

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 13 January 2021 at 6.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Monday 25 January 2021 at 5.00pm

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

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Andrew Millard, Director of Place
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

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

78. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 9 December 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

79. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

80. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

81. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by wishing everyone a Happy New Year. He stated that due to increased levels of COVID-19 around the country, a new national lockdown had begun a week ago, and the country was reaching a critical stage in the spread of the pandemic. He explained that Thurrock had also seen an increase in positive cases, and had been the epicentre of the new COVID strain, which was 58-70% more transmissible than the previous strain. He stated that the NHS and other keyworkers had done an amazing job in fighting the virus on the frontlines, but Essex had declared a major incident due to the strain being put on hospitals, who would not be able to cope if they did not receive additional help. The Leader stressed the importance of the government's 'Hands, Face, Space' message and urged residents to follow lockdown rules to protect each other and the NHS. He also

urged young people and children to follow the rules and not go out and meet friends, and asked all residents to act as if they already had the virus and take all necessary precautions.

The Leader then explained that the local rate of COVID-19 was now 1,324 cases per 100,000, which had decreased from 1,514 the previous week. He stated that Thurrock were now fifth in the country for the highest rates of COVID, which had again decreased from being the second highest rates in the country. He added that there were also currently 299 COVID cases in residents above the age of 60, which had also decreased from 313 cases in the previous week. He stated that although cases across the country were continuing to rise, cases in Thurrock were plateauing, and encouraged residents to follow government guidelines to ensure local case numbers continued to drop. The Leader explained that Priti Patel MP and the National Police Chief had recently given a press conference outlining how police forces around the UK would now move to enforcement action more quickly to encourage people to remain at home, and stressed that Essex Police would be following this guidance and would take action if necessary. He described how Essex Police had recently visited Butts Lane and the Maple Park Estate after reports of anti-social motorbike riding in the area. He added that police officers were also regularly patrolling open spaces and residential areas to ensure COVID compliance and increase interactions with the local community. He encouraged residents to report if they witnessed anti-social behaviour or COVID compliance breaches directly through Essex Police's website or 101 non-emergency number. The Leader understood that there could be delays on the 101 number, but urged residents to hold on, as he felt that all reports helped the police do their job. The Leader stated that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner would be holding an online meeting on 19 January via Facebook, which he would be taking part in, and they would be answering some of the public's questions surrounding COVID-19 and anti-social behaviour.

The Leader then explained that Thurrock had currently received £26million in central government grants, which had been distributed to local businesses to help them through the pandemic. He explained that this also included £2.6million which had been distributed to 260 local businesses since 2 December 2020. He stated that some businesses had fallen through the cracks in receiving this funding support, such as businesses which operated from home or community halls, and Thurrock had given these types of businesses more than £1million in grant support. He urged all local businesses to look on Thurrock's website to find and apply for funding. The Leader then stated that support was also available for individuals too, for example people who were self-employed could now access a one-off grant payment if forced to self-isolate.

The Leader then moved on and discussed the recent coverage surrounding free school meals, and stated that parents across Thurrock had received £186,000 to support their children and ensure they did not go hungry. He explained that this included £11,000 worth of £15 vouchers, which would be expanded to include the upcoming February half-term, but explained that the

free school meals responsibility had now moved to schools as it was term-time. He also outlined that none of the free school meal packages supplied through Thurrock Council had come from those companies mentioned in the press.

The Leader then described the strain that the COVID-19 pandemic was having on bin collection crews, and encouraged residents to report online if their bins had not been collected. He stated that if the entire street had been missed then the bin collection team would come back, but urged residents to contact their local councillor if their bin had not been collected and was more than one week overdue. He also advised residents to park considerately, as some of the missed collections were due to bin lorries not having enough space to enter roads, due to inconsiderate parking. He added that residents also needed to ensure their bins were out early, as crews now started collections as early as 5am.

The Leader then highlighted the work of the Tilbury Town Board, who were currently looking at a bid to increase youth provision, and help to transform the town. He stated that the first step would be submitting this bid to government, and felt it was an excellent example of the good work that the Town Boards could achieve. He stated that during consultation 93% of Tilbury residents had wanted increased youth provision, and this bid would show that residents were being listened too.

82. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Watkins stated that due to COVID-19 staff shortages, the Linford Household Waste and Recycling Centre had been closed for the previous two days, but would be opened again tomorrow. He explained that he was closely monitoring the situation, and the site would give as much warning as possible to residents if it needed to close in future. He also asked residents to be patient with local bin collection crews during this difficult time, and to report any missed collections. He added that the decision regarding garden waste collection had been difficult, but felt it was right to protect general waste and recycling collections during this time. He stated that the teams were working hard to resume usual business, and stated that the teams would let residents know if there were large delays. Councillor Watkins added that he would present his annual report to Full Council in a few weeks, which would highlight the work that was being undertaken to improve the missed collection reporting system, and would hopefully improve the service.

Councillor Jefferies commented that he wished to reassure residents surrounding the free school meals issue, and stated that the government had given 6,000 children vouchers over the Christmas school break. He stated that the government would also be helping families during the February half-term, including some vulnerable families that were not entitled to free school meals. He explained that although there had been lots of photos in the media regarding free packed lunches, Thurrock's free lunch programme was undertaken by caterers who provided a weeks' worth of nutritious meals that were value for money.

Councillor Coxshall then highlighted the work of the Tilbury Town Board, as he sat on the Board and felt it was exciting to see the work that was being undertaken. He also felt that it was good to see local residents were being listened to through consultation, and hoped that the successful bid would ensure the opening of the proposal by 2024/25, which would include all-day youth provision and cheap meals for young people. He stated that work was also being undertaken by the Grays Town Board, which would improve the High Street.

83. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

84. Questions from Non-Executive Members

No questions had been submitted from Non-Executive Members.

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

Other than those items already contained within the agenda, no matters had been referred to Cabinet for consideration by an overview and scrutiny committee.

86. Draft General Fund Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy Update (Decision: 110544)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that in May 2016, the Conservative minority administration had inherited a £30million deficit forecast over a three year period, but had managed to balance this budget through entrepreneurial ideas, and not simply service cuts. He stated that the investment approach had been started before the Conservatives had taken power, and had been built on since then, including during a time when there had been three party leadership. He stated that Members continued to be involved in the investment strategy, and highlighted that rainy day reserves had initially increased by 40%, but had now been tripled. He stated that this was partly due to the investment strategy, but also partly due to more structured services, such as children's centres and the policy of 'fewer buildings, better services', which had seen children's centre uptake increase from 70% to 95%. He stated that because of these policies, the Council had been able to fund lots of different additional areas, such as increased policing, increased use of technology, and the Clean It, Cut It, Fill It strategy.

Councillor Hebb stated that because of COVID-19 the Council were now entering a new world, with the majority of people working from home, increased numbers of people in care homes, increased numbers of benefits claimants, and another national lockdown. He stated that because of the impact of the pandemic, the Council would be deferring £19million of capital projects, and would have to make other savings too. He stated that as

individuals were affected by COVID, the Council were also affected, such as through loss of income because of temporary leisure centre closure and a reduction in the payment of business rates. He stated that the investment strategy remained resilient, as Thurrock had invested in solar energy, which was both good for the environment and not affected by the global pandemic. Councillor Hebb stated that although current investments continued to do well, the investment strategy had now been paused. He stated that due to COVID-19 pressures, there had been reduced levels of new investment compared to what had been anticipated, so Thurrock would reduce its borrowing forecast by over £300million, and would take stock of future infrastructure projects that had been planned.

Councillor Hebb stated that many peoples' lives had been changed by the pandemic, but individuals had been supported through government schemes such as furlough, homelessness support and business grants. Councillor Hebb stated that the government had also supported Thurrock through the pandemic, by giving £10million to close budget deficit gaps. He stated that this government support would have to end eventually, both on an individual level and a Council level, which would affect people in numerous ways, such as through loss of income or loss of jobs. He stated that this individual impact would have a knock-on effect for the Council, as the Council would continue to see increased numbers of people unable to pay business rates, or applying for local council tax support. He stated that currently Thurrock had not seen a large rise in the number of people applying for local council tax support, but felt that this would increase dramatically in 2021/22, due to the end of the furlough scheme and other COVID impacts. He stated that government support received by Thurrock would not continue indefinitely, and therefore only deferred the budget deficit gap, and did not solve it, but Thurrock would continue to support those most vulnerable residents.

