

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 26 October 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors James Halden (Mayor), Susan Little (Deputy Mayor), Qaisar Abbas, John Allen, Alex Anderson, Paul Arnold, Chris Baker, Gary Byrne, Adam Carter, Colin Churchman, Gary Collins, George Coxshall, Mark Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Victoria Holloway, Deborah Arnold, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Ben Maney, Fraser Massey, Allen Mayes, Augustine Ononaji, Srikanth Panjala, Maureen Pearce, Terry Piccolo, Georgette Polley, Jane Potheary, Shane Ralph, Kairen Raper, Elizabeth Rigby, Sue Sammons, Sue Shinnick, Graham Snell, Luke Spillman, James Thandi, Lee Watson and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillors Daniel Chukwu, Robert Gledhill, Shane Hebb, Andrew Jefferies, Sara Muldowney, Joycelyn Redsell and Jennifer Smith

In attendance: Ian Wake, Acting Chief Executive
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Julie Rogers, Director of Public Realm
Ewelina Sorbjan, Interim Director Housing
Karen Wheeler, Director Strategy, Engagement and Growth
Jonathan Wilson, Interim Director Finance & S151 Officer
Matthew Boulter, Interim Monitoring Officer
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being filmed and recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

65. Items of Urgent Business

The Mayor had agreed an urgent item of business this evening to approve, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the appointment of the Interim Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer). The Leader presented the report which had been a result of government intervention and the Best Value Inspection work. A report with several recommendations regarding the senior management structure had been taken to General Services Committee on 29 September 2022. At that meeting, General Services Committee agreed to commence the recruitment of the Director of Legal and Governance role with the interview process taking place at the 25 October 2022 General Services Committee.

The Leader thanked Matthew Boulter and Mark Bowen for undertaking their interim appointments in great manner and congratulated them on the work undertaken.

With 42 votes in favour, 0 against, 0 abstained, the recommendation was agreed.

RESOLVED

Approved in accordance with the Council's Constitution the appointment of John Jones as Interim Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer).

66. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

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

The Mayor praised the Mayoral Roll of Honour names listed on page 9 of the agenda. The Mayor also thanked Matthew Boulter for his services as Interim Monitoring Officer who was an officer who fully understood the role of elected members and respected scrutiny and debate.

Councillor M Coxshall, the Leader of the Council, made the following announcements:

The Leader had promised, two weeks ago, to transform the culture between councillors, officers, media and between parties in this chamber and hoped that already members had seen some improvements.

The Leader spoke about the 'Just Stop Oil' Protests on the QEII Bridge who had stopped people from across Thurrock from going to work and taking their children to school because of those two self-important individuals. This had affected a great many of Thurrock businesses in the area, stopped some of our essential services and had hampered the blue light emergency services.

The Leader updated members on the progress of his six actions and looked forward to seeing as many members as possible at the cabinet meeting on the 9 November where any member could come and ask questions about items on the agenda. None of these need to be tabled in advance. The Leader would also arrange a press briefing for any member of the media before Cabinet. He also stated the council needed to be better at scrutiny which was why he had offered chairs and vice-chairs of overview and scrutiny committees to opposition groups.

The Leader stated that members were already forming an important part of the Improvement Plan with Councillor J Kent on the Finance and Improvement Boards alongside himself and had been informed of the

council's actions as they happened. The Leader reaffirm that the Improvement Plan would come to a debate at Full Council.

The Leader stated that access and dialogue at this council to staff and members had been improved and hoped the weekly letters were a useful way of keeping up to date. He stated he was the leader for all members of the council and would make sure that all members were properly informed as much as he could.

Finally, the Leader stated that changes were being made to the culture between officers and councillors. At Cabinet two weeks ago, he had clearly announced the executive decisions that had been made on free school meals and grants for local businesses and a process he had promised to continue. There had been significant changes to senior leadership with more directors proactively working to keep quality public services running. These restructures had put some of our best officers in senior positions that would change culture and dynamics. The Leader also expected councillors to be completely fair and reasonable with officers and their workload and with building trusting relationships going two ways and sometimes members should show their appreciation better.

To conclude, the Leader stated important steps had already been taken to improve the council and reiterated that he could not change the past, he had very little power to influence the future, but the council could decide how it acted here and now. With the journey being much easier if members across the chamber could continue to work together and put governance before party. The Leader offered for any member to walk into his office for a coffee and a chat at any time.

The Leader thanked all members for their continued support.

68. Questions from Members of the Public

There were no public questions from members of the public.

69. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

No notices of petition had been received.

70. Petitions Update Report

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

71. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies, Statutory and Other Panels

The Mayor enquired whether there were any changes to be made to the appointments previously made by committees and outside bodies, statutory and other panels.

