

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 22 July 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Sue Gray (Mayor), Cathy Kent (Deputy Mayor), Tim Aker, Chris Baker, James Baker, Jan Baker, Clare Baldwin, Russell Cherry, Colin Churchman, Mark Coxshall, Leslie Gamester, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, Yash Gupta (MBE) (left at 8.32 pm), Graham Hamilton, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Terence Hipsey, Victoria Holloway (from 7.04 pm), Barry Johnson, Roy Jones, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Charlie Key, Steve Liddiard, Brian Little, Susan Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Tunde Ojetola (from 7.02 pm), Bukky Okunade, Jane Potheary, Robert Ray, Joycelyn Redsell, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice, Andrew Roast, Peter Smith, Graham Snell, Richard Speight, Deborah Stewart, Michael Stone, Pauline Tolson, Kevin Wheeler and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillors Terry Brookes, Garry Hague, Tom Kelly and Barry Palmer

In attendance: David Bull, Interim Chief Executive & Director of Planning and Transportation
Steve Cox, Assistant Chief Executive
Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing
Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services
Roger Harris, Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning
Sean Clark, Head of Corporate Finance
Mike Heath, Head of Environment
Jackie Hinchliffe, Head of HR, OD & Transformation
Karen Wheeler, Head of Strategy & Communications
David Lawson, Deputy Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer
Matthew Boulter, Principal Democratic Services Officer
Stephanie Cox, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

34. Apologies for absence

The Mayor apologised on behalf of Councillor Kelly, who was running late to the meeting.

Councillor Ojetola arrived at the meeting at 7.02 pm and Councillor Holloway arrived at 7.04 pm.

35. Minutes

The Minutes of Council, held on 24 June 2015, were approved as a correct record.

Councillor S. Little requested that the transcript of Public and Members questions be included in the printed agenda alongside the minutes in future, as she had requested at earlier meetings.

Councillor J. Kent observed that he could see no problem with the transcript of Public and Members questions being included alongside the minutes within future agendas, to which it was subsequently agreed.

36. Items of Urgent Business

The Mayor informed the Council that she had not agreed to the consideration of any items of urgent business.

37. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

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

The Mayor advised that since the last meeting of Council she had the pleasure of attending a variety of events, which included the unveiling of Thurrock's latest Heritage Plaque at the London Cruise Terminal in Tilbury and visiting schools and having afternoon tea.

The Mayor informed Members that Coalhouse Fort would be hosting a World War One Commemorative Sports Day on 24 August 2015 from 11.00 am to 3.00 pm and that visitors would have the opportunity to participate in sporting tournaments throughout the day as the soldiers did at Coalhouse Fort in 1915, in addition to interactive tours by Creative Blast where visitors could learn about stories from the Fort and re-enactments by the Great War Society.

The Mayor informed the Chamber that at the event the Engine Room Café would also be launched, which was completed as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund at Coalhouse Fort.

The Mayor further reported that the 7th Big Lunch event would be held the following week on Wednesday 29 July 2015 from 11.00 am to 3.00 pm in Grays Town Park and that she hoped as many members as possible would be able to attend.

The Mayor informed Members that she had put St Luke's Hospice donation boxes in each of the group offices and that the total money donated would be announced at the Council meeting in September.

The Mayor advised that the extraordinary meeting of Council to discuss matters relating to the Frost Estate and the proposal to create a parish council would be held on Wednesday 26 August from 7.00 pm in the main hall at Hassenbrook School.

Members were informed that residents of the Frost Estate would be receiving letters in the post the following week inviting them to the meeting and a formal notification and diary invitation to Members would be circulated following the meeting.

The Mayor further advised that a revised political balance calculation would also be ratified at the extraordinary Council meeting in August.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J. Kent, made the following announcement:

As everyone will know, yesterday we announced that the contract with our strategic partner, Serco, will end in November.

Also, as everyone will understand, the negotiations to end such a large and complicated contract have been long and detailed; the negotiations also include what can and what should not be said publicly. So tonight's statement is worded very carefully.

The contract costs Thurrock Council around £20 million every year – Serco admit that.

We have agreed to pay just under £10 million to end the contract – a lot of money, but only half what we have paid Serco – and before that Vertex – since 2005, and would pay them for the next five years too.

Obviously it's not quite that simple, but we know that in these times of austerity we would rather any profits, so to speak, went direct on services to local people rather than Serco's shareholders.

That money is not simply a pay-off, but includes things like computer equipment and telephony that will transfer back, as well as some sub-contractor costs – but admittedly there is a loss of profit payment within it.