Councillor Hebb stated that Thurrock Council would ask the same questions that residents were currently asking such as, what savings were available and how spend could be reduced. He stated that because of the pandemic, service reviews would be accelerated and the Council were also proposing a 3% adult social care precept increase and a 1.99% council tax increase. He stated that this increase would equate to roughly £1 per week for 70% of residents, and £2 per week for people in higher council tax bands. He explained that these increases needed to happen to ensure that the Council could continue with vital services. Councillor Hebb also stated that some reserves would be partly used to help close the budget gap. He urged residents to seek support if they needed it, and encouraged residents to reach out if they felt they could not afford council bills. He stated that enforcement action on those who had missed council payments would also be slower. He summarised and stated that the Council would rise to the challenge that COVID-19 had created, and although it would be difficult, could be achieved if everybody worked together.

Councillor Halden thanked Councillor Hebb and the finance team for their report, and stated that this was a budget being put together during a global crisis, which had instigated the need for a council tax rise. He felt proud that

over half of the budgets agreed in previous years under a Conservative administration had frozen or not increased council tax by the maximum. He felt that this was an unprecedented crisis and £1 per week would not impact the majority of local residents. He stated that for those most vulnerable residents who would be impacted by this rise, support would be made available. He highlighted that in the 11 months since the start of the pandemic, the number of people needing adult social care places had increased by £11million, and the majority of these people were extremely vulnerable. He added that Thurrock's adult social care market needed to remain competitive with the private sector and other local authorities, to retain the best care workers, as market pressures increased and morale decreased.

Councillor Johnson also thanked the finance team and Councillor Hebb for their report, and felt that it was easy to understand, honest and trustworthy. The Leader summarised and stated that the crisis needed to be managed, and although the Council were still seeing investment returns, due to local headlines this had decreased slightly. He stated that the rainy day fund would be used to help tackle the financial impact of the pandemic, and felt pleased that the Council had increased reserves over recent years, which helped deal with the crisis currently being faced.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Noted the proposed updates to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the remaining deficits in future years.**
- 2. Noted the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy forms the basis of the 2021/22 budget.**
- 3. Supported the proposed council tax increase of 1.99%.**
- 4. Supported a 3% adult social care precept increase.**
- 5. Commented on the draft budget proposals within the report to inform the consultation with Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with the final budget proposals to be presented to Cabinet on 10 February 2021.**

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

87. School Capital Programme Update 2020/21 (Decision: 110545)

Councillor Jefferies began by introducing the report and stated that recommendation 2 would need to be edited to reflect that the UK no longer followed EU procurement rules, due to the country's departure from the European Union. He highlighted that the 2018/19 and 2019/20 school capital programmes had now almost been completed, including the expansion of Corringham Primary School and St Cleres Secondary School. He stated that the expansion of Benyon Primary School was also very close to completion.

He described how the temporary accommodation at the old Thurrock Learning Campus had been renovated and redesigned as Thameside Park School, which had officially opened.

Councillor Coxshall stated that since 2010 when the current MP's had been elected, the quality of education across the borough had increased, and therefore the number and quality of job opportunities for young people had also increased, which benefitted the Council in the long-term. He felt that these improvements began with the school capital programme, which was a critical component of good education. He added that Thurrock had also been at the forefront of academisation, which encouraged schools to move forward and increased the quality of education.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the School Capital Programme to deliver additional school places at Abbots Hall Primary, in the Tilbury Planning Area and Aveley, Ockendon and Purfleet Planning Area.

2. Approved the commencement of the procurement process in accordance with Council procurement procedures to appoint architect-led, multi-discipline designers and project teams, for the next School Capital Programme and appoint the Principal Contractors to take forward the proposed schemes.

3. That, following a selection procedure compliant with the EU procurement regulations, the subsequent decision to enter into the contract be delegated to the Accountable Director, reporting back to the Portfolio Holder, such report to detail the selection procedure results, and compliance with EU procurement regulations.

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report.

This decision is subject to call-in.

88. HRA Housing Development: 13 Loewen Road (Decision: 110546)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and stated that Cabinet had previously approved the Housing Development Approach, which had also gone through the scrutiny process and consultation. He stated that this was the first project that had followed the new approach, and sought to demolish the current building at 13 Loewen Road and replace it with five three-bedroom council houses, and associated parking. He stated that consultation had been held from 19 October to 16 November and the project had been well-received. He explained that the development would also be low carbon emission as all of the proposed properties would use zero gas. He added that this project would be funded through the HRA, using the right to buy retention scheme, and would not impact upon general fund borrowing. He summarised and stated that this project aligned with the Council's vision and priorities, particularly the 'place' objective.

