

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 12 January 2022 at 7.00 pm

Deadline for call-ins is Monday 24 January 2022 at 5.00pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Leader), Shane Hebb (Deputy Leader), Mark Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Deborah Huelin, Barry Johnson, Ben Maney, Allen Mayes and Luke Spillman

Apologies: Councillors Andrew Jefferies

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services and Governance Manager, and Interim Monitoring Officer
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

70. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 8 December 2021 were approved as a correct record.

71. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

72. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

73. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by outlining the increasing numbers of COVID-19 levels that were being seen both within Thurrock and across the country. He stated that last week Thurrock had had the highest COVID numbers of any unitary authority, but this had decreased this week and Thurrock were now 63 out of 149 unitary authorities for COVID rates. He explained that this figure could increase over the coming weeks with the return of schools following the Christmas break and increases of COVID in other boroughs. He commented that since December 2021 the contact tracing team had spoken to 90,000 residents, which equated to over half of the population of the borough. He added that the age groups with the lowest vaccine uptake were seeing the highest positive COVID levels, for example only 64% of residents aged 18-49 were vaccinated but accounted for 50% of all COVID positive cases. He urged residents to continue to follow government guidance and get the vaccine, as well as the booster. He stated

that over the weekend the army had been helping at a walk-in vaccination centre in Grays, and the Council were currently looking at other potential walk-in vaccine sites across the borough. He stated that there were currently walk-in centres in Grays, Chadwell St Mary and Stifford Clays, and residents could also book an appointment to have their vaccine. He stated that Thurrock Council were also providing financial support for local businesses affected by COVID, and details of these schemes could be found on the Thurrock website. He stated that since the start of the pandemic, the Council had distributed more than £100mn in government grants to local businesses, which had helped them through the pandemic. He summarised and stated that Thurrock had seen 3316 positive cases in the past week, 659 of those in the under 18 age group; 1118 in the 18-49 age group; and 776 in the over 50 age group. He stated that that current positive test rate was 1863 per 100,000, but that 150,000 people had received two vaccines, and 66,000 people had received both vaccines and the booster.

The Leader moved on and stated that the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) in West Thurrock had been extended which prevented car cruise meetings from taking place. He stated that this had been in place since 2015 and had been extended until December 2024. He felt the PSPO had been effective at preventing car cruise meetings, which had improved resident's safety and reduced noise levels in the local area. He stated that the Council had been working closely with Essex Police to continue to take action against those who ignored the PSPO. He stated that Thurrock Council had recently confiscated £500,000 from an illegal self-storage business that had been operating in green belt land in Bulphan, as the business did not have the necessary planning permission. The Leader summarised and stated that under the Clean It, Cut It, Fill It scheme: 2785 potholes had been filled, 99% within target time; 1256 fly-tips had been cleared; 1750 tonnes of waste had been cleared; and 3235 Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued.

74. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Mayes stated that yesterday Council officers and Members had met with senior NHS leaders to discuss the recent issues regarding the four Integrated Medical Centres (IMCs) within Thurrock. He stated that NHS leaders and partners had reaffirmed their commitment to the IMCs project, all of which would be opened before the closure of Orsett Hospital in 2025. He explained that the aim was for the Tilbury IMC to open in the second quarter of 2022, and the Grays IMC to open in 2025. He felt that the IMCs would improve healthcare outcomes for local residents and provide a better service. The Leader sought clarification that all IMCs would be open before the closure of Orsett Hospital, and Councillor Mayes confirmed that they would.

Councillor Spillman stated that the housing team had worked hard to reduce the number of out of borough placements. He explained that there were currently 31 out of borough placements, and this figure had been 121 in September 2021. He commented that the team were on course to deliver no out of borough placements, other than those which were necessary due to safeguarding issues. He stated that the team were also working hard to

abolish street homelessness, and he hoped this aim would be achieved whilst he remained Portfolio Holder. The Leader thanked Councillor Spillman and the housing team for their hard work on these issues.

75. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

76. Questions from Non-Executive Members

There were no questions submitted by Non-Executive Members.