This is not the time to detail the savings to the council – and council taxpayers of Thurrock – that will become clear over the coming months as we analyse the future savings we have to make, here in the chamber, in cabinet, in overview and scrutiny and in the public meetings we will be holding.

However it is clear that there will be major savings of between £3½ million and £4 million every year.

Back in 2004 when the contract was signed, times were very different, local authorities had money and it was thought the so-called efficiencies of the private sector would improve services in the public sector.

Eleven years on and things have changed, yet the contract signed all those years ago did not allow for our contractor's services to change with the times.

As you can tell from this we are looking at all of our outsourced services and staff – Billfinger for example – with a view to closely examining the advantages and disadvantages of bringing them back in-house or not.

I don't want to commit to making any further decisions here tonight, but I do know the hard work and effort our facilities management team and others put in on behalf of local people and I want us to find the best way forward for them and us too.

Finally tonight, I'd like to assure the 350 or so people who will be returning to the council that we will be working very closely with Serco to make that move as smooth as possible over the coming months – we value their expertise and experience, and we are looking forward to them joining the Thurrock Council family.

39. Questions from Members of the Public

A copy of the transcript of questions and answers can be viewed under the relevant meeting date at <http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/thurrock>

40. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

The Mayor informed Members that, in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme, the requisite notice had been given by two members of the public and one Councillor who wished to present a petition at the meeting.

Mr Coleman presented a petition on behalf of 1084 residents of Chafford Hundred, which called on the Council to immediately review the service it provides to the residents of Chafford Hundred, particularly in regards to the environment, public protection, road safety and traffic.

Councillor Redsell presented a petition on behalf of residents of Parkside, Grays, which called on the Council to introduce a one-way system between King Edward Drive and Woodview.

Mrs Harper presented a petition on behalf of residents of Baker Street and Woolings Row in Orsett, which objected to the proposed traffic regulation order to make Baker Street (Woolings Row) a no waiting area from Woolings Row and up to and including Foxhound Riding School.

41. Petitions Update Report

Members received a report on the status of those petitions handed in at Council Meetings and Council Offices over the past six months.

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

The Mayor enquired whether Group Leaders wished for any changes to be made to the appointments previously made to Committees and outside bodies, statutory and other panels.

The Leader of the Council apologised that Councillor Brookes was not in attendance to present his Communities and Public Protection Cabinet Member Report and answer the questions that had been submitted. The Leader of the Council remarked that this, combined with his non-attendance at the previous meeting, was unacceptable and as a result declared that Councillor Potheary would replace Councillor Brookes as Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Protection.

As a result of the appointment of Councillor Potheary to the Cabinet, the Leader of the Council informed the Chamber that he wished to make the following changes:

- for Councillor Kerin to be appointed as a member of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Potheary.
- for Councillor Liddiard to be appointed as a member of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Potheary.
- for Councillor Potheary to be removed from the membership of the Licensing Committee, and for the appointment to the Labour vacancy created to be confirmed at a later date.

As a result of the appointment of Councillor Kerin to the membership of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, he would thereby cease to be a substitute for that Committee.

The Leader of the Conservative Group confirmed that he did not wish to make any changes to appointments that had previously been made.

The Leader of the UKIP group informed the Chamber that he wished to make the following change, in light of the resignation of Councillor Churchman from the UKIP group:

- for Councillor Churchman to be removed from the membership of the Planning Committee, and for the appointment to the UKIP vacancy created to be confirmed at a later date.

At 7.27 pm there was a disturbance from the Public Gallery, during which the Mayor warned the person concerned not to interrupt, when the individual continued to do so he was removed from the meeting.

Councillor Ray, Independent Member, confirmed that he did not wish to make any changes to appointments that had previously been made but advised that changes would be made at the next Council meeting.

The Mayor advised that she had accepted a request from Councillor Churchman to make a short statement.

Councillor Churchman thanked the Mayor for allowing him to make a short statement in light of his recent resignation from the UKIP group. Councillor Churchman explained the reason for his resignation was because he felt that the leader of the group had tried to use his influence and position to interfere with his work and as a result advised that he had decided to resign in order to maintain his integrity.

The Mayor permitted Councillor Snell, Leader of the UKIP Group the right to reply.