Councillor Coxshall thanked the team for their hard work on this report and felt it showed commitment and investment to local residents, as well as helping to meet the 'live' element of the 'Live, Work, Play' objective . He added that the new homes would be affordable, and looked forward to seeing council homes built on a larger scale across the borough. The Leader added that it was good to see these would be zero gas properties, and felt that the scheme also maximised land usage, as it transformed one large building into five new homes.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed to that delegated authority be given to the Director of Place and Director of Adults, Health and Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to determine the procurement route for delivery of this project; and to tender and award a contract for the construction of this project.

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

89. Electric Vehicle Charging (Decision: 110547)

Councillor Maney introduced the report and stated that this report would enable future infrastructure for electric vehicle charging across the borough, as well as allow for an associated long-term policy. He explained that the number of people buying electric vehicles was increasing as it was a more sustainable method of travel, but there were currently only three charging points in Thurrock which used older technology. He stated that Thurrock needed more charging points using newer technology to be able to keep up with future demand, and help residents make greener choices. He commented that Thurrock had agreed to reduce carbon emissions, and the government had enacted a ban on combustion engine cars by 2030, and the new proposed infrastructure would help Thurrock meet these targets by making electric vehicle charging easier. He stated that the contract would be to a single external provider for between 10 and 15 years, although a break clause would be included in the contract and relevant KPIs would be analysed regularly. He described how this report also allowed for work to begin on a new electric vehicle policy, which would include how and where electric vehicles could be charged. He highlighted point 2.8 in the report which detailed three funding streams for the project including, government grants, developer contributions, and grant-matched funding from the Office for Low Emission Vehicles. He thanked the officers for their hard work on the project, and felt that because of their hard work the Council would stand in good stead for a successful bid.

Councillor Maney then proposed a new recommendation, which was for a yearly update to go to Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee so they could receive updates on the progress of the

contract. He stated that the report had been through the scrutiny committee, where it had been well-received and no additional comments had been made.

Councillor Coxshall felt it was good to see Thurrock Council keeping up with electric vehicle technology, as many businesses were now building electric vehicle charging points, such as intu Lakeside. The Leader stated that this report would be good news for residents as it would help improve their lives. He stated that electric vehicle charging technology continued to improve, and highlighted the work that had been undertaken to include 5G connectivity cables inside electric vehicle charging points. He stated that other add-ons could also be included, such as air quality testing points, electric vehicle street charging points, and park-over charging points. He felt this would encourage residents to purchase an electric vehicle, and asked that the contract also consider curb-side charging for people who lived in older houses or in blocks of flats.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Approved the procurement of a single contract over a maximum period of 15 years. The initial contract period will be 10 years with an option to extend for one further period of 5 years (10+5).**
- 2. Approved the creation of a policy to inform the roll out of the charging infrastructure, based upon a demand-led approach for on-street and off-street parking provision and the upgrade/expansion of existing Council assets and in town centre location and transport hubs.**
- 3. Approved the budget and contract value for the full 15 year period to the value of up to £9m based on the following income areas:**
 - a. Allocation of budget on the DfT Integrated Transport Block funding of minimum £75,000 per annum (total allocation over 15 year project life is estimated at being a minimum of £1.125m);**
 - b. Contributions secured pursuant to Section 106 of the T&CPA1990 (based on Local Plan projections for infrastructure improvements), and;**
 - c. Office for Low Emission Vehicle (OLEV) grant funding of up to 75% of the capital costs for installation of EV facilities.**
- 4. Approved the approach to delegated authority for awarding contract(s) to the Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport.**
- 5. Agreed a yearly update report go to the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor the contract.**

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

90. Thurrock Active Place Strategy (Decision: 110548)

Councillor Watkins introduced the report and stated that this report had been a long time in the making, and formed a crucial part of the Local Plan, which would increase the number of sports clubs and the number of people attending sports clubs across the borough. He stated that the report had been through the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and comments from these meetings had been included within the report. He added that extensive consultation had also been undertaken, which included numerous sports groups and community groups. He stated that the consultation had been very comprehensive and thanked the team for their hard work on the report. He outlined that the report was not a document solely regarding spending money, but formed a blueprint for change, which would only be undertaken once external funding had been made available, such as funding from Sports England. He summarised and explained that sports would be at the centre of the new Local Plan, and this report would help to increase sport uptake across the borough.

