

Draft Minutes of the Reconvened 9 March 2022 Meeting of the Cabinet held on 23 March 2022 at 6.00pm

The deadline for call-ins is Friday 1 April 2022 at 5.00pm

Present: Councillors Rob Gledhill (Leader), Shane Hebb (Deputy Leader) (*arrived 6.07pm*), Mark Coxshall, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Allen Mayes, and Luke Spillman

Apologies: Councillors Jack Duffin and Ben Maney

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 and would be uploaded to the Council's website.

115. Thames Freeport: Business Rates Policy and Governance Structure (Decision: 110609)

The Leader welcomed Members to the reconvened Cabinet meeting, which had been adjourned on 9 March 2022, to discuss two recommendations relating to the Thames Freeport report. He stated that the Interim Monitoring Officer had been present at the 9 March meeting and had confirmed that Cabinet had followed the correct governance process regarding the adjournment and reconvening. He added that Members who had not been present at the adjourned Cabinet meeting could comment and vote on the recommendations being heard at this meeting. The Leader stated that events had moved on rapidly since the adjournment on 9 March and felt appalled by recent events regarding P&O Ferries. He explained that due to these events, he would be proposing alternative recommendations for 1.4 and 1.5.

Councillor Coxshall proposed that a new report regarding the Thames Freeport be brought to a future Cabinet meeting, which could outline all governance options for the Freeport and would provide the basis for a full discussion of these options. He felt that the Freeport would be a fantastic opportunity for the borough, as it could bring approximately £300m in business rate retention. He hoped that DP World would reoffer jobs to the 800 people who had been let go, and would be reoffered jobs at good rates rather

than £1.88 per hour. He felt disgusted that DP World and P&O Ferries thought this was an acceptable level of pay. He added that this pay rate could also give an unfair competitive advantage to P&O Ferries.

Councillor Hebb arrived at 6.07pm.

The Leader stated that although the Thames Freeport would provide £300mn in business rate retention and levelling up opportunities for residents, Cabinet wanted to have all options outlined, including confirmation of central government's plans. He stated that he would be proposing a pause to ensure Thurrock had all available information before moving forward. He thanked the Chief Executive and all officers for their hard work on this issue over the previous evening and weekend. He added that Thurrock wanted to buy-in to the Thames Freeport as it could be beneficial to the local area, but did not want to do so at the expense of others.

Councillor Huelin stated that she was the Ward Councillor for Corringham and Fobbing, and came from a family of seafarers. She felt disgusted by the behaviour of the senior leadership at DP World and P&O Ferries, as they seemed to be able to pay almost £150m promoting a golf tour, but did not have the money to pay for merchant navy pensions. She agreed with proposals to pause and wait for more information. Councillor Spillman thanked Councillor Coxshall and the Jackie Doyle-Price MP for their hard work on this issue. He felt that recent actions by DP World were a misjudgement, as DP World and the UK had previously had a mutually beneficial relationship, but recent actions had put future opportunities for DP World in the UK at risk. He stated that recent years had been difficult for industries such as bus companies, airlines, and ferry operators, but processes had to be followed correctly. He felt shocked by the actions of P&O Ferries, but felt proud of the position that Thurrock Council were taking on the issue. He felt that the behaviour of P&O Ferries was not acceptable in the twenty first century and agreed that the level of pay they were offering would put other ferry companies at a competitive disadvantage.

The Leader stated that workers in UK waters should be paid the national living wage as a minimum. Councillor Hebb added that the recent actions of DP World and P&O Ferries were not in the spirit of private enterprise. He stated that there were practices in place regarding consultation and collaboration with employees. He understood that 2022 had been a difficult year for ferry operators, but felt that 800 people had now lost their jobs in circumstances that did not align with modern labour relations. He stated that P&O Ferries were an established and long-running company, but their recent actions would cause challenges for employees and their families, as well as with other private and public sector organisations. The Leader summarised and

reiterated that DP World would remain a partner in Thames Freeport, unless otherwise directed by government. He stated that the Thames Freeport scheme had many moving parts, and was one of the largest schemes being undertaken in the area.

The Leader proposed an alternative recommendation 1.4 as follows: *“Agreed that a full report would be brought back to Cabinet to explore all options available in relation to the governance of the Thames Freeport, following conclusion of the UK government’s review.”* This was agreed by all Cabinet Members.

The Leader proposed an alternative recommendation 1.5 as follows: *“Cabinet condemns the actions of P&O Ferries and agrees that the Leader will write to the Thames Freeport asking that they pause their work in relation to governance arrangements, until the UK government’s review is completed”.* This was agreed by all Cabinet Members.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

4. Agreed that a full report would be brought back to Cabinet to explore all options available in relation to the governance of the Thames Freeport, following conclusion of the UK government’s review.

5. Condemned the actions of P&O Ferries and agreed that the Leader will write to the Thames Freeport asking that they pause their work in relation to governance arrangements, until the UK government’s review is completed.

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

The meeting finished at 6.23 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