In response Councillor Snell, Leader of the UKIP Group, stated that he had consulted with the Monitoring Officer and was confident that he had neither said anything unreasonable to Councillor Churchman nor made any unreasonable requests of him. He said that as had been reported in the press, the group had hoped to benefit of Councillor Churchman's years of experience, but it proved difficult to do so as Councillor Churchman refused to attend meetings to resolve some of the issues which he had felt strongly about. Councillor Snell observed that communication was important and that a failure to communicate nearly always resulted badly.

Councillor Snell accepted that he and Councillor Churchman did not agree regarding the decision that had been exercised by Councillor Churchman, and whilst recognising that Councillor Churchman's resignation was on a point of principle and a courageous thing to do, he called on Councillor Churchman to act again on a point of principle and do what he believed would be the courageous thing to do, to put his seat up for a by-election in order for the residents of Stanford East and Corringham Town to have their say on the matter.

Members voted unanimously in favour of the changes to Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies, Statutory and Other Panels.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Councillor Kerin be appointed as a member of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Potheary; and thereby for Councillor Kerin to be removed as a substitute for that Committee.**
- 2. That Councillor Liddiard be appointed as a member of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Potheary.**
- 3. That Councillor Potheary be removed from the membership of the Licensing Committee, and for the appointment to the Labour vacancy created to be confirmed at a later date.**

4. **That Councillor Churchman be removed from the membership of the Planning Committee, and for the appointment to the UKIP vacancy created to be confirmed at a later date.**

Addendum to the Minutes:

Subsequent to the meeting it was clarified that Councillor Liddiard should have also been appointed as Vice-Chair of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following his replacement of Councillor Potheary as Member and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Group Leaders were consulted and for clarity it was agreed for Councillor Liddiard to be appointed as the Vice-Chair of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Potheary, ahead of the next meeting scheduled for September.

5. **That Councillor Liddiard be appointed Vice-Chair of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to replace Councillor Potheary.**

43. Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report 2014/15

The Mayor advised Members that the report introduced the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2014-15, which in accordance with the Council's Constitution, should be presented to Council each year in order to detail the work of the six Overview and Scrutiny Committees and their main achievements.

Upon being put to the vote, Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendation, whereupon the Mayor declared this to be carried.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2014-15 be noted.

44. Review of Members' Allowances - Report of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel

The Mayor advised that the Monitoring Officer had received and accepted proposed amendments for the recommendations contained within the report from Councillor J. Kent and Councillor Gledhill, details of which had been circulated electronically to all members in advance and tabled at the meeting.

Prior to the meeting a typographical error in the printed report was brought to the attention of Members, as there were two recommendations numbered as 1.2. For clarification the second recommendation 1.2 in the printed report was subsequently referred to as 1.2.1.

The Mayor advised Members on the process for dealing with both amendments at the meeting.

Councillor J. Kent, the Leader of the Council first proposed his amendments to the recommendations contained within the report which included:

- To insert '*i) Portfolio Holders*' at recommendation 1.2.1
- To delete recommendation 1.4 in the printed report, which was '*The SRA for portfolio holders is increased to 130% of the Basic Allowance or £11,275.*'

Upon being put to the vote, Members voted unanimously in favour of the proposed amendments detailed above, whereupon the Mayor declared these to be carried.

Councillor J. Kent, the Leader of the Council, then introduced the report which set out the recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel following its review of Members Allowances, which was undertaken every 4 years.

Councillor J. Kent remarked that although the increased allowance for Cabinet Members would be welcome, it was not reasonable for the additional allowance to be accepted in light of the budget savings faced and the impact on public services. He further observed that he felt it was appropriate the Leader of the UKIP group, as a group that had more than 4 members but was not the main opposition group, should be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) of 25% of the Basic Allowance for the time dedicated.

Councillor Gledhill agreed that no Members needed an increase to their allowances during a time when the authority needed to deliver budget savings but remarked that he found the report to be contradictory. He further advised that he was unhappy how the remuneration had been calculated and that he wanted a full review of the support provided to Members to be undertaken in order to demonstrate value for money and provide clarity to Members, which included the supply of laptops, printers, paper, ink cartridges and support from back office Member Services staff.

As a result, Councillor Gledhill proposed his amendment to recommendation 1.2 in the printed report, which was seconded by Councillor Hebb, which read as follows:

"That the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee carries out a full review of support to members to ensure more open and transparent use of public funds."

Councillor J. Kent opposed the suggested amendment, which if agreed would overturn the independent panel's recommendations, as he felt it was inappropriate for the Council to instruct an independent panel to undertake a review and determine recommendations, which could then be disregarded and subjected to an internal Overview and Scrutiny process led by Members.