Councillor Coxshall felt it was good to see this report as the Local Plan would not just be about housebuilding, but would include provision for open spaces and sports, as this would be vital for local residents. Councillor Coxshall added that this report also helped to meet the 'play' aspect of the 'Live, Work, Play' objective, which he felt pleased to see. He also felt it was good to see such detailed and extensive consultation. Councillor Halden agreed that this was an exciting report and agreed that it was good to see detailed consultation. He felt that everybody should be encouraged to take an active part in consultations, and felt it was good to see disabled sports groups and sports groups with older members being included in this consultation, as everybody needed access to culture, leisure and sport.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the Thurrock Active Place Strategy, which consists of:

- a. the Thurrock Indoor Built Facilities Assessment and Strategy**
- b. the Thurrock Playing Pitch Assessment and Strategy**
- c. the Thurrock Active Travel Strategy**
- d. the Thurrock Open Space Assessment and Standards Report**

2. Instructed officers to progress the recommendations arising from the Thurrock Active Place Strategy and update them within the context of feedback from committee stage discussions.

3. Incorporate inclusive consultations plans within each key project.

4. Report progress to the Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in autumn 2021.

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

91. Collaborative Communities Framework 2021-2025 (Decision: 110549)

Councillor Huelin introduced the report and stated that it outlined how the Council would work with local communities. She stated that there were three key points of the report, which were engagement, equalities, and empowerment. She highlighted that the report had been approved by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and she had sat down with the Shadow Portfolio Holder to discuss the report and its implementation. Councillor Huelin described how the report would enact a 'pact' between local communities and Thurrock Council, and commented that a total of 150 people had been consulted with and engaged with the proposed framework. She stated that numerous groups had felt that council services worked independently from each other, which could leave services feeling disjointed for residents. She stated that this report would help directorates work together, which would increase community engagement and work with the voluntary sector. She felt that this framework would lead to robust decision making, improved access to services for residents, and improved service cohesion.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the draft Collaborative Communities Framework at Appendix 1.

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

92. Thames Freeport Bid to Government

Councillor Coxshall began by introducing the report and stated that Freeport's were part of Thurrock's DNA, and highlighted that the Port of Tilbury had been a Freeport until 2012. He stated that the continued theme of the Cabinet meeting had been 'Live, Work, Play' and felt that this report helped to meet the 'Work' aspect of the objective. He stated that the Freeport bid had been the work of Thurrock Council, London Gateway, the Port of Tilbury, and Ford Dagenham, as the bid would benefit Thurrock and other local areas along the Thames. He stated that the proposed Freeport would help the local Tilbury area, in conjunction with the work of the Tilbury Town Board, and would be a catalyst for growth across the borough. He described that the proposed Freeport would provide 20,000 direct jobs and 20,000 indirect jobs in the area, and would see £1 billion of government investment over the next 25 years. He stated that the bid would be hard fought as 7 bids in England and 3 bids in the other nations were being submitted, and although Thurrock was the port hub of the UK, the Council would have to work hard to ensure the bid was successful. He stated that Ford Dagenham had also asked to be included in the bid as they wished to make the move to electric vehicles, and would make

the A13 the transportation route between the ports and Ford Dagenham.

The Leader felt it was good to see Ford Dagenham had been included in the bid, as it would help both Thurrock and other neighbouring boroughs. He stated that a Freeport was not just a port, but a zone that would reduce import tariffs if products were assembled in the zone. He stated that this would increase the UK's durability in terms of avionics and manufacturing, and would increase the number of jobs and wages in the borough. He urged residents to support the bid and proposal.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Supported in principle the submission of the Thames Freeport bid to government.**
- 2. Endorsed the continued engagement of officers with partners to bring forward a compelling bid to government which supports the policy objectives and benefits the borough; and delegated authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Director of Finance, Governance and Property; Monitoring Officer; Leader; Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Strategic Planning; and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, to support the final bid prior to submission.**
- 3. Subject to approval in 1.2, delegated authority to the Leader to sign a letter of commitment of the Council's support and agreement to the proposed Freeport for those areas of which Thurrock Borough Council has statutory responsibility. Not all of the proposed tax sites are currently supported for development within the Local Plan including sections of Green Belt, the letter will give the Council's support for the Freeport bid in this context, whilst not fettering its discretion and statutory duties as the local planning authority.**

The meeting finished at 7.16 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