was taken to keep this target to more clearly analyse the disruption caused by the pandemic, where this has had a contributory impact.

3.6.2 Average gross full-time weekly wage in Thurrock

The committee asked for clarification as to whether the indicator related to the wage for Thurrock residents or for Thurrock jobs.

There are two main national indicators which measure average earnings in an area. One measures the average earnings by place of residence, and one by place of work. The indicator being monitored here is by place of residence – ie for people who live in Thurrock. The target for this year is £631.70 which is for the value to not decrease from the latest published data by the Office of National Statistics at time of target setting.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The corporate priorities and associated performance framework are fundamental to articulating what the council is aiming to achieve. It is best practice to report on the performance of the council. It shows effective levels of governance and transparency and showcases strong performance as well as an acknowledgement of where we need to improve.
- 4.2 This report highlights what the council is focussing on during 2021/22 and confirms the governance and monitoring mechanisms which were in place to ensure that priorities are delivered.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Performance against the corporate priorities was monitored through Performance Board, a cross-council officer group of performance experts representing each service. Performance Board will continue to consider the corporate KPIs on a monthly basis, highlighting areas of particular focus to Directors Board.
- 5.2 Each quarter a report will continue to be presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and finally reported to Cabinet.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The vision and priorities cascade into every bit of the council and further to our partners, through key strategies, service plans, team plans and individual objectives.
- 6.2 This report will help decision makers and other interested parties, form a view of the success of the council's actions in working towards achieving the vision and priority ambitions.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Joanne Freeman**

Finance Manager

The report provides an update on performance against corporate priorities. There are financial KPIs within the corporate scorecard, the performance of which are included in the report.

Where there are issues of underperformance, any recovery planning commissioned by the council may entail future financial implications, and will need to be considered as appropriate.

The council is still assessing the full financial impact of Covid-19 and this is being regularly reported to members.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**
Corporate Governance Lawyer

There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendation of this report. However under s3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999, local authorities have general duty to obtain Best Value by making arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In relation to this general duty, the focus is not simply to achieve best value, but also to strive for continuous improvement. The best value duty also extends to obtaining best value to all aspects of local authorities operation.

Effective KPIs are useful in ensuring and monitoring the level of service delivery of the Council's services and activities. Where there are issues of underperformance, any recovery planning commissioned by the Council or associated individual priority projects may have legal implications, and as such will need to be addressed separately as decisions relating to those specific activities are considered.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

The Corporate Performance Framework for 2021/22 contains measures that help determine the level of progress with meeting wider diversity and equality ambitions, including youth employment and attainment, independent living, vulnerable adults, volunteering etc. Individual commentary is given throughout the year within the regular monitoring reports regarding progress and actions.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

The Corporate Performance Framework includes areas which affect a wide variety of issues, including those noted above in the body of the report. Where applicable these are covered in the appendix.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright): N/A

9. Appendices to the report

- n/a

Report Author

Sarah Welton

Strategy Manager

16 November 2021		ITEM: 9
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Fair Debt Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Andy Brittain, Strategic Lead for Revenues and Benefits		
Accountable Assistant Director: Jonathan Wilson, Assistant Director Finance		
Accountable Director: Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on enhancements and initiatives delivered within the Debt Recovery Service following the independent review by the Institute of Revenues, Ratings and Valuation (IRRV) in 2017 and the Fair Debt Summit which was held in September 2018.

The Fair Debt Summit which was a joint initiative between Children’s Services and Finance and divided into two sections; section one looking at young people’s understanding around managing finances and section two focused on identifying improvements in the council’s collections process as to how we communicate with people who owe money to the council, in a fair way with the “right message, in the right way, at the right time” providing the opportunity for those that “can’t pay but want to” to gain support, whilst ensuring those that “can pay but won’t” are brought to justice.

This report will focus on section two which focussed on the Council’s collection process.

1. Recommendations:

- 1.1 To note the initiatives delivered since the Fair Debt Summit.
- 1.2 To review and comment on the performance.
- 1.3 To review and comment on the draft revised Fair Debt Policy.
- 1.4 To endorse that the Council uses all legal powers available to it to recover money owed by those who “can pay but won’t” including committal.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Council recognises that debt remains one of the most difficult issues facing some of the Borough's residents and is committed to ensuring effective support is provided to assist people in overcoming the burden of debt. In order to guide this, the following activities took place:

- In 2017 the Council Commissioned the Institute of Revenue, Ratings and Valuation (IRRV) to undertake an independent review of the Debt Recovery service. Having completed its review, the IRRV provided an extremely positive report of the debt recovery service, its management and current practices. It also endorsed the planned developments whilst making some further recommendations to assist in shaping the service plan.
- In 2018, the council hosted its first Fair Debt Summit. The event brought together members from across the different political parties, experts and representatives from local public and voluntary sector organisations to explore the reasons people get into debt, the consequences, and how the support the council and its partners provide can be improved for people who want to pay but can't. Conversely, the summit also considered the appropriate approach for those than "can pay but won't".

2.2 The Fair Debt Summit built further on the service plan and IRRV recommendations to provide: an enhanced framework of good practice, with a rich source of ideas and suggestions as to how processes can continue to improve.

2.3 A number of key development activities were identified to enhance the Fair Debt approach. This report is intended to provide an overview of what has been achieved to date, how the Fair Debt approach provided additional support throughout the pandemic and an overview of the next planned steps.

3. Initiatives Delivered

3.1 Single View of Debtor

The first phase of this project went live for debt staff in March 2020. The technical solution developed with Xantura has brought together relevant debt information held across multiple different systems, along with any information held throughout the council that may suggest vulnerability into a single view. This enables staff to consider the overall debt position and relevant circumstances to guide the approach to supportive resolution.

This ground breaking project has already achieved wider recognition winning the 'Solutions Partner' category at the the Public Finance Awards 2020'. It is intended the solution be further enhanced through future phases of the project which are outlined later in this report.

3.2 Financial Inclusion

Building on the success of the initiative developed in the Housing Service, the Financial Inclusion offering has been enhanced to cater for wider council debts dealing with the most vulnerable residents who may need additional support in claiming benefits, budgeting etc.

Initially, this initiative has been focused on care leavers working with 'Inspire'. However, following positive feedback, it is now being expanded to cater for wider referrals from the debt team.

3.3 Breathing Space

Working in partnership with Xantura, a case management system was built to take electronic data flows from the Insolvency Service for people entering the Breathing Space Moratorium. This application was delivered and ready for the 4th May when it went live.

This system ensures all cases entering the process are validated against all debt portfolios within Thurrock and collection action placed on hold for the 60 day Moratorium (or longer for Mental Health cases) to ensure no further action or costs are incurred.

This gives the Debt Adviser (Citizens Advice, StepChange, etc) the opportunity to negotiate with all the creditors for that person experiencing difficulty to implement a sustainable payment plan.

The next stage of this solution is the implementation of the Statutory Debt Repayment Plans due later this year.

3.4 Revised Fair Debt Policy

Building on the themes and outcomes identified and enhanced at the Fair Debt Summit, the Fair Debt Policy has been enhanced to achieve the overall Fair Debt objective of "Right message, Right way, Right time".

The draft policy, which is included for review in appendix 1, has been developed in conjunction with key partners who attended the Fair Debt Summit.

3.5 Focus on early resolution

Following on from the education developments, (outlined in a previous report) which considers how we better educate people to reduce the numbers of getting into serious debt, when somebody does fall into arrears, the priority turns to encouraging them to make contact at the earliest opportunity to enable a resolution to be discussed or assistance sort.

The initiative to date has involved issuing various communications in addition to the legislative requirements by different channels, urging those in debt to make contact either with the council or the signposted support to find suitable resolution without the need for enforcement action.

The success of the drive towards front end collection can clearly be seen from the comparative data provided in appendix 2 which shows the significant reduction over recent years of those reaching court stage. This will be further enhanced through further developments highlighted later in this report.

3.6 Fair Debt Approach during the Pandemic

Clearly the significant financial burden/uncertainty placed on many residents and businesses due to restrictions and social distancing, meant that we had to carefully consider how to maintain income to support vital services, whilst ensuring collection action for residents and businesses was appropriate and supportive during this difficult time.

As a result, many standard recovery stages were paused and replaced by tailored “reaching out” initiatives to ensure that those experiencing difficulties in this unprecedented period, were provided with the opportunity to seek assistance including the opportunity to revise payments plans where appropriate.

This approach fits squarely within the associated principle agreed at the Fair Debt Summit in 2018 to support those who want to pay, but can't.

4. Impact and performance

4.1 The cumulative effect of the ongoing improvements can clearly be seen in appendix 2 with the service continuing to deliver:

- Above average collection performance equating to additional in year collections of £2.7m per annum compared to the national average and an arrears position £12.4m better than the national average.
- An improved proportion of cases being resolved without the need for court/enforcement action.
- Complaints against the debt team held at low levels equating to 0.03% upheld against debt actions taken.

5. Next steps

In order to ensure the service continues to improve, the service plan for the forthcoming 12 months will focus on the following deliverables:

5.1 Continue SVoD Development

Building on the success of the first phase, the second phase will offer further refinements to the information available to officers to guide the recovery of

debts. Additionally, the next phase will consider the business case to further improve contact rates by delivering tailored debt collection activities by debtor type through varied communication channels.

5.2 Tackling those that ‘can pay but won’t’

Sadly, whilst the Thurrock approach drives excellent collection rates, there are still a small cluster of routine offenders who continue to choose not to pay, even though they can. There is currently close to £1m outstanding that is associated to debtors who have multiple Liability Orders issued against them and who have exhausted all other collection channels.

Council Tax – unlike other most other debts carry legal sanctions for non-payment. It is the council’s intention to pursue those who can pay but choose not to pay through all legal avenues available including asking the court to undertake a means enquiry which ultimately could lead to Committal.

6. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

6.1 The Fair Debt Summit brought together a number of experts and support organisations to consider current processes and initiatives to improve.

The output of the Fair Debt Summit also informed the revised policy, which attendees have been invited to review and comment.

