

Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4 July 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Luke Spillman (Chair), Alex Anderson (Vice-Chair), Vikki Hartstean, Tom Kelly and Lee Watson

Apologies: Councillors Jacqui Maney

In attendance: Councillor Ben Maney, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Highways
Mark Bradbury, Interim Director for Place
Steven Mair, Interim Chief Financial Officer
Michael Dineen, Assistant Director Counter Fraud, Enforcement and Community Safety
Navtej Tung Strategic Transport Manager
Matthew Boulter, Strategic Head of Democratic Scrutiny and Member Services
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 February 2023 were approved as a true and correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business declared.

3. Declaration of Interests

The Chair of the Committee declared an interest in Item 6 Call-in to Cabinet Decision 110643: Thurrock Supported Bus Services, in that he was a Member of Cabinet at the time the decision was made and following advice from the Monitoring Officer he would be withdrawing himself from the Chamber when the item took place.

4. Terms of Reference

The Chair of the Committee introduced the Terms of References to the Committee and sought any comments. There were none.

5. Call-in to Cabinet Decision 110643: Thurrock Supported Bus Services
The Chair of the Committee left the Chamber at 7.05pm

The Vice-Chair of the Committee started by advising those present of the call-in procedure.

Each representative was given the opportunity to present their call-in, during which the below was highlighted:

- It was felt the consultation was not carried out appropriately missing several areas which would be affected by the withdrawal of the bus services, including Purfleet, South Stifford and West Thurrock.
- When the discussion of withdrawing funds for the bus services in Fobbing, it was raised that the Ward Member was able to secure a 12 month grace period. It was queried why the same was not offered for other bus services.
- The withdrawal of the bus services would cause a negative impact on local residents' lives, leaving many of them without access to health facilities and local amenities.
- It was felt funding was available through Section 106 funds, which had been used previously to maintain the bus service in East Tilbury.
- By withdrawing the services within areas such as East Tilbury, Horndon on the Hill, Bulphan and Purfleet, the borough's vulnerable residents would be put at risk.

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Highways was given the opportunity to address the Committee, during which he advised:

- The decision to withdraw the bus services was not taken lightly and was a difficult decision to come to.
- The consultation was undertaken for 12 weeks, finishing in October 2022, Officers reviewed the data for several months before the Cabinet decision was reached in March 2023.
- The bus services offered were not statutory or council services, so the decision to withdraw the services was balanced against the interest of the local taxpayer.
- Looking at the results from the consultation it was evident the bus services were not being used to their full capacity.
- When the report was previously presented to the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members of the Committee praised the consultation, which when undertaken went above and beyond standard practice by having paper copies available on the buses with pre-paid envelopes, as well as online and at key amenity sites.
- Section 106 funding was looked at as an option as were other funding streams, however it was noted that this type of funding

had caveats attached to it which meant the council did not have a free hand to spend the funds on certain projects.

The Committee asked the Portfolio Holder to respond to the case that due regard for individuals and communities served by Thurrock were not considered when Cabinet made their decision. The Portfolio Holder stated the decision was not one taken lightly and the decision had considered not only the consultation responses but also the statistical analysis of service usage presented in the original report. An equality impact assessment had been completed and considered as part of the decision, which the portfolio holder felt was balanced, informed and appropriate.

While summarising their cases, the representatives of the call-ins asked that the decision be referred back to Cabinet and for the bus services to be reinstated.

Following the debate and questions on the call-ins, Members voted on the call-ins as follows:

- Councillor Watson's Call-in: No Further Action be taken on the basis of a) Due regard for individuals and communities served by Thurrock and c) Due consultation in line with the council's consultation strategy. (passed 3 votes against 2)
- Resident call-ins: No Further Action be taken on the basis of a) Due regard for individuals and communities served by Thurrock (passed 3 votes against 2)
- Welcom Forum Call-in: No Further Action be taken on the basis of a) Due regard for individuals and communities served by Thurrock (passed 3 votes against 2)

In accordance with Chapter 1, Part 2, Article 3 of the Constitution the Vice Chair accepted a question from a resident. The Question posed was:

Residents in outlying villages in Thurrock rely on buses to access health services, for shopping and to remain part of society. These services are essential, as was highlighted in the council's feedback following the bus users consultation. It is the council's responsibility to consider the needs of all their residents. If the decision to axe these buses is taken, how do councillors perceive their constituents will access vital services?

The Vice Chair agreed to include the question in the report for Cabinet to acknowledge and respond to through their debate.

RESOLVED:

That the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee decide to take no further action.

The Chair of the Committee returned to the Chamber at 7.55pm

6. Fees and Charges Review 2023/24

The Interim Chief Financial officer explained that the Fees and Charges report would be going to Cabinet next week (12 July) and would report on the comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. In the budget report in March of this year the Commissioners commented that further financial work was needed to improve sustainability of the Council and a full review of fees and charges would need to be completed by the end of quarter 1.

Members heard the Council had begun a three-part review of fees and charges. The first stage was to examine benchmarking and some price reviews. In the second stage there would be further price reviews. The third stage would be a longer-term piece of work which normally took around 2-3 years and this would look at the profitability of all services and that the Council was actually charging what it could charge for. The policy recommended full cost recovery.

Following the update from the Chief Financial Officer, Members were invited to ask questions. Key points raised included:

- When parking in Resident parking permit zones, it was only for the zone applied and paid for where parking was permitted.
- Clarity was sought as to the cost of parking permits for HMO's. Officers advised they were looking into the cost of permits for HMO's, it was believed that the cost was £15 per permit per HMO.
- The 26% raise in the NHS permit, was issued by the NHS and had been increased to bring the permit in line with other services.
- Following a query it was confirmed that the parking permit scheme was reviewed annually during which residents were asked what they liked and disliked about the scheme.

Action 1 – Officers to email Members with results following the investigation of cost for parking permits for HMO's

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the proposed Fees and Charges policy, Appendix 1, in particular agreeing the commitment to full cost recovery and annual CPI inflation increases as the default.**
- 2. That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the proposed Fees and Charges increases for the material areas, Appendix 2.**
- 3. That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the proposed new Charges in section 8 of this report.**

4. That Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the requirement for a further detailed review & analysis of remaining Fees and Charges by Quarter 4 2023/24.

7. Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme listed within the agenda.

Action 2 – Democratic Services Officer to email the Monitoring Officer with regards to additional meetings in September and November 2023

RESOLVED:

That the following items be included on the work programme for 2023/2024:

- Local Plan
- Freeport
- Update on the BVI report
- Purfleet
- Tilbury and Grays Town Funds
- Grays underpass
- Stanford Le Hope Station
- Regeneration Project update
- Housing Company – PRL
- Integrated Transport Block
- Update on A13

The meeting finished at 8.30 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