He further explained that he felt it would be inappropriate for the Council Tax Payer, who faced cuts to their own household budget and services, to fund Councillors ICT equipment and printing.

In response Councillor Gledhill explained that it was not his expectation that Council Tax Payers should fund Councillors laptops and printing, but rather that a review of support provided to Members should be undertaken to demonstrate value for money and transparency.

Councillor J. Kent observed that there could only be two outcomes of an Overview and Scrutiny Review, either keeping the process the same or overruling the recommendation of independent panel which would result in Members printing, postage and stationery costs being borne by the Council Tax Payer.

Councillor Halden declared a Point of Order and asked Councillor J. Kent to withdraw his comment, as he felt a review would be beneficial to identify what Member support worked well and what could be improved, in order to demonstrate value for money on contracts and operational matters.

A brief debate took place on the level of support provided to all Members, particularly in relation to Member Services staff.

Councillor Coxshall explained that he was concerned that the report of the independent panel confused matters further, in particular relation to the proper conduct of Members in the use of Council stationery and postage and whether Member Services Officers should assist with such requests.

Councillor B. Rice felt that the matter was being unnecessarily overcomplicated and that it was morally correct that Members should not be accepting an increase in allowances.

Councillor Speight echoed that the report had been compiled by an independent panel and felt that their recommendations should be endorsed.

A number of Members felt that the debate had been unnecessarily extended and would not help promote a positive public image of Elected Members.

Councillor J. Kent suggested that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee could investigate the matter further if the Chair, Councillor Hebb, wished.

Councillor Coxshall declared a Point of Order and felt that a vote should be undertaken, following which Councillor Gledhill proposed that he would withdraw his proposed amendment if the original recommendation 1.2, as printed in the report, was also removed.

Members indicated their agreement for recommendation 1.2 to be withdrawn, along with the proposed amendment that had been submitted by Councillor Gledhill.

Upon being put to the vote, Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations, which included Councillor J. Kent's earlier amendments, whereupon the Mayor declared these to be carried.

RESOLVED:

- 1. There is no change to the current Basic Allowance payable to Thurrock councillors (remaining at £8,670 per annum for Thurrock Councillors).**
- 2. There is no change to the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) for the following positions:**
 - a) The Leader of the Council**
 - b) The Deputy Leader of the Council**
 - c) The Chair of Planning Committee**
 - d) The Vice-chair of Planning Committee**
 - e) The Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees**
 - f) The Vice-chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees**
 - g) The Chair of Licensing Committee**
 - h) The Vice-chair of Licensing Committee**
 - i) The Chair of Standards and Audit Committee**
 - j) The Leader of the Main Opposition Group**
 - k) The Deputy Leader of the Main Opposition Group**
 - i) Portfolio Holders**
- 3. The Allowances Scheme be made clear that the qualification of 16 seats (or one third of the seats on Council) is required for a group to attract an allowance for the Deputy Leader of the Main Opposition Group.**
- 4. Leaders of other opposition groups, which have more than four members but are not the main opposition group, should be paid an SRA of 25% of the Basic Allowance (£2,165) and that this is added to the Allowances Scheme.**
- 5. The Chair of the Health and Well-being Board does not receive an SRA.**
- 6. The Allowance Scheme continues to prohibit the receipt of more than one SRA regardless of the number of remunerated posts a Member may hold.**
- 7. The allowance for ordinary co-optees on the Standards and Audit Committee remain unchanged.**
- 8. The allowance for statutory co-optees on overview and scrutiny committees is reduced to £260 per annum in line with Southend Borough Council.**

9. **The Civic Allowances for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor remain unchanged.**
 10. **Allowances for the following remain unchanged:**
 - a) **Dependants Carers' Allowance**
 - b) **Subsistence Allowance**
 - c) **Travelling Allowances**
 11. **The remuneration for the Independent Persons in relation to disciplinary action against a statutory officer remain at £500 with the Panel reviewing this in later years.**
 12. **Basic Allowances, SRAs and co-optees' allowances are indexed to the annual percentage salary increase.**
 13. **Mileage allowance is adjusted in line with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs rates.**
 14. **Subsistence Allowance to be indexed to the same percentage increase that may be applied by the Council to officer subsistence allowances.**
 15. **Child Care rates are indexed to the national minimum wage applicable to the age of the carer.**
- 45. Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board - Change to Membership**

Councillor B. Rice, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, introduced the report which requested changes to Membership of the Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board and set out the revised Terms of Reference.

Councillor Key observed that the board had grown in size over recent years, but that it was important to ensure it could still function on a strategic level in future.