Key comments received from Citizens Advice endorse the collaborative approach as follows:

- Citizens Advice welcomes the revised Fair Debt Policy and was pleased to have had the opportunity to be involved in the Fair Debt Summit
- The revised policy will be all the more critical in a post-COVID environment where we anticipate an increase in debt issues.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Assistant Director Finance

The financial implications are set out in the body of the report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**
Corporate Governance Lawyer

Local authorities have a fiduciary duty to its taxpayers to seek to recover outstanding debt wherever possible, and to act fairly and proportionality in the

collection and enforcement of debt. The Council has a number of options available to recover debts. The options available will depend on the nature of the debt as some methods of enforcement arise out of a particular statutory provision that apply only in certain contexts. The Local Government and Finance Act 1992 and the Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1992 set out councils' powers to collect and recover council tax.

The individual circumstances of a particular debtor may also restrict the options available to the Council. The Government did introduce a number of measures in relation to the enforcement of debt during the current pandemic which had an impact on the Council's ability to recover debt.

There is no legal requirement on the Council to use committal orders to enforce debt, this an option amongst other methods of recovery. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has in a number of reports recommended that local authorities consider the implications of bankruptcy and only use it as a last resort when all other debt recovery methods have been exhausted because of the impact that it can have on a debtor and their family. The effect of bankruptcy on a debtor can be significant in relation to both the loss of assets and the costs that can increase the original debt substantially.

Decisions about pursuing bankruptcy, seeking committal to prison or applying for a charging order should be recorded and the records retained together with the information considered by the decision maker where a senior officer has decided that pursuing bankruptcy is a fair and proportionate action after reviewing an accurate history of the origin of the debt and the debtors personal circumstances.

In developing a fair debt the policy the Council needs to ensure that information sharing arrangements and gathering information about individuals for the purpose of recovering debts are compliant with an individual's rights under General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and Human Rights legislation.

The Council in exercising its functions must have due regard to its Public Sector equality duties under the Equalities Act 2010. Prior to reaching a decision to adopt the Policy, the Council is required to assess and consider how the proposed policy is likely to impact on persons who have certain protected characteristics specified under the Act, and what steps can be taken to mitigate any negative impact.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead Community Development and Equalities

'The Fair Debt Policy has been developed with stakeholder engagement to help consider the needs of vulnerable people and those with protected characteristics. A Community Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out, and implementation monitored, to ensure the policy achieves the intended outcomes'

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

N/A

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Working Papers held by Corporate Finance and Revenues and Benefits.

9. **Appendices to the report**

Appendix 1 – Revised Fair Debt Policy (Draft)

Appendix 2 – Performance Measures

Report Author:

Andy Brittain

Strategic Lead for Revenues and Benefits

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Appendix 1

Thurrock Council Corporate Fair Debt Policy November 2021

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1. Executive Summary

I am extremely proud of the collaborative effort that has led to this policy document. Our Corporate Fair Debt Policy combines innovation, compassion and pragmatism. It was developed through a collaborative community process which saw the council, industry and residents come together to discuss all the issues around the causes of household debt, and how we compassionately assist those who “want to pay, but can’t”, and also pursue those who “can, but won’t” pay their debts.

In September 2018 we held a Fair Debt Summit which brought together key thinkers from the public, welfare, health and voluntary sectors to look at improving the support we have available to those who are struggling with debt.

This document is a tangible outcome from that summit bringing together many of the ideas and ideals discussed. This is a policy which puts fairness first and makes sure that we remember that when we are dealing with debt we are dealing with people and that we do so in an open, honest and understanding way.

This policy will make sure that those on the brink of spiralling into debt get the help that they need while at the same time tackling the issue of those who can pay but don’t. It will allow us to take action in both cases to make sure that people can act before they find themselves in crisis-levels of debt with the council.

Like nearly, if not all, of you, I know first-hand what it is like to find yourself in household debt, and I also know the anxieties of getting out of that debt. That is why I have created Thurrock’s #LifesLadder.

This policy is only one part of the work we are doing with #LifesLadder. We have also created a suite of educational tools to engage with young people, teach them how to manage their money and avoid debt in the first place as they emerge from their secondary education and enter the world of work – all this has emerged from our Fair Debt Summit, and the work has been developed, built on, and sponsored by a number of persons in Thurrock’s Education system. The fact that this preventative action may help young adults predict the signs of getting into too much debt is something dear to me – and I am proud to have worked with those who have brought this to fruition; themselves caring enough to help others avoid the anxiety of large debt.

We will continue working with our partners and communities to ensure that we support our residents with all aspects of debt and financial management. I am thankful to the Collections department, the Education system, the CAB, the IRRV (an external body which has fully reviewed our processes and felt them to be professional and supportive) and John Kruse (expert in Enforcement Agents – Bailiff Law) and many others who have helped pioneer our approach to managing the sensitive subject of collecting the various debts which need to be collected, so we can continue to fund the services that Thurrock residents use and depend. This

includes cementing a Vulnerable Persons Policy into this policy, which subject experts have helped us to shape and develop.

Cllr Shane Hebb, Thurrock Council Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

2. Thurrock Council Vision and Priorities

Our Vision

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

Our Priorities

People - a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.

Place - a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future.

Prosperity – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.

3. Introduction to the Fair Debt Policy

Thurrock Council is reliant on the collection of local taxes and charges in order to maintain the vital services it provides. Amounts that are not collected or that take additional effort to collect can severely impact both the authority's ability to provide these services and the wider charge payer.

In order to ensure these services are available the Council has a legal obligation to residents, businesses and other organisations within the area to ensure that prompt, cost effective, billing and recovery of all sums due to the council is achieved.

The Fair Debt Policy underpins the council's commitment to ensuring that all aspects of the recovery processes are delivered efficiently and effectively, with a high standard of customer care, that has both a regards to an individual circumstances and minimises the financial burden of uncollected debt on wider charge payers.

4. Scope

This Policy sets out the councils approach for billing and collecting all debt owed to us by individuals or business customers.

5. Definitions - The following definitions apply for the purpose of this policy:

- Debt – Refers to an amount that is due to the council.
- Arrears – An amount that is due to the council and has not been paid by the date it was due.
- Debtor – A person, persons, organisation or other legal entity that owes a sum of money to the council.
- Vulnerable Person –For the purposes of this policy the term ‘vulnerable person’ refers to a person who has exceptional difficulty dealing with a payment of a bill because of their personal circumstances and/or who requires additional assistance in dealing with amounts owed in order to meet their financial obligation. **The Councils full Vulnerable Persons Policy in relation to debt is set out in Appendix 1.**

6. Fair Debt Policy Key aims and commitments.

a. We will seek to maximise income and to avoid debt accruing by:

- Ensuring that customers are fully aware of their responsibility to pay debts and of the consequences of non-payment.
- Where appropriate, requesting payment ahead of service delivery.
- Issuing prompt, accurate and clear bills/invoices.
- Ensuring ‘making payment’ is made easy by providing numerous accessible payment options.
- Promoting relevant benefits and discounts/exemptions and providing an accessible and efficient application process.
- Offering clear advice to debtors on what they should do if they are experiencing financial difficulties and where they can get independent money advice and support for wider debt problems.
- Developing and encouraging take up of debt education courses within the secondary school and adult education curriculum.

b. We will attempt to recover arrears fairly and efficiently by ensuring that:

- Prompt action is taken to recover any arrears, including discretionary steps above those that are required of a council.

- Where appropriate, the Council will enhance the standard recovery process with additional communication and follow up stages via various channels in an attempt to establish meaningful contact with those that owe money and avoid additional costs and enforcement action.
- Where appropriate, information is provided a clear distinction is made between those that 'Can't Pay' and those that 'Won't Pay' and that the collection process is adjusted to reflect this where appropriate.
- Relevant information regarding a debtor contained on different systems is made available to the Council's debt officers in order that an individual's full indebtedness can be established and to determine the best course of action. A Single View of Debt (SVOD) application is in its second phase of development that enables a user to see a more holistic view of the balances owed to the council by displaying this information on a case summary to show as an example Council Tax, Rent and Sundry balances.
- The SVOD application will also assist in identifying potential vulnerability from the various datasets that are contained within the application.
- Additional "Flyers/Inserts" are included with standard legal/statutory documents to sign post people in difficulty and advise them of the consequences/costs that they may incur if they do not engage or ignore the notice.
- Additional "Nudge" concept letters are sent within the statutory collection process to encourage contact and resolution without the need to progress further along the collection cycle. Thus minimising additional costs
- All recovery communications issued by the Council and agents working on its behalf, are clear as to:
 - What the money is owed for.
 - What to pay, when to pay and how to pay it.
 - How to gain advice and support if required.
 - The consequences of the situation remaining unresolved.
 - Provide clear warning in advance of any potential additional costs being incurred.
 - Signposting to free financial support agencies
- Council staff and enforcement agents (Bailiffs) working on its behalf are appropriately trained and treat those owing money in a fair and professional manner.
- Enforcement action is only taken as a last resort once all reasonable attempts to recover amounts due have been exhausted.
- Enforcement agencies working on behalf of the Council adhere to the agreed Ministry of Justice charging structure.
- Debtors will be encouraged to allow access to "Open Banking" so the Council or its agents can validate their financial position.

c. **We will support those identified as vulnerable by:**

- Providing the opportunity to gain appropriate advice and support to ensure their vulnerability does not place them in a detrimental position with regards to the recovery process.
- Offering a dedicated financial inclusion service for those facing extreme situations.
- Working with recognised debt advice agencies to identify sustainable repayment plans for those they are supporting, to enable financial obligations to the Council to be met.
- Supporting recognised debt advice agencies by placing a hold on recovery, where requested and appropriate.
- To act in accordance with “The Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space Moratorium and Mental Health Crisis Moratorium) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020” and placing accounts on hold for the 60 days for Standard Moratoriums or the extended periods given to the Mental Health Moratoriums whilst the person is being supported.
- To operate in accordance with the Statutory Debt Repayment Plans Scheme (due to be launched late 2021) that uses the Standard Financial Statement (SFS) document to evidence a person’s income/expenditure/debt position and payment proposals
- Having in place a clear policy regarding reductions under section 13a of the Local Government Finance Act. **(Appendix 4)**

d. **For debtors who ‘can pay but won’t pay’**

- Those who pay promptly should not subsidise those who are not prepared to pay what they owe by the date it is due. Where people deliberately attempt to avoid payment, fail to make contact or to maintain arrangements the council will use all legal powers at its disposal to recover an amount due, potentially including the committal process for habitual and deliberate offenders
- The Council will utilise all means available to trace debtors who abscond without advising of a forwarding address. This will include the use of Debt Collection Agencies (DCA) and credit reference agents as appropriate.
- Accounts that are written off due to being deemed unable to trace or uneconomical to collect will continue to be monitored by Debt Collection Agencies to ensure that should the situation change recovery commences and amounts are written back on where appropriate.
- The use of County Court proceedings including Money Claims On-Line (MCOL) will be utilised, in addition unsatisfied County Court Judgments over £600 maybe transferred to the High Court for further enforcement.