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

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

78. Draft General Fund Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (Decision: 110594)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that a correction needed to be made to the first sentence of point 4.7 of the report, as follows: “*A comprehensive review of the service has led to the identification of a number of targeted efficiencies across the fieldwork and provider services, including the amalgamation of the Older Peoples’ Day Care Services and a change in the provision of the meal delivery service.*” He moved on and stated that the Council were on track to deliver a balanced budget in 2022/23, with a key focus being placed on Adult Social Care and Children’s Social Care. He explained that although the Council were still predicting a budget gap in 2023/24, this had been reduced and gave the Council more time to reform services. He explained that all local council’s faced a financial pressure on social care due to the effects of COVID, but Thurrock would continue to work hard to support vulnerable residents. He stated that both Adult and Children’s Social Care would be given a financial boost, due to the proposed council tax increase of 1.99% for Children’s Social Care and 1% for the Adult Social Care Precept. He stated that for an average band D property, this would equate to an increase per week equivalent to the cost of 2 pints of milk or a first class stamp. Councillor Hebb explained that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee had met in November and agreed with the Local Council Tax Scheme, which would be going to February’s Budget Full Council for agreement. He stated that this scheme helped vulnerable residents that struggled to pay their Council Tax. He added that over the past year Children’s Social Care had seen an increased spend of £3.1mn, but Council Tax increases would only provide an additional £.14mn for Children’s Social Care. He stated that all local council were seeing an increase in social care demand post-COVID, and the Local Government Association had recommended an increase in Council Tax for all local authorities. He stated that inflation was currently 5%, so the Council Tax rise remained under the

inflation level. Councillor Hebb explained that Thurrock Council also had a low council tax base, for example Thurrock collected approximately £16.5mn less than Southend-on-Sea Borough Council in Council Tax.

Councillor Hebb moved on and explained that the Council would also need to reform services, as well as increasing Council Tax. He explained that therefore the Council would only be focusing on vital capital programme projects. Councillor Hebb added that the investment approach, which had helped increase reserves by 300% since 2016, was also being wound down, which would reduce the Council's income. He explained that there were currently £13mn in reserves, but these could only be used as a one-off solution, due to their nature and had to be used prudently.

Councillor Hebb highlighted point 2.8 of the report and felt that the investment approach had been successful, and had helped the Council survive the pandemic, but was now being wound down due to changing rules and a changing market. He explained that the Council's website had been updated which more detailed information regarding the investment approach and the treasury, and provided more consolidated information for residents. He stated that the report would go to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee next week, who would also receive a report regarding member oversight of the investment approach and Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). Councillor Hebb summarised and stated that the budget for 2022/23 would be balanced due to the reduced inflation stimulus of Adult and Children's Social Care; the redefinition of services; and the use of reserves.

Councillor Duffin thanked Councillor Hebb and his team for the report, and felt it was good to see more detailed information being published on the Council's website. He also highlighted that an additional £115mn had come into the Council because of the investment approach, and felt proud that the approach had been successful. Councillor Huelin added that although Thurrock Council had a lower Council Tax base than other unitary authorities, it had a higher than average number of service users. She stated that Thurrock Council had the lowest spend per head on Adult Social Care than any other unitary authority in England, and therefore were under pressure to provide a good service to users. She stated that pressure on Adult Social Care services had increased during the pandemic, and therefore spend had increased from £1.5mn to £3mn. She explained that although the Council operated a policy of early intervention, the additional income of £700,000 from the 1% Adult Social Care precept, would equate to roughly £875 per year for every service user. Councillor Huelin explained that therefore the team had to look for efficiencies within the service to ensure a good service was provided for service users. She stated that the commissioning team looked at all contracts to ensure the Council were receiving value for money, and the team also worked with the voluntary sector and other partners. She stated that the team had consulted with residents on the amalgamation of the day service to Cromwell Road, and had found the new service to provide more flexible respite care and increased opening hours.