The leader of the council, Councillor M Coxshall, stated he had the following changes to make:

Replace Councillor Rigby with Councillor Thandi as Vice-Chair on the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Replace Councillor Ononaji with Councillor Redsell on the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Return Councillor Rigby as Chair on the Standards and Audit Committee.

The Leader of the labour group, Councillor J Kent stated he had no changes to make.

Councillor Byrne, Massey and Allen stated they had no changes to make.

72. Ethical Standards - Changes to the Constitution

The Leader presented the report that recommended changes to the Council's Constitution in accordance with recommendations made by the national Committee on Standards in Public Life in its report on local government ethical standards to update the Member Code of Conduct. The report also recommended the adoption of the social media policy for Members.

Councillor J Kent agreed to go straight to the vote as the report had already been presented at the Standard and Audit Committee.

With 42 votes in favour, 0 against, 0 abstained, the recommendations were agreed.

RESOLVED

- 1. The adoption of the Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct as set out in Appendix 1 to replace Members Code of Conduct 15 November 2013 set out in Chapter 7, Part 3.**
- 2. The adoption of the Social Media policy for Members as set out in Appendix 2 - to be incorporated into the Constitution as Chapter 7 Part 3A.**
- 3. Noted that the Standards and Audit Committee considered the Local Government Association's Guidance on Member Code of Conduct Complaints Handling and recommended that the Monitoring Officer revised the Council's existing arrangements to reflect best practice for approval at a future meeting of full council.**

73. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the chamber that three questions to the Leader had been received and eight questions to cabinet members.

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

74. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

No reports were presented.

75. Minutes of Committees

The minutes of committees as set out in the agenda were received.

76. Update on motions resolved at Council during the previous year

Members were informed that an update to the Motion Update Report would be provided at the 30 November 2022 meeting.

77. Motion submitted by Councillor Polley

The motion, as printed in the agenda was proposed by Councillor Polley and seconded by Councillor Mayes. The motion read as follows:

Cost of Living - This Council resolves to work with the Government to ensure that it delivers the much-appreciated support to the residents of Thurrock as quickly as possible, and that the Council proactively identifies those most in need of support in the Thurrock area and ensure that they have access to all the Government support they are eligible for.

Councillor Polley presented her motion by stating the third sector in Thurrock was amazing and it was those voluntary sectors that could identify where the most need was for this support. She referred to the amazing work and knowledge of the LACs, nationally the 18 million homes in fuel poverty would likely increase winter death by 10% with an additional cost to the NHS by £2.5 billion, the increased pressures put on the emergency fire and rescue services and the need to continue with school meal payments for children when not in school. Councillor Polley concluded that she would like to see Thurrock Council work with the government as much as possible to ensure the maximum amount of relief be distributed to Thurrock residents and to ensure Thurrock residents were looked after.

Councillor Spillman stated his support and welcomed the motion and agreed more integrated frontline services across local government was required to prevent multiple visits to resident's homes and to ensure help could be provided quicker. That a review of housing services would commence next

month to see where services could be integrated more effectively into health and social care functions.

Councillor J Kent stated his support on this motion and had been surprised this motion had been put forward by a conservative member when over the last 12 years as a conservative government there had been the biggest drop in take-home pay in history, with food and fuel prices soaring, inflation at a 40-year high and family budgets at breaking point. Councillor J Kent referred to the nationally 18 million homes in fuel poverty which could lead to 10,000 winter deaths when the NHS was already facing unprecedented pressures. The council was having to deal with a Conservative financial catastrophe which limited the type of services that the council could and should be undertaking. This was the time to make some one-off grants to voluntary bodies, food uniform grants, a Thurrock's hardship fund could have been established to help residents and although labour members would be supporting the motion it had not to be forgotten who was to blame for the situation that Thurrock had found itself in.

Councillor Byrne stated his 100% support to the motion.

Councillor Mayes supported this motion and stated although he was very grateful to the government for the cost-of-living payment of £650, the payment towards the fuel bill of £400, the capping of the energy cost for the average home at £2,500, the disability cost of living payment of £150 as well as the council tax rebate of £150 he felt that in the future this should be more targeted. Councillor Mayes stated his gratitude for this support, moving forward the support should be given to those in a more targeted way, for those that needed it the most which would be the right and fair thing to do, and action needed to be undertaken as quickly as possible for those struggling residents.

Councillor Polley summed up by thanking members for their support and agreed targeting should be introduced and welcomed that the chancellor had recognised this had not been the best laid out plan and not been afraid to say the government would not want to be in this position nationally or locally and to find ways to start to move forward. Thurrock needed to ensure that all the help coming from government was disseminated out to Thurrock residents.

The Mayor called a vote on the motion. With the 42 votes in favour, 0 against and 0 abstained the motion was carried.

The meeting finished at 8.05 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**