- Cases escalated to the High Court will also involve the use of High Court Enforcement Officers (HCEO) to visit the debtor to collect the debt/seize goods
- External Databases/systems/applications will be utilised as appropriate and in accordance with our legal obligations to obtain additional information/intelligence regarding the debtor to aid collection or the collection strategy.

7. Council Guidelines for recovery of specific debts.

Non standard recovery actions

In addition to the standard recovery actions set out in 7.1 to 7.6 for each debt type below and in accordance with the Fair Debt Policy the Council will undertake additional initiatives and collection stages where appropriate in an attempt to establish meaningful contact with debtors and avoid escalation of the recovery process and costs. These may include:

- Sending additional communications by text, email, letter.
- Utilising all telephony and web based applications that will issue web pages and guidance.
- Initiatives to enable debtors to communicate with the council 'non-verbally' if this is their choice via web pages, web chat, text, email.
- Varying communications by debtor type.
- Holding either 'physical or video conference' surgeries prior to the court hearing and during the collection process from the issuing of a Reminder, in order to encourage charge payers to speak with the council, in an open environment and resolve any issues they have before the court hearing.

7.1 Sundry Debts (Inc. Social Care)

In order to maintain services it is essential the council recover any billable charges for the services provided.

Where appropriate, payment will be requested ahead of service provision, however where this is not possible, Sundry invoices will be raised and issued promptly to the person or organisation deemed liable for the charge.

Invoices will be clear as to the amount billed and provide with sufficient information to explain the reason for the charge, when it is due, what to do in the event of invoice dispute; or where to get help if there are difficulties in making payment.

In the event of non-payment the council will act legally and promptly to recover amounts due and will utilise all appropriate channels of communication. The council

will also make use of wider data available including external sources such as credit reference or government agencies to assist in the recovery of arrears.

Where appropriate the council reserves the right to withhold provision of services whilst arrears remain outstanding.

As a minimum when an instalment or part of an instalment is missed the following process will be followed:

Pre Enforcement Recovery

The council will make every effort to encourage the debtor to make contact and resolve the situation without the need for enforcement action. Where debtors do make contact the council will consider agreeing an instalment plan dependant on the individual's circumstances.

As a minimum pre enforcement recovery will follow the standard steps below:

- 1) A first reminder will be issued.
- 2) If payment is not made, a second reminder will be issued.
- 3) If payment is still not made, a Letter Before Action (LBA) will be issued.

Enforcement Action

Where a debt remains unresolved the council will review the circumstances to determine the appropriate course of action. Where enforcement action is necessary the council will issue a County Court Claim which could result in a County Court Judgment (CCJ) being lodged.

County Court Judgment data is held by the Credit Checking companies such as Experian, Equifax and TransUnion and can affect people's ability to obtain credit.

Once a CCJ has been obtained, the Council will act to enforce it, this may include:

- 1) An Attachment of Earnings order.
- 2) Enforcement action to seize goods to the value of the debt.
- 3) An order to attend Court for questioning.
- 4) Bankruptcy proceedings (for debts above £5,000).
- 5) Transfer up to High Court (debts over £600) for High Court Enforcement Officer (HCEO) action.
- 6) Garnishee Order.
- 7) Enforcement Agents visiting the property.
- 8) DWP deductions (direct payments from DWP benefit only in respect of overpaid housing benefit debts) or Direct Earnings Attachment (DEA- only in respect of overpaid housing benefit debts
- 9) A Charging Order may be obtained on the non-payer's property, which will remain in place until the property is sold, although this may be enforced

sooner by proceeding with an order for sale. Interest will be accrued at the statutory rate until settled.

Write Off's

If the debt is deemed as non-recoverable, the Debt Manager will employ the write – off procedure (see Appendix 2).

7.2 Council Tax (Including Local Council Tax Scheme Overpayments)

In accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the council is responsible for levying and collecting Council Tax that is payable on all occupied and unoccupied domestic properties, which are not exempt and are situated within Thurrock.

Liability

To enable the Council to provide an efficient and accurate service, all changes in circumstances that may affect billing should be reported to the council in a timely manner.

In most cases it is the occupier of a property that is liable to pay Council Tax, however where a property is (or is assumed to be) unoccupied or empty, liability will fall to the Landlord/Owner.

In order to safeguard themselves against being held liable, where an alternative party is liable, Landlords/Owners should inform the Council within 21 days of any changes in occupancy.

The Council will only consider backdating a change in our records for more than 21 days if there is a good reason why the information being provided is late and we can confirm that the information is correct. To confirm a backdated tenancy we would require a verifiable tenancy agreement, proof of the tenant's identity, evidence of a tenancy deposit scheme receipt, utility bills in the tenants name and for the relevant period, external residency checks that support the residency and verifiable contact details for the tenant.

In these circumstances a landlord may also be required to sign a declaration to acknowledge that the information provided is accurate and that they are aware of the sanctions of supplying false information.

Where data is not provided in a timely manner the Council may impose a fine in line with amounts prescribed in legislation.

Billing and Collection

At the beginning of each financial year tax payers have the statutory right to opt to pay the charge for the forthcoming year over up to 12 monthly instalments. Further to

this payments must be received in line with instalment plan detailed on the demand issued.

Where payments are not received in accordance with the demand issued the council will make every effort to encourage the debtor to make contact and resolve the situation without the need for enforcement action.

The collection and enforcement of Council Tax are governed by the "Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1992". As a minimum when an instalment or part of an instalment is missed the following process will be followed:

Pre Enforcement Action

- 1) A first reminder letter will be sent.
- 2) If the charge-payer fails to make payment following a first reminder letter a final notice will be sent and the resident will lose the right to pay by instalments. The full sum, payable for the year, will become due within seven days.
- 3) If the missed instalment is paid no further action is taken. If a further instalment becomes overdue a second reminder would be issued giving 7 days to pay before a final notice is issued.
- 4) Once the right to instalments has been lost, a debtor can request the council considers agreeing to a special arrangement, however entering into any such arrangement is entirely at the council's discretion.

In considering a further special arrangement, officers will take account of the individuals circumstances including a reason for default, the amount being offered in relation to the debt, payment history etc.

As a guide, any such arrangement will usually be subject to any missed instalments to be cleared upfront, employment details/status provided and on the understanding the council will proceed to obtain a Liability Order to allow prompt recovery action to continue should the agreement not be maintained. The terms of any special arrangement will rarely be as favourable as those offered on the original demand.

- 5) If payment has not been made in accordance with final notice, the council will issue a Summons for the charge payer to appear before the Magistrates Court for non-payment of the outstanding balance of the Council Tax.

Enforcement Action

- 6) Should the account not be settled by the court hearing date, the council will make an application for a Liability Order and request the court to award reasonable costs.

Staff attending court will be fully prepared to assist the charge payers who may choose to attend court for the Liability Order hearing and ensure they have a written breakdown of summons and Liability Order costs available.

- 7) Once a Liability Order has been obtained a Council Tax Notice of Liability Order with details of the possibility of Enforcement Agent action and costs will be issued to the taxpayer within 2 working days of the court hearing. The issuing of this notice is no longer a Statutory requirement but is sent to act as a further notice to encourage contact and remove the need to escalate the debt to an Enforcement Agent
- 8) Once a Liability Order has been obtained this permits the council to consider the following options to collect the debt:
 - 7.1) Attachment of Earnings/Benefit - Where employer details are available or if the debtor is known to be on appropriate benefits, an attachment to earnings/benefits can be considered to recover the outstanding debt.
 - 7.2) Enforcement Agents:

Enforcement Agent's operating on behalf of the council will adhere to the Taking Control of Goods regulations 2013/2014 and any specific local instruction as set out in the SLA agreement.

The standard collection stages are as follows:

- 1) **Compliance Stage** - Before a visit can take place the enforcement agent will issue a Compliance letter to the debtor to provide a final opportunity to pay or agree an arrangement before a physical visit is made. The letter makes clear the relevant stages and costs the debtor may incur during the collection cycle. The debtor will incur costs at this stage as prescribed in the relevant regulations.
 - 2) **Enforcement Stage** – A visit is made to the premises by an Enforcement Agent.
 - 3) **Removal Stage** – Removal of goods and sale if a sustainable payment plan cannot be made and all other avenues of collection have been exhausted.
- In addition to the standard collection stages where appropriate enforcement agents working on behalf of the council will make further attempts to establish contact with the debtor at all stages of the process via various methods, such as telephone calls, text messages, letters, web pages and self-serve facilities (for those that do not wish to verbally communicate) and emails.

Where this actions does not result in payment being made the council will consider further courses of action such as:

- Charging Orders
- Petitions for Bankruptcy

For Bankruptcy and Charging Orders the appropriate legal actions will be taken and costs will be incurred.

- Committal to Prison

The council will send a pre-committal warning letter prior to commencement of proceedings, allowing the charge payer the opportunity to make payment. Any committal summonses will be served using methods agreed by the council.

Where the resident fails to respond a means enquiry summons will be issued.

The council will charge costs up to the statutory maximum at the time of issuing a means enquiry to cover reasonable costs against the charge payer.

No Payment made or resolution can result in a prison sentence of up to 90 days for the debtor.

Write-offs

Any Council Tax debt which is identified for write off will be actioned in accordance with the council's Corporate Write Off Policy (Appendix 2).

These debts were suitable will be issued to Debt Collection Agencies (DCA`s) for further action.