Councillor Johnson stated that recent news headlines around the UK had

highlighted the issues that could occur within Children's Social Care, particularly during the pandemic, as COVID had increased pressures on services around the country due to an increased number of service users. He stated that at Thurrock, 50% of the overall budget was utilised by Children's Social Care as it could be hard to place children, and unregulated placements could cost upwards of £40,000 per week. He stated that the increase in Council Tax would be ring-fenced by Children' Social Care which would help protect vulnerable children throughout the borough. Councillor Spillman highlighted that the proposed Council Tax rise would still be under inflation levels, and the additional income from Council Tax would go directly to Adult and Children's Social Care to help the most vulnerable.

The Leader thanked Councillor Hebb and the finance team for their hard work on the report, and felt that Adult and Children's Social Care needed support to ensure the borough's most vulnerable residents were looked after. He stated that during the pandemic, the Council and the community had worked hard to support vulnerable people, and the Council would continue this support once the pandemic was over. He stated that it was good to see the Council changing and evolving, and felt proud that the investment approach had increased the Council's budget by £115mn. Councillor Hebb explained that the £16mn of interest payments associated with the investment approach had allowed for the £115mn investment into the Council. He highlighted section 2.8 of the report and explained that the spend on non-statutory services had increased due to the investment approach.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Noted the proposed updates to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the remaining deficits in future years.**
- 2. Supported the use of capital receipts and general reserves to meet the 2022/23 budget deficit of £2.490mn.**
- 3. Supported the proposed council tax increase of 1.99%.**
- 4. Supported the 1% Adult Social Care precept increase.**
- 5. Commented on the draft budget proposals within this report to inform the consultation with Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with the final budget proposals to be presented to Cabinet at its February meeting, ahead of Full Council on 23 February 2022.**

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

79. Report on Asset Related Savings (Decision: 110595)

Councillor Coxshall introduced the report and stated that it outlined the conversations that had been happening between the Council and community groups since July 2021 regarding the Thameside Complex. He stated that if

the Thameside Complex was transferred to the community, it would not only save the Council money, but would improve the cultural and arts offering within the borough. He stated that conversations were moving forward and progressing well, and more meetings were scheduled for the end of the month before a final report was presented to Cabinet in March. He felt that this project provided a good opportunity for the service and the borough, and hoped the outcome would be the transfer of the Thameside Complex to the community. He felt that this would be a long-term solution and would improve the service. Councillor Huelin thanked the community groups for the involvement and felt the conversation had been productive and constructive. She echoed comments from Councillor Coxshall and felt the community would be better placed to run the Thameside Complex, and would provide a much better arts offering within the borough. Councillor Coxshall added that if the Thameside was run by the community, they would be able to dedicate the time to it that it deserved, as well as increasing funding opportunities. He stated that the Council and community groups would work for the next three months to get it right and provide a long-term solution.

Councillor Spillman stated that he had previously worked with local arts groups following a motion to expand the arts offer in Thurrock. He felt that the best option for the Thameside Complex would be a community transfer as it would improve the Thameside, and would increase revenue for the arts in Thurrock, as the Complex would be tailored to the demands of the local community. He felt there was lots of future potential for the Thameside and felt that a community building would improve the service through improving infrastructure and expanding artistic education for residents. Councillor Hebb thanked officers, Member and the community groups for their work on this project, and felt that there was still some way to go until a decision was reached. He felt that although the staff in the Thameside worked hard to provide a good service, Thurrock Council was not best placed to run a theatre, and this could be better done by the local community. Councillor Johnson urged local community groups to work together and to contact the Council if they needed help or advice. Councillor Huelin added that the transfer to the community also provided staff more opportunities, as the theatre could put on different shows and offerings, without being limited by Thurrock Council policies. She added that community groups were also better placed to access Arts Council funding, which Thurrock Council could help facilitate and administer.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Noted the main points from the meeting with Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 November 2021.**
- 2. Noted the main points from the community based Roundtable meetings.**
- 3. Supported the relevant Portfolio Holders and Officers to continue with further discussions with the community over the future of the**

Thameside building and related services.