7.3 Non-domestic rates

In accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the council is responsible for the levying and collection of Non-domestic Rates that appear on the rating list for all occupied and unoccupied hereditaments which are not exempt.

Liability

To enable the Council to provide an efficient and accurate service, all changes in circumstances that may affect billing should be reported to the Council in a timely manner.

In most cases it is the occupier of a property or the person with beneficial occupation that is liable to pay Non-domestic rates, however where a property is (or is assumed to be) unoccupied or empty, liability will fall to the Landlord/Owner.

In order to safeguard themselves against being held liable, where an alternative party is liable, Landlords/Owners should inform the Council within 21 days of any changes in occupancy.

The Council will only consider backdating a change in our records for more than 21 days if there is a good reason why the information being provided is late and we can confirm that the information is correct. To confirm a backdated tenancy we would require a verifiable tenancy agreement, proof of the tenant's identity, evidence of a tenancy deposit scheme receipt, utility bills in the tenants name and for the relevant period, external residency checks that support the residency and verifiable contact details for the tenant.

In these circumstances a landlord may also be required to sign a declaration to acknowledge that the information provided is accurate and that they are aware of the sanctions of supplying false information.

Billing and Collection

At the beginning of each financial year tax payers have the statutory right to opt to pay the charge for the forthcoming year over up to 12 monthly instalments. Further to this payments must be received in line with instalment plan detailed on the demand issued.

It is important that anyone who does not pay their Non-domestic Rates by the due date is pursued for payment quickly. Where payments are not received in accordance with the demand issued the council will make every effort to encourage the debtor to make contact and resolve the situation without the need for enforcement action.

The collection and enforcement of Non Domestic Rates are governed by the Non-Domestic Rating (Collection and Enforcement) (Local Lists) 1989. As a minimum when an instalment or part of an instalment is missed the following process will be followed:

Pre Enforcement Action

- 1) A first reminder letter will be sent.
- 2) If the charge-payer fails to make payment following a first reminder letter a final notice will be sent and the resident will lose the right to pay by instalments. The full sum, payable for the year, will become due within seven days.
- 3) Once the right to instalments has been lost, a debtor can request the council considers agreeing to a special arrangement, however entering into any such arrangement is entirely at the council's discretion.

In considering a further special arrangement, officers will take account of the circumstances inc. the reason for default, the amount being offered in relation to the debt, payment history etc.

As a guide, any such arrangement will usually be subject to any missed instalments to be cleared upfront and on the understanding the council will proceed to obtain a liability order to allow prompt recovery action to continue should the agreement not be maintained. The terms of any special arrangement will rarely be as favourable as those offered on the original demand.

- 4) If payment has been made in accordance with final notice, the council will issue a summons for the charge payer to appear before the Magistrates Court for non-payment of the outstanding balance of the Non-domestic Rates.

Enforcement Action

- 9) Should the account not be settled by the court hearing date, the council will make an application for a Liability Order and request the court to award reasonable costs.

Staff attending court will be fully prepared to assist the charge payers who may choose to attend court for the Liability Order hearing and ensure they have a written breakdown of summons and Liability Order costs available.

- 10) Once a Liability Order has been obtained a Notice of Liability Order with details of the possibility of Enforcement Agent action and costs will be issued to the taxpayer within 3 working days of the court hearing.
- 11) A Liability Order permits the council to consider the following options to collect the debt:

11.1) Enforcement Agents can be instructed as follows:

- Enforcement Agent's operating on behalf of the council will adhere to the Taking Control of Goods regulations 2013/2014 and any specific local instruction as set out in the SLA agreement.
- The standard collection stages are as follows:
 - 1) **Compliance Stage** - Before a visit can take place the enforcement agent will issue a Compliance letter to the debtor to provide a final opportunity to pay or agree an arrangement before a physical visit is made. The letter makes clear the relevant stages and costs the debtor may incur during the collection cycle. The debtor will incur costs at this stage as prescribed in the relevant regulations
 - 2) **Enforcement Stage** – a visit will be made to the premise or any associated address eg Head Office, Registered Office – can include visits to Directors home addresses to look for assets owned by the Business
 - 3) **Removal Stage** – Removal of goods and sale if a sustainable payment plan cannot be made and all other avenues of collection have been exhausted

- In addition to the standard collection stages where appropriate enforcement agents working on behalf of the council will make further attempts to establish contact with the debtor at all stages of the process via various methods, such as telephone calls, text messages, letters and emails.
- Should the debt fail to be recovered by Enforcement Agents further appropriate action will be taken. E.g. A petition for bankruptcy/liquidation/winding up may be sought or in the case of individual liability a means enquiry could be undertaken.
- The appropriate legal actions and costs will be incurred as at the time of commencement when taking these proceedings are taken will apply

Write-offs

Any Non Domestic-Rates debt which is identified for write off will be actioned in accordance with the council's Corporate 'Write Off Policy' (Appendix 2).

These debts were suitable will be issued to Debt Collection Agencies (DCA`s) for further action.

7.4 Overpaid housing benefit

The regulations covering calculation and recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments are covered by the Housing Benefit regulations 2006 99-107.

Legally the majority of Housing Benefit overpayments are recoverable however beyond this the council has overall discretion whether to instigate recovery.

Officers assessing claims will decide if the overpayment is recoverable at the time of processing the overpayment. When making a decision all factors will be taken into account such as the likelihood of the person receiving the payments knowing they were being overpaid, wider personal circumstances etc.

Any recoverable overpayment will be recovered from either the claimant or the person to whom payment was made – this could be a landlord or the claimant's appointee.

Recovery methods

The council can recover overpayments by any lawful means. One or more of the following methods of recovery may be employed, dependent upon the individual circumstances of each case.

Recovery from on-going benefit – Rent Allowance or Rent Rebate

Where a claimant continues to receive Housing Benefit the Council will make deductions from ongoing payments of Housing Benefit having regard to their financial circumstances. Where appropriate the Council will recover debts at the weekly amounts recommended by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP).

As well as the above-mentioned rates of recovery, the Council will also increase deductions, where appropriate, by half (50%) of any of:

- the earnings disregard, if applicable
- regular charitable income or voluntary payments, if applicable
- War Disablement or War Widows Pension, if applicable

In all above-mentioned cases, the recovery amounts are, in theory and subject to discretion considered appropriate by the council, subject to an overall maximum deduction, which, does not reduce the benefit payable to less than £0.50 (50 pence).

In addition, the council can ask another council to recover overpaid benefit on its behalf.

A Guide to Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Support Overpayments is issued with every Overpayment letter providing information to claimants about overpayments and appeal rights.

Deduction from certain DWP benefits

The council may ask the DWP Debt Management Office to recover a Housing Benefit (HB) overpayment by deduction from certain DWP benefits, as prescribed by Regulation. These are as follows:

- Income Support
- Jobseeker's Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit
- Industrial Death Benefit
- Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit
- Carer's Allowance
- Maternity Allowance
- State Pension credit
- State Retirement Pension
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- War Pension
- War Disablement Pension
- Bereavement Benefit
- Widowed Mother's Allowance
- Widow's Benefit
- Widow(er)s Pension
- Employment Support Allowance

Where necessary entitlement to benefits will be identified through the Customer Information System (CIS) connected to the Department for Works and Pensions Database.

Recovery through the Sundry Debt Process

Where the above recovery methods are not appropriate the debt will be invoiced and recovered through the sundry debt process.

Write-off

Write-Off action will be taken in accordance with the principles set out in the council's Corporate Write off Policy (Appendix 2). The Housing Benefit Overpayment officer will retain details of all outstanding overpayments where benefit is no longer in payment, in the event of future benefit being awarded, enabling recovery in the future.

These debts where suitable will be issued to Debt Collection Agencies (DCA's) for further action.

7.5 Parking Enforcement

To ensure compliance with the restrictions within the council car parks and the borough highways, the council is authorised to issue Penalty Charge Notices to vehicles parked in contravention of the restrictions as stated in the Traffic Management Act 2004.

Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) will be issued to contravening vehicles whenever a Civil Enforcement Officer deems it necessary.

The recovery of the fines is the responsibility of the office team and for reasons of segregation of duties and safety, the Civil Enforcement Officers are not allowed to take payment for the PCNs they issue.

Except where a separate instalment arrangement has been agreed by the parking office, all payments will be in accordance with the Traffic Management Act 2004.

Throughout the life of the PCN the office team should make every attempt to recover the amount due at every stage in the proceedings.

The council has the discretion to cancel a Notice for various reasons and therefore not proceed with the fine. The powers of discretion in these cases can only be exercised by a senior parking manager.

At all times the council will act legally and promptly in all cases where payment is overdue.

Before a notice is passed to an Enforcement Agent for collection all statutory methods of enforcement must have been taken. Notice to owner, charge certificate, warrant obtained.

Where every effort has been made to recover up to warrant stage, the office team, in conjunction with the parking manager can consider cases to progress the case to external enforcement.

Once the court are happy that all the statutory steps have been taken and the warrant has been granted to the council further recovery action can commence.

Enforcement Agent's operating on behalf of the council will adhere to the Taking Control of Goods regulations 2013/2014 and any specific local instruction as set out in the SLA agreement.

Any debts for Foreign Registered vehicles will be pursued via the appropriate methods.

Where instalment arrangements are sought by the debtor an investigation into their ability to pay must be carried out and initially the amount should not be paid over a period longer than 3 months. Where the office team, due to the amount or circumstances, the balance should be paid over a longer period then a case conference should be held with the line manager to decide a way forward.

Write-off

Write off action will be carried out in accordance with the Corporate Write off policy (appendix 2). To ensure segregation of duties the officer compiling the write off report cannot remove the records from the system and once the cases have been removed from the system the write off sheet must be passed to the service manager for checking.

Debts that are written off can be issued to Debt Collection Agents to enforce and placed on surveillance in order to ensure debtors that have deliberately absconded in an attempt to avoid paying their debts are pursued.

7.6 Housing rent

In order to maintain services the Housing Service needs to maximise income collection and minimise arrears owed by current and former tenants, ensuring that tenants have the information and support they need to maximise their income and prevent or minimise debt.

Tenants are informed of their payment responsibilities before they commence their tenancy, when they sign-up and at their welfare visit which takes place four weeks after the sign up dates/commencement of tenancy.

The Housing Service offers a range of payment methods which are widely publicised.

During the sign up process Tenants are informed of the full rental charges and details of any service charges due.

Policies specific to housing rents

At sign-up new tenants are advised of their responsibilities regarding the tenancy placing great emphasis on the requirement to pay their rent promptly.

A debt counselling service has been set up between Thurrock Council incorporating other organisations and the CAB for our residents to access if they require assistance. Tenants can be referred to the CAB or other organisations by a Rents and Welfare officer or they can approach CAB directly themselves. The Rents and Welfare team have Financial Inclusion Officers working within their team who offer debt advice and assist with applications for Universal credit and other benefits.

Arrangements must be put in place to oversee and action arrears when a team member/staff post is vacant, annual leave or absent through sickness.

Our objective is to achieve and maintain upper quartile performance in the level of rent collection and rent arrears by:

- ensuring a corporate approach to the recovery of debt
- taking account of social inclusion
- referring to a debt counselling service
- adopting examples of good practice and ensuring an approach of continuous improvement
- ensuring staff are fully trained, supported and developed

Customer focus in the delivery of the service

The Rents and Welfare Manager is responsible for the collection of rent income and recovery of rent arrears. It is important that anyone who does not pay their rent by the due date is pursued for payment.

When the rent account falls into two weeks arrears contact is made with the tenant by e-mail, telephone. If the Rent Officer is unable to contact a first letter is sent.

All accounts are monitored and the arrears policy followed. If there is no response by the next payment date a second letter is sent out and the situation monitored.

If there is no response to the second letter a telephone call is made to the tenant. If there is still no response a Notice of seeking possession will be ordered and a home visit will be carried out by the Rents and Welfare officer. If on arrival at this visit the Rent Officer finds the tenant is not home the Notice of seeking possession, covering letter, along with a business card will be left asking the tenant to contact the office.

Service of Notice of Seeking Possession

A Notice of Seeking Possession is the first step in taking legal action against the tenant. The purpose of this action is to recover possession of the council's premises from the tenant and may result in the tenant's eviction from their home. Service of

the Notice (NSP) is governed by Law and must be carried out correctly for successful legal action to follow.

As a general rule, the arrears should not be permitted to get any higher than the equivalent of six weeks rent before a NSP is served. However, the Rents and Welfare officer has the discretion to serve a NSP earlier than this or to delay it providing an explanation for the action is recorded. The Notice is served, together with a covering letter which offers debt advice and contact details.

The Rent Welfare Officer will only refer a case to court if:

- All appropriate recovery actions have been taken
 - Debt advice and support has been offered on pre NSP arrears letters
- The NSP is still valid

Court hearing

Rent and Welfare officer attends and presents the cases to the court and will ask the District Judge for one of the following orders:

- Money judgement for the sum outstanding
- Possession order-(suspended or outright)
- Case adjourned
- Case dismissed
- Case withdrawn

Post Court action

If the tenant defaults on repayments of the court order, the Rents and Welfare Officer will make further contact with the tenant to assess their situation and discuss bringing the Court Order up to date, if this is not possible and arrears continue to increase the case will be passed to the Arrears Panel where the case will be discussed.

Arrears Panel

Prior to being passed to legal for Eviction action to be taken, cases are discussed in the arrears panel. Internal and external departments/partners are advised of cases listed and asked to notify the team of any information they feel relevant. If the tenants arrears continue to increase or they fail to engage it is at this panel that a decision could be made to request a Warrant be served.

Officers are advised to seek eviction as a last resort.

Pre-eviction action

Prior to seeking an eviction, the Rent Welfare Officer will inform the Housing Solutions team, Adults and Children's Social Care teams and other relevant service providers/agencies regarding the affected household.

If the full debt is paid prior to the Eviction date the warrant will not be executed.

Where the tenant makes a large payment and offers to pay off the balance in instalments, the tenant should be advised to apply to the court for a stay hearing.

Tenants have the right to apply to the court for the eviction warrant to be suspended before the eviction date. Based on evidence presented to the court by both parties, the judge may dismiss the appeal or suspend the eviction on terms of payment.

Recovery of former tenant accounts

A former tenant account is created when a tenant leaves a property. If there were arrears on the account this becomes Former Tenant Arrears (FTA) which will be pursued by the team. The Housing Solutions team will check FTA records to ensure that customers requesting social housing with previous arrears arrange to repay any debt owed.

A decision should be made on the most effective and appropriate method of recovery. This is based on the client information available. A letter will be sent detailing the outstanding balance of the former account and requesting contact to discuss payment in full.

Should a customer advise that payment in full is not affordable, a brief financial assessment must be carried out by the Officer and an affordable arrangement agreed to repay the total debt. Letters of confirmation are sent to confirm all arrangements made.

Prompt and appropriate action will be taken in all cases to recover all sums overdue to the Council. However, in cases where payments are not forthcoming and Officers are unable to trace the whereabouts of a former tenant, consideration shall be given to writing off the debt in accordance with financial regulations. When a debt has been written off, it will no longer be shown as outstanding in the Council's accounts, however, the debt remains due to the Council in law and if the tenant is subsequently traced, the debt will be re-instated.

Write-off

Rent which is identified for write off will be actioned in accordance with the council's Corporate Write-Off Policy (Appendix 2).

Appendix 1 – Vulnerable Persons Policy

Background

The council recognises that in certain circumstances the usual enforcement procedures (such as Enforcement Agent action or committal proceedings) may not be appropriate for some people who find themselves in debt to the council. This could be because the person might be viewed as vulnerable owing to their individual circumstances. The Vulnerable Persons Policy provides guidance for staff and the council's collection agents on how to manage the situation and support a vulnerable person who owes a debt to the council.

It will support and assist officers and collection agents to be able to promptly identify vulnerable individuals in order that each person can be treated with dignity and that their individual situation can be dealt with in a sensitive and responsible way.

People who are considered vulnerable will find themselves in a range of situations and it is important to remember that in many cases people will have tried very hard to manage and will not have deliberately created the situation they find themselves in. By the time the individual comes to the attention of the debt recovery service it is important to consider that in many cases they may be very concerned and worried about owing money to the council.

People who are potentially vulnerable

People are considered to be vulnerable for many different reasons. Some of these reasons may be:

- Experiencing mental ill health
- Having a physical disability
- Being learning disabled
- Being a disabled parent
- Being a parent of a disabled child
- Having communication difficulties
- Experiencing significant long term or life limiting ill health
- Being hearing or visually impaired (deaf or blind)
- Suffering from domestic violence
- A combination of any of the above

Other areas that also make people potentially vulnerable can be:

- Someone who is recently bereaved
- Where literacy skills are an issue or where English is not the persons first language
- Someone following a drug or alcohol rehabilitation programme
- Someone recovering from a serious accident or illness
- A person who has recently been released from prison
- Those who are asylum seekers or refugees

The above lists are not exhaustive and each situation should be viewed individually to determine if there is actually any vulnerability.

Identification

Based on the above descriptions, the member of staff or collection agent can make a decision about whether a nonpayer may be considered vulnerable. The initial request to consider a person as vulnerable may come from a third party e.g. the Citizens Advice, Social Services, Housing. The examples above are only a guide and each case has to be considered based on the person's individual circumstances.

Any non-payer who is considered potentially vulnerable will be flagged up immediately to the designated senior officer. The account should be marked with the appropriate code on the respective computer systems. Recovery proceedings will be amended/adjusted accordingly.

A senior officer may undertake a review of any referral. The nonpayer may be visited at home, interviewed by telephone or invited to attend a face to face discussion in the office. It will be important to make sure that each person's circumstances are taken into account and consideration should be given to any support the person may require if they are interviewed, such as a family member, an advocate or a support worker. With the nonpayer's consent, further information and/or opinion may be sought from medical practitioners, Social Services and relevant professional bodies.

It is imperative that this stage is completed as quickly as possible in order to minimise uncertainty or anxiety on the part of the person concerned.

Evaluation

Having weighed carefully all the evidence, the senior officer will conclude whether the nonpayer would be adversely affected if recovery proceedings were to continue. If so, the case will be identified as a Vulnerable Person's account. All future enforcement notices and actions may be stopped. The designated senior officer will ensure that all Vulnerable Persons are accorded the personal and sensitive attention required, within the provisions of the law.

Any person considered not to be a Vulnerable Person may appeal to the relevant departmental senior council officer whose decision will be final.

In undertaking the investigation, the designated senior officer would seek to ensure that:

- The liability is correctly calculated and all reductions have been applied – for example, status, discounts, Local Council Tax Support
- A comprehensive statement of means is completed where legally appropriate for the debt – where applicable, a clearly affordable repayment plan is agreed, together with a suitable payment method, and care must be exercised to avoid the accumulation of arrears which would have to be repaid at a later date
- The person has a named contact and direct line for any future enquiry
- Any authorisation for a third party to act on behalf of the vulnerable person is obtained and properly recorded

- Where appropriate, a recommendation may be made for the debt to be written off in part or whole – any request should be supported with as much information as possible of the persons circumstances, both personal and financial

Appendix 2 – Write-off policy

The council recognises that where a debt is irrecoverable, prompt and regular write off of such debts is good practice. The council will seek to minimise the cost of write-offs by taking all necessary action to recover what is due. All debts will be subject to the full recovery, collection and legal procedures as outlined in the council's Corporate Fair Debt Policy.

Paragraph 6.34 of the council's Finance Procedure Rules (Constitution, chapter 9, part 3) states that managers shall ensure that every effort is made to recover debts due to the Council. They also have authority to write off a debt where they consider that the sums are not reasonably recoverable, subject to the following:

- Up to £2,000 in any one case – after notifying the Director of Finance, Governance and Property.
- Between £2,000 and £25,000 in any one case – after consultation with the Director of Finance, Governance and Property and the Monitoring Officer
- Over £25,000 in any one case – after consultation with the Director of Finance, Governance and Property and the Monitoring Officer, and subject to the appropriate Cabinet approval.