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

80. Parking Policy and Strategy, Parking Design and Development Standards, and Parking Enforcement Strategy (Decision: 110596)

Councillor Maney proposed that the report be deferred until a later meeting, as he had received a late representation from the Chair of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who had asked to have another look at the report. He felt that this was democracy in action, as scrutiny would have another chance to inform Cabinet's decision, and would ensure the decision was right first time. He stated that the report had been to scrutiny last year, but as the report and appendices would form part of the emerging Local Plan, they were important and scrutiny wished to have another look. He explained that the documents appended to the report would be the standard used when discussing planning applications with developers and therefore needed to be right. He thanked officers for their hard work on the report and felt they were well-informed documents.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Deferred the decision to a later Cabinet meeting.

81. Thurrock Regeneration Ltd - Proposed Development of Culver Centre and Field, South Ockendon (Decision: 110597)

Councillor Coxshall introduced the report and stated that it was the first step in the programme to release the brown field site, under the 3Rs policy. He explained that this parcel of land would be the start of the new programme for Thurrock Regeneration Ltd (TRL) and would ensure that new homes were delivered in South Ockendon quickly. He stated that a proportion of the homes would be affordable, which would ensure that young people in the borough could get on the housing ladder. He added that the report had gone to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who had recommended that the report go to Full Council for sign-off rather than Cabinet. He explained that the decision was within Cabinet's remit as it released the site to TRL. He stated that if the Council decided to give money to TRL directly, this would be a decision that would need the sign-off of Full Council. The Democratic Services and Governance Manager and Interim Monitoring Officer explained that he had received a statement from the Chair of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the report. The Leader replied that the Chair's queries had been discussed.

Councillor Spillman added that the housing market in the South East of England was particularly difficult for young people, and these houses could be accessed by young people through the help to buy scheme. He added that it would also reduce homelessness as more affordable housing became available, as an increase in the number of houses would reduce the demand.

Councillor Coxshall stated that all Council owned assets and land would be reviewed under the 3Rs policy, and this would help young people buy new homes in the area. He stated that it would also provide income for the Council and would benefit local communities, as residents would be able to live, work and play in the borough.

The Leader stated that there was a change to the second part of recommendation 2, which would now read “to enter into legal agreements, including appropriation of land and procurement, as required etc.”

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed that Thurrock Regeneration Ltd develop the Culver Centre and Field, South Ockendon site in accordance with the consented planning application.

2. Agreed that authority be delegated to the Corporate Director of Resources and Place Delivery, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Strategic Planning and External Relationships, to transfer value of the land, final funding to TRL, and to enter into legal agreements, including appropriation of land and procurement, as required to enable this development, subject to the financial parameters as set out in the report.

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

82. Nursery Provision - Alternative Delivery Model (Decision: 110598)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and stated that it formed part of the wider review of nursery provision and the Council’s assets. He stated that nursery provision was not a statutory duty for a local authority and wide consultation had been undertaken with service users and staff. He stated that the report would begin a procurement process to find an alternative provider and reduce the risk of closure. Councillor Mayes thanked Councillor Johnson and the team for the report. He stated that he did not want to see reduced nursery provision in Tilbury, but felt that nurseries would be better run by specialist providers than by the Council. Councillor Spillman felt pleased to see that the team had considered all options before presenting the report to Cabinet, and had had to consider closure of the nurseries to undertake due diligence. Councillor Maney echoed comments made by Councillor Mayes and stated that specialist nursery providers would be more efficient than Thurrock Council, would be more sustainable, and would provide better outcomes for service users and residents. The Leader thanked all of the nursery staff for their hard work throughout the pandemic and post-COVID.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed to the procurement of an alternative early education provider for Little Pirates and Neptune Nursery in Tilbury.

2. Agreed to the closure of Little Pirates and Neptune Nursery, should the procurement be unsuccessful.

3. Agreed to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Childrens Services, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder, to award contracts following completion of the procurement process.

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

The meeting finished at 8.08 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**