Debts may be referred to the appropriate service manager or director for all sums for write-off if:

- The council has evidence to confirm the claimant is suffering a severe physical or mental illness, which renders enforcement action inappropriate
- The council is unable to trace the nonpayer
- The debt is not cost-effective to pursue due to small balance
- The debt is not cost-effective to pursue due to the likelihood of payment balanced against the cost of proceedings
- The claimant has died and there are no or insufficient funds in the estate to settle the debt
- The claimant is subject to formal insolvency proceedings and there is little likelihood of a dividend
- Before a debt is written off from any system, the member of staff identified as being responsible for write offs will have received all relevant paperwork and used it to check a sample of the debts to ensure:
 - Accuracy by looking them up on the appropriate system
 - The council's Corporate Fair Debt Policy has been adhered to

Appendix 3 – write-on policy

The council recognises that in cases of a credit remaining on an account for an unacceptable period of time i.e. over thirteen months, the credit should be considered for cancellation. This process is known as a "write-on".

Extensive research will be undertaken prior to this consideration to enable an attempt to be made to inform the payee of the credit. Letters to the last known address will be written and searches carried out to establish new addresses. If such attempts are not successful, the credit will be written on following the same policy rules and processes as detailed in the write off policy.

Appendix 4 - Discretionary Reduction in Liability Policy (Council Tax)

Introduction

1.1 Section 13A 1c of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, provides the Council with additional discretionary powers to enable it to reduce the council tax liability where statutory discounts, exemptions and reductions do not apply.

1.2 These discretionary awards can be given to:

- Individual Council Taxpayers;
- Groups of Council Taxpayers defined by a common set of circumstances;
- Council Taxpayers within a defined area: or
- To all Council Taxpayers within the Council's area.

1.3 The legislation states the following:

.....in any case, may be reduced to such extent or, if the amount has been reduced under S13a 1 a (Council Tax Reduction Scheme) such further extent as the billing authority for the area in which the dwelling is situated thinks fit.....

1.4 The provision allows the Council the discretion to provide assistance to taxpayers where either the existing legislation does not provide a discount, exemption or reduction or in such circumstances where the Council feels that the level of discount; exemption or reduction is insufficient given the circumstances.

1.5 When deciding on whether to grant a discretionary award, the Council will consider each application on its merits. Principles of reasonableness will apply in all cases with the authority deciding each case on relevant merits.

1.6 Any decision made will be without reference to any budgetary considerations notwithstanding the fact that any awards must be balanced against the needs of local taxpayers who will ultimately pay for a reduction in Council Tax income.

1.7 Likewise the period of any reduced liability will be considered in conjunction with the circumstances of the Council Taxpayer.

1.8 For the purposes of administration, the decision to grant any reduction in liability shall be considered within the following categories:

2.1 In accordance with Section 13A 1a of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Council has a Council Tax Reduction Scheme which provides support, through a discount, to those deemed to be within financial need. The Scheme has been designed to take into account the financial and specific circumstances of individuals through the use of applicable amounts, premiums and income disregards.

2.2 Applications will be accepted under this part of the policy for people who have qualified for support under the Council Tax Reduction Scheme but who are still experiencing severe financial hardship. Other taxpayers may also apply, however the Council would normally expect the taxpayer to apply for Council Tax Reduction in any case. 2 Exceptional Financial Hardship

2.3 As part of the process of applying for additional support, all applicants must be willing to undertake all of the following:

Make a separate application for assistance;

Provide full details of their income and expenditure;

The taxpayer is able to satisfy the Council that they are not able to meet their full Council Tax liability or part of their liability;

Accept assistance from either the Council or third parties such as the CAB or similar organisations to enable them to manage their finances more effectively including the termination of non-essential expenditure;

Identify potential changes in payment methods and arrangements to assist the applicant;

Assist the Council to minimise liability by ensuring that all discounts, exemptions and reductions are properly granted;

The taxpayer is able to demonstrate that all reasonable steps have been taken to meet their full Council Tax liability including applications for employment or additional employment, alternative lines of credit;

The taxpayer has no access to assets that could be realised and used to pay the Council Tax and benefits, Council Tax Support, discounts and exemptions

Maximise their income through the application for other welfare benefits, cancellation of non-essential contracts and outgoings and identifying the most economical tariffs for the supply of utilities and services generally.

2.4 The Council will be responsible for assessing applications against this policy and an officer will consider the following factors when applying this policy:

Current household composition and specific circumstances including disability or caring responsibilities;

Current financial circumstances;

Determine what action(s) the applicant has taken to alleviate the situation;

Consider alternative means of support that may be available to the applicant by:

- Re-profiling council tax debts or other debts;
- Applying for a Discretionary Housing Payment for Housing Benefit (where applicable);
- Maximising other benefits;
- Determining whether in the opinion of the decision maker the spending priorities of the applicant should be re-arranged.

3 Crisis – Flood, Fire etc.

3.1 The Council will consider requests for assistance from Council Taxpayers who, through no fault of their own, have experienced a crisis or event that has made their property uninhabitable e.g. due to fire or flooding, where they remain liable to pay council tax and for which they have no recourse for compensation nor have recourse to any statutory exemptions or discounts.

3.2 All such requests must be made in writing detailing the exact circumstances of why reduction in the liability is required and specifying when the situation is expected to be resolved.

3.3 The Council will consider applications on a case-by-case basis in consultation with other organisations as appropriate. Any reduction will be applied where they remain liable to pay council tax and for which they have no recourse for compensation nor to any statutory exemptions or discounts or where the crisis or event is not covered by any insurance policy. The Council will not consider requests from taxpayers where government guidance or policy provides for a reduction in liability in specific circumstances for example, flood relief schemes.

4 Other Circumstances

4.1 The Council will consider requests from Council Taxpayers for a reduction in their liability based on other circumstances, not specifically mentioned within this document. However the Council must be of the opinion that the circumstances relating to the application warrant further reduction in their liability for Council Tax having regard to the effect on other Council Taxpayers.

4.2 No reduction in liability will be granted where any statutory exemption or discount could be granted.

4.3 No reduction in liability will be granted where it would conflict with any resolution, core priority or objective of the Council.

5 Changes in circumstances.

5.1 The Council may revise any discretionary reduction in liability where the applicant's circumstances or situation has changed.

5.2 The taxpayer agrees that he/she must inform the Council immediately either by phone or in writing about any changes in their circumstances which might affect the claim for under this policy. Failure to do so may result in the withdrawal of the

reduction granted for the year and the requirement to repay any outstanding amount to the Council. All changes in circumstances should be notified within 21 days in accordance with the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012 as amended. Potential Fine of £.....

6 Duties of the applicant and the applicant's household

6.1 A person claiming any discretionary reduction in liability must:
Provide the Council with such information as it may require to make a decision;
Tell the Council of any changes in circumstances that may be relevant to their ongoing claim; and
Provide the Council with such other information as it may require in connection with their claim.

7 The award and duration of a reduction in liability

7.1 Both the amount and the duration of the award are determined at the discretion of the Council, and will be done so on the basis of the evidence supplied and the circumstances of the claim.

7.2 The start date of such a payment and the duration of any payment will be determined by the Council. In any event, the maximum length of the award will not exceed the end of the financial year in which the award is given.

8 Payment

8.1 In line with legislation, any award shall be granted as a reduction in the liability of the Council Tax Payer thereby reducing the amount of Council Tax payable

9 Reductions in Council Tax liability granted in error or incorrectly

9.1 Where a reduction in liability has been granted incorrectly or in error either due to a failure to provide the correct or accurate information to the Council or some other circumstances, the Council Taxpayers account in the normal way.

10 Notification of a reduction in liability

10.1 The Council will notify the outcome of each application in writing. The notification will include the reason for the decision and advise the applicant of their appeal rights.

11 Appeals

11.1 Appeals against the Council's decision may be made in accordance with Section 16 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

11.2 The Council Taxpayer must in the first instance write to the Council outlining the reason for their appeal. Once received the Council will reconsider its decision and notify the Council Taxpayer accordingly.

11.3 Where the Council Taxpayer remains aggrieved, a further appeal can then be made to the Valuation Tribunal. This further appeal should be made within 2 months of the decision of the Council not to grant any reductions. Full details can be obtained from the Councils website or from the Valuation Tribunal <http://www.valuationtribunal.gov.uk/Home.aspx>

12 Fraud

12.1 The Council is committed to protecting public funds and ensuring funds are awarded to the people who are rightfully eligible to them.

12.2 An applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a reduction in liability by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence under The Fraud Act 2006.

12.3 Where the Council suspects that such a fraud may have been committed, this matter will be investigated as appropriate and may lead to criminal proceedings being instigated.

13 Complaints

13.1 The Council's 'Compliments and Complaints Procedure' (available on the Councils website) will be applied in the event of any complaint received about this policy.

14 Policy Review

14.1 This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis and updated as appropriate to ensure it remains fit for purpose. However, a review may take place sooner should there be any significant changes in legislation.

The Tables below compare Thurrocks collection performance to that of the national average.

Debt Performance Comparison - Council Tax

Authority	Item	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
Thurrock	Billed	£82,461,000	£80,865,000	£78,409,000	£73,490,000	£69,008,000	£65,161,000
	Arrears	£3,966,000	£2,690,000	£2,295,000	£2,421,000	£3,012,000	£2,828,000
	Arrears ratio	4.81%	3.33%	2.93%	3.29%	4.36%	4.34%
	In Year Collection Rate	97.96%	98.74%	98.91%	98.82%	98.86%	98.62%
	Written off in year	£125,000	£424,000	£471,000	£696,000	£462,000	£220,000
	Ratio of billings w/off	0.15%	0.52%	0.60%	0.95%	0.67%	0.34%

Authority	Item	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
England	Billed	£33,101,727,000	£32,076,334,000	£30,185,467,000	£28,319,489,000	£26,797,091,700	£25,521,990,218
	Arrears	£4,423,665,000	£3,576,721,000	£3,236,106,274	£3,023,209,000	£2,835,723,900	£2,734,172,700
	Arrears ratio	13.36%	11.15%	10.72%	10.68%	10.58%	10.71%
	In Year Collection Rate	95.70%	96.84%	97.04%	97.11%	97.17%	97.10%
	Written off in year	£133,651,000	£171,154,000	£194,743,000	£169,557,000	£171,814,800	£193,112,300
	Ratio of billings w/off	0.40%	0.53%	0.65%	0.60%	0.64%	0.76%

This table shows that the average in year collection rate for Council Tax within Thurrock over recent years is 1.82% better than the all England average. In monetary terms if Thurrock performed at the same level as England it would result in an annual reduction of in year collections of £1.5m.

The current arrears ratio for Thurrock is 8.55% better than England . If Thurrock had the same arrears ratio as England, the Council's arrears position would be worse by £7m.

Debt Performance Comparison - Business Rates

Authority	Item	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
Thurrock	Billed	£78,951,000	£127,217,000	£123,229,000	£116,282,000	£113,854,000	£111,363,000
	Arrears	£6,967,000	£2,183,000	£1,482,000	£437,000	£692,000	£444,000
	Arrears ratio	8.82%	1.72%	1.20%	0.38%	0.61%	0.40%
	In Year Collection Rate	96.82%	98.22%	98.93%	99.67%	99.74%	99.72%
	Written off in year	£0	£884,000	£210,000	£440,000	£218,000	£468,000
	Ratio of billings w/off	0.00%	0.69%	0.17%	0.38%	0.19%	0.42%

Authority	Item	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
England	Billed	£16,001,106,000	£26,416,752,000	£26,188,145,000	£25,287,459,000	£24,643,214,400	£24,056,816,000
	Arrears	£2,497,338,000	£1,411,935,000	£1,259,757,944	£1,314,910,000	£1,279,550,340	£1,251,325,630
	Arrears ratio	15.61%	5.34%	4.81%	5.20%	5.19%	5.20%
	In Year Collection Rate	93.02%	98.04%	98.32%	98.36%	98.22%	98.19%
	Written off in year	£88,851,000	£37,398,000	£212,297,000	£194,549,000	£238,352,340	£213,727,370
	Ratio of billings w/off	0.56%	0.14%	0.81%	0.77%	0.97%	0.89%

This table shows that the average in year collection rate for Business Rates within Thurrock over recent years is 1.49% better than the all England average, if Thurrock performed at the same level as England it would result in an annual reduction of in year collections of £1.2m.

The current arrears ratio for Thurrock is 6.78% better than England . If Thurrock had the same arrears ratio as England , Thurrocks arrears position would be worse by £5.4m

The table below provides details of the number of Key collection actions taken by year.

Year	Council Tax Key recovery actions by year					Year	Business Rates Key recovery actions by year			
	1st Reminders	2nd Reminders	Final Notices	Liability Orders (Issued By the court)	Percentage of defaulters issued a Liability Order		1st Reminders	Final Notices	Liability Orders (Issued By the court)	Percentage of defaulters issued a Liability Order
2009 - 2010	23993	4805	13878	9937	41.42%	2009 - 2010	1682	367	499	29.67%
2010 - 2011	20521	7417	14179	7805	38.03%	2010 - 2011	2346	692	300	12.79%
2011 - 2012	14220	3468	10204	5223	36.73%	2011 - 2012	866	509	286	33.03%
2012 - 2013	19686	5764	11249	5193	26.38%	2012 - 2013	1002	901	307	30.64%
2013 - 2014	26568	7924	15736	6926	26.07%	2013 - 2014	1621	867	193	11.91%
2014 - 2015	23577	6720	13030	6456	27.38%	2014 - 2015	1920	882	212	11.04%
2015 - 2016	28270	8169	11646	5295	18.73%	2015 - 2016	1995	773	405	20.30%
2016 - 2017	19317	7171	9923	5258	27.22%	2016 - 2017	1438	730	206	14.33%
2017 - 2018	21415	6406	10660	4930	23.02%	2017 - 2018	1548	757	137	8.85%
2018 - 2019	23500	8306	10595	4892	20.82%	2018 - 2019	1241	696	164	13.22%
2019 - 2020	20918	7823	9943	4667	22.31%	2019 - 2020	1204	650	155	12.87%
2020 - 2021	29236	4162	10838	0	0.00%	2020 - 2021	1740	985	0	0.00%
2021 - 1st Oct	16077	3777	8505	3158	19.64%	2021 - 1st Oct	1542	963	180	11.67%

This table shows that the % of defaulters being issued a Liability Order by the court has reduced. The drive for early resolution will be further enhanced within the next planned phase of the Single View of Debtor project.

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The Table Below provides numbers of complaints received and upheld against the debt team, along with a ratio against reminders issued

Period	No: Complaints received				No: Complaints upheld				% Complaints upheld			
	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Apr	2	9	3	2	0	2	0	0	0%	22%	0%	0%
May	8	3	0	1	1	1	0	0	13%	33%	0%	0%
Jun	2	3	0	4	1	2	0	0	50%	67%	0%	0%
Jul	3	0	2	4	0	0	0	2	0%	0%	0%	50%
Aug	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sep	8	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%	
Oct	6	2	1		0	1	1		0%	50%	100%	
Nov	4	12	4		1	4	1		25%	33%	25%	
Dec	4	5	1		0	1	0		0%	20%	0%	
Jan	4	9	0		2	2	0		50%	22%	0%	
Feb	3	7	2		0	2	0		0%	29%	0%	
Mar	1	3	2		0	1	1		0%	33%	50%	
Total for Year	47	58	18	12	5	16	3	2	11%	28%	17%	17%
Ratio to reminders issued	0.19%	0.26%	0.06%	0.07%	0.02%	0.07%	0.01%	0.01%				

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16 November 2021	ITEM: 10
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Thurrock’s Scrutiny Review: An Update	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Accountable Assistant Director: Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Legal and Governance, and Monitoring Officer	
Accountable Director: Sean Clark, Corporate Director Resources and Place Delivery	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

This report provides an update to Thurrock’s Scrutiny Review, which was agreed by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2020 and by Cabinet in December 2020. The outcome of the review was to ensure that scrutiny functioned for all Members of the Council, and met national best practice guidelines. This report outlines the work that has been undertaken so far to implement the recommendations.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the implementation of the review recommendations thus far, as outlined in Appendix 1.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The review began in 2018 as Members wished to have an in-depth look into the scrutiny function and process. Following on from this, multiple events were held as well as detailed research to look into the workings of scrutiny, and if the function could be improved.

2.2 The final report, which included ten recommendations, was agreed by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2020, and then agreed by Cabinet in December 2020.

2.3 Since the agreement of the review, the Democratic Services team have been working with officers and Members to implement the recommendations of the

review, and have continued to ensure the successful function of overview and scrutiny.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The issues, options and analysis are included at appendix one of the report.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 As part of the agreement of the review, Members of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee wished to see regular updates as to the progress of the recommendations.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 This report has been through all necessary internal process including Directors Board, and governance procedures.

5.2 Members of overview and scrutiny, as well as the Executive, were extensively consulted on the original review recommendations.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 Delivery of successful, high-quality governance has a significant impact on all of Thurrock Council's priorities. Specifically, on including the community in governance procedures such as Committee meetings and asking questions of Members.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Senior Management Accountant

There are no financial implications set out in the report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Ian Hunt**
Assistant Director Law and Governance, and
Monitoring Officer

There are no legal implications set out in the report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager – Community Development and Equalities

There are no diversity and equality implications set out in the report.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Cabinet – Item 10 – Overview and Scrutiny at Thurrock: A Review – 9 December 2020: [Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday, 9th December, 2020, 7.00 pm | Thurrock Council](#)

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – The Scrutiny Review: An Update

Report Author:

Lucy Tricker

Senior Democratic Services Officer

Resources and Place Delivery

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Overview and Scrutiny at Thurrock Council: A Review

Update

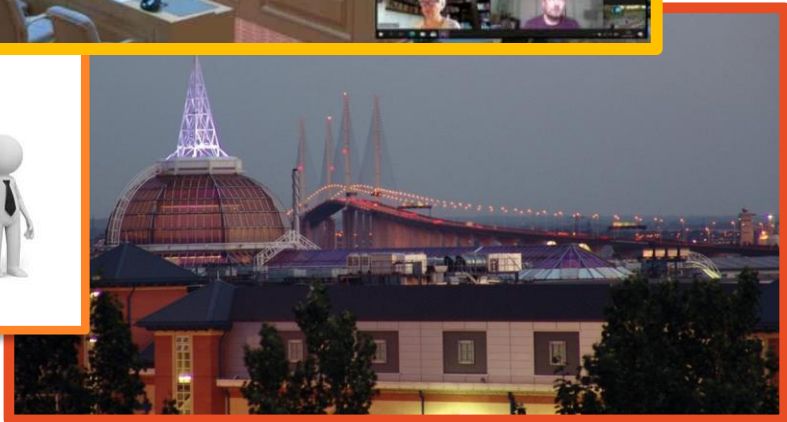
2021/22

Contact:

Direct Democracy

Thurrock Council

Direct.democracy@thurrock.gov.uk



BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Review began in 2018, as Members wanted to undertake a deep-dive study into how the function met national best practice guidelines; how the service performed; and if it could be developed.
- 1.2 A motion then followed in October 2018, which asked the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of their cross-cutting remit, to look into the function and undertake a review.
- 1.3 The Committee, working with the Democratic Services team, then undertook a series of research projects and tasks to help identify how the scrutiny function worked, and areas for further consideration.
- 1.4 The Committee started by focussing on the national scrutiny best practice guidelines, developed by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. This research highlighted that Thurrock were meeting the majority of guidelines set out in the framework. Members felt there were some areas that could be enhanced. The Committee also considered the latest central government statutory guidance that was released in May 2019 that outlined scrutiny best practice, and how this could be adopted at Thurrock.
- 1.5 Detailed research was then begun which looked into how Thurrock's scrutiny function compared to our local neighbours, as well as other similar sized unitary local authorities. This went into detail regarding the call-in process, the number of scrutiny committees, and the process around pre-scrutiny. This found that Thurrock largely had more scrutiny Committees than other authorities, but followed similar call-in and pre-scrutiny processes.
- 1.6 As the desktop research continued, the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook two projects to help determine Members viewpoints regarding scrutiny at Thurrock.
- 1.7 In September 2019, Dr Dave McKenna from the Centre for Public Scrutiny came to Thurrock Council to hold a scrutiny symposium for all scrutiny Members. This was to find a baseline of Members feelings towards the function, for example what areas were working well and what challenges scrutiny currently faced. This was a productive session during which Members

provided Dr McKenna, and the Democratic Services team, with numerous ideas for development of the function.

- 1.8 After some delay due to COVID-19, a workshop between the Executive and scrutiny Members was held to determine how Members felt the relationship between the two functions could be enhanced. Members discussed the draft recommendations that had been developed since the symposium, and talked about how these recommendations could be implemented and supported by the Executive.
- 1.9 Finally, all elements of the review were summarised and presented as a report to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2020. The Committee agreed all of the recommendations, and asked for regular updates to be provided. This report is therefore being provided to update Committee Members on the progress of the recommendations thus far, and further work that is due to be undertaken.
- 1.10 The report was then presented to Cabinet in December 2020 and all recommendations were agreed.
- 1.11 Between January and April 2021, the Democratic Services team worked hard to ensure that the recommendations were ready to be implemented at the beginning of the 2021-22 municipal year.
- 1.12 By the nature of the function, the six scrutiny Committees have independence to decide how to implement the recommendations, to suit their workload and the nature of their commitments. This report outlines and charts how the recommendations are being implemented across the various Committees.



PROGRESS MADE ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Actions to Date	Evidence and Examples
<p>1. Establish an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol to ensure a formal process for scrutiny comments to reach the Executive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Protocol has now been formally adopted by Members and is included on the Members Library on Inform. • It is now also included as part of the formal scrutiny training offered to all Members at the beginning of the municipal year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Executive-Scrutiny Protocol has had an impact on the scrutiny function as: • More Portfolio Holders are including scrutiny comments in their verbal reports to Cabinet, for example the Quarter 1 Corporate Performance Report was considered at Corporate O&S Committee; comments from which were then discussed by the Portfolio Holder for Central Services at Cabinet. • In addition, the Chair of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee attended a meeting of Cabinet to discuss the Grays Underpass report and recommendations that had been considered by the Committee. • There have been no briefing reports as defined by the Protocol sent to Cabinet.
<p>2. Every Overview and Scrutiny Committee to have an overarching topic-led project that they</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This has been adopted by the Corporate O&S Committee, Planning, Transport and Regeneration O&S Committee and the Cleaner, Greener and Safer O&S Committee. • This recommendation has not been adopted by the Health and Wellbeing O&S Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example, the Corporate O&S Committee are currently undertaking a deep-dive review into fair debt and compassionate collections. • Some scrutiny committees have decided that the project does not suit their

Recommendation	Actions to Date	Evidence and Examples
<p>manage throughout the municipal year.</p>	<p>or the Housing O&S Committee for this municipal year.</p>	<p>workload this year, but this will be discussed as part of their Work Programme next municipal year.</p>
<p>3. Portfolio Holders are invited to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committees to answer questions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio Holders are now more regularly attending scrutiny Committees, either to answer questions on a specific topic or about their general Portfolio. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example, the Portfolio Holder for Adults and Communities attended the first meeting of Health and Wellbeing Committee to discuss a specific report on adult services provision. • In addition, the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Sports and Leisure attended the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Committee to answer general questions on his Portfolio. • This recommendations is developing well across committees and there are future plans for Portfolio Holders to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
<p>4. Members to commit to Committee specific training at the start of the municipal year, with Chairs to receive specific Chairs training.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall there continues to be low attendance for scrutiny training sessions. In total, 14 Members attended the 'Overview and Scrutiny: A Practical Guide', which explained the role of Chairs, as well as outlining the powers of the scrutiny function. All attendees of the session were scrutiny Members and Chairs. • The 'Best Practice – Overview and Scrutiny' training session, run by trainer David McGrath, did see a slight increase in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In November 2020 a Members Training Steering Group was reconvened, whose purpose was to provide feedback and ideas regarding the Members training programme, which would be used for input into the development of the 2022/23 programme. • The group have so far met three times and worked to develop a questionnaire to obtain overall training feedback.

Recommendation	Actions to Date	Evidence and Examples
	attendance, from 5 Members in 2020/21 to 7 Members in 2021/22.	
<p>5. Members agree that the number of scrutiny Committees meets the requirements of the Council, and ensures each Committee can fulfil their role.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Democratic Services will continue to monitor Members views towards the number of scrutiny Committees, through regular updates to the Corporate O&S Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As outlined in the scrutiny review research, Thurrock has comparatively more scrutiny committees than neighbouring local authorities and comparable unitary authorities. This was discussed as part of the scrutiny symposium and Executive-Scrutiny Workshop and Members felt happy with the number of scrutiny committees and their remit.
<p>6. Members agree that overview and scrutiny processes with regards to call-ins are to remain the same, taking into account the research undertaken by officers into best practice at other Councils.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As discussed in the scrutiny review, Thurrock follows a similar call-in process as the majority of comparator local authorities. This research also determined that Thurrock's call-in procedure was in line with best practice guidance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Local Government Association. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Democratic Services will continue to monitor other local authorities' call-in processes, as well as best practice guidance, through the Officers Scrutiny Network and the Association of Democratic Services Officers. If national best practice is updated regarding call-ins, this information will be presented back to the Committee.
<p>7. Members agree that the motions process works effectively at Thurrock Council, although quarterly update reports on motions will be</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular updates on the motions process will be provided to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Work Programme item on the agenda. This will allow scrutiny Members to monitor closely the progress of motions, as well as proposed actions arising. 	

Recommendation	Actions to Date	Evidence and Examples
<p>provided to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comment and oversight.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So far this year, no motions have been agreed by Members at Full Council, so no updates have yet been provided to scrutiny. 	
<p>8. Selected reports for pre-scrutiny come to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee earlier in the policy development process, so scrutiny comments can be included in policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So far in this municipal year, officers and Members have been working to develop this recommendation, but have faced some challenges due to tight deadlines and internal governance processes. 	
<p>9. The number of 'to note' reports to be reduced, by emailing 'to note' reports to Committee Members for comment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following this recommendation a new system of briefing notes has been introduced into the scrutiny function. This ensures that reports that do not require a specific recommendation, or simply provide update to the Committee, can still be considered by Members without taking up space on an agenda. • Members still have the chance to discuss briefing notes within the agenda, under Items of Urgent Business if they feel that a discussion is appropriate. • Some Overview and Scrutiny Committees do not wish to pursue a system of briefing notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So far this municipal year, the briefing note system has been successfully adopted by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation	Actions to Date	Evidence and Examples
	at this present time, as there is not currently the need. This will continue to be monitored and discussions with Chairs will be ongoing.	
<p>10. The Work Programme to be more Member-led. A discussion to happen at the beginning of each municipal year regarding which reports would be sent through committee throughout the year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Services have undertaken a quantitative analysis of this recommendation and found that overall the majority of scrutiny committees now have more Member-led work programmes, when compared to last municipal year. • For example, the Cleaner, Greener and Safer scrutiny committee Work Programme is now 30% Member-led, compared to only 6% last year. • The Housing O&S Committee Work Programme is now 65% Member-led, compared to 43% last year. • This means that of the items listed on the Work Programme, more have been suggested by the Chair and Members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This recommendation will be monitored throughout the year and will be reported back to the Committee. • This recommendation is intrinsically linked to a cultural change, and Democratic Services will continue to work with Officers and Members to embed this recommendation into the function.

How has the Scrutiny Function Changed since the Review?

2.1 From the above table the following recommendations have been successfully implemented:

1. An Executive-Scrutiny Protocol has been established and embedded.
2. 3 Overview and Scrutiny Committees have adopted a topic project for the 2021/22 municipal year.
3. Portfolio Holders are now more regularly attending scrutiny Committees.
4. Scrutiny Committees will get the opportunity to discuss relevant motions that have been submitted to Full Council.
5. 2 Committees have adopted the briefing note process, and have reduced the number of 'to note' reports.
6. Work Programmes are now more Member led.

Further Work

2.2 Although the scrutiny review has been successfully implemented for the majority of recommendations, there are still areas that require further work:

1. The development of Member training to increase engagement with training opportunities.
2. The number of reports that are received by scrutiny Committees earlier in the policy development process.

2.3 Given the long-term nature of the review, these areas will be monitored by the Democratic Services team to ensure the recommendations are developed as necessary.

2.4 Democratic Services will use Member feedback to develop the recommendations and the strategy for future implementation.

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Work Programme

Committee: Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Year: 2021/22

Dates of Meetings: 8 June 2021, 7 September 2021, 16 November 2021, 18 January 2022, 8 March 2022

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
8 June 2021		
End of Year Corporate Performance Summary 2020/21	Sarah Welton/ Karen Wheeler	Officer
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
7 September 2021		
Quarter 1 (April to June 2021) Corporate Performance Report 2021/22 and Corporate Performance Framework	Sarah Welton/Karen Wheeler	Officer
Communications Strategy 2021-24	Karen Wheeler	Officer
Fair Debt Summit – Supporting Vulnerable Residents	Michele Lucas	Member
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
16 November 2021		
Thurrock's Scrutiny Review: An Update	Lucy Tricker/Matthew Boulter	Member
Mid-Year/Quarter 2 (June-September 2021) Corporate Performance Report 2021/22	Sarah Welton/Karen Wheeler	Officer
Fair Debt Update	Andy Brittain/Sean Clark	Members

Work Programme

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
Report on Asset Related Savings	Sean Clark	Officer
Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals	Jonathan Wilson/ Sean Clark	Officers
Local Council Tax Scheme	Andy Brittain/ Sean Clark	Members
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
18 January 2022		
Investment Strategy – Member Oversight	Sean Clark	Member
Draft General Fund Budget & Medium Term Financial Strategy Update	Jonathan Wilson/Sean Clark	Officer
Capital Strategy 2022/23	Jonathan Wilson/Sean Clark	Officer
Draft Capital Programme 2022/23	Jonathan Wilson/ Sean Clark	Officer
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
8 March 2022		
Fair Debt Summit – Education and Compassionate Collections Summary	Sean Clark	Member
Quarter 3 (April-December 2021) Corporate Performance Report 2021/22	Sarah Welton/Karen Wheeler	Officer

Work Programme

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
Work Programme	Work Programme	Work Programme

Clerk: Lucy Tricker

Updated: 27th August 2021

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