Councillor B. Rice explained that it was important the board worked with partners but agreed that it was imperative the board functioned on a strategic level and noted the concern expressed.

Upon being put to the vote, Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations, whereupon the Mayor declared these to be carried.

RESOLVED:

1. **That Council agree to NHS Providers NELFT, SEPT, and BTUH becoming members of Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board;**

2. **That Council agree to Thurrock CVS becoming a member of Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board;**
3. **That Council agree to Thurrock CCG's Executive Nurse becoming a member of Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board; and**
4. **That subject to agreement to recommendations 1.1 – 1.3, Council agrees the amended Terms of Reference for the Health and Wellbeing Board.**

46. Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care

Councillor Okunade, Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, introduced the report and, in doing so, highlighted some of the key achievements of the Portfolio, which included:

- That the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had produced some positive media headlines and that it was expanding its role to include the piloting of the First Response Team to increase capacity to focus cases appropriately towards early intervention, where appropriate to the levels of need and risk.
- That the MASH brought together a variety of agencies into an integrated co-located multi agency team where information was shared appropriately and securely on children, families and adults to prevent the escalation of problems.
- That the Troubled Families programme focused on families with worklessness, poor school attendance and anti-social behaviour and officers continued to work closely with partners.
- That the Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children's Board had continued to be proactive within the community, in order to raise awareness on safeguarding, promote online safety and prevent sexual exploitation and grooming.
- That the numbers of Looked After Children in Thurrock had risen over recent years but the service was committed to supporting families to enable children and young people to stay safely in their own home wherever possible and appropriate.

The Cabinet Member thanked all the staff, Children in Care Council, Young Peoples groups and foster carers for their hard work and congratulated the Youth Offending Service for their achievements.

Members questioned the Cabinet Member and received responses as follows:

- Councillor S. Little questioned why Looked After Children in therapeutic foster care placements experienced significantly better life outcomes than those in Thurrock placements and what the Cabinet Member was doing to close the gap.

The Cabinet Member advised that it was difficult to make comparisons and that all Thurrock Looked After Children had the

same level of care, with many children were doing well and had good outcomes later in life.

- Councillor Halden highlighted that the report identified that spending on agency staff remained a high risk area for the budget. Whilst he appreciated the service was demand led, he observed that the spending on Thurrock's own staff was not, and questioned what the Cabinet Member was doing to ensure that spending on agency staff did not pose a risk to the budget.

The Cabinet Member advised that the retention of staff was a national issue and that Thurrock competed with London Borough's in the recruitment of staff.

- Councillor MacPherson highlighted that there were only seven lines in the report regarding the support provided to care leavers and argued that more work needed to be dedicated to care leavers in order to help them achieve improved outcomes, such as in securing and holding down tenancies. She further reported that the figure of those care leavers being recorded in employment, education and training was very poor – with a documented increase from 35% to only 42% – that was well below the 70% aspirational target. She questioned what plans and timescales the Cabinet Member had to improve the figures detailed within the report.

The Cabinet Member advised that it was the ultimate aim of the service to ensure that 100% of care leavers, without complex disabilities or mental health issues, were in continuous employment, education or training and assured Councillor MacPherson that she would monitor progress against this.

In response Councillor MacPherson felt that this issue should not just be monitored and requested the Cabinet Member to provide a written response outside of the meeting to detail what the service was doing to improve the outcomes of care leavers and those in employment, education and training, including timescales.

Councillor Okunade confirmed that she would provide a written response following the meeting and that it was important to monitor progress.

47. Report of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Protection

The Mayor advised that the item would be withdrawn following the Leader of the Council's earlier announcement, and that the report would be rescheduled for debate at a later date.

48. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that one question had been submitted to the Leader and a further three questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee.

Councillor Redsell confirmed that she wished to withdraw her two questions submitted to the Cabinet Member of Communities and Public Protection, in light of Councillor J. Kent's earlier announcement, and that she would resubmit for the following meeting.

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

49. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

There were no reports from Members representing the Council on outside bodies.

50. Minutes of Committees

The Minutes of Committees, as set out in the Agenda, were received.

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

Members received an information report updating them on progress in respect of Motions resolved at Council over the past year.

52. Motion submitted by Councillor Ojetola

The Motion, as printed in the Agenda, was proposed by Councillor Ojetola and seconded by Councillor Gledhill. The Motion read as follows:

"Radicalisation of youths seems to be quite rampant, doing nothing is not an option as parents are losing their children to extremism. We call on Thurrock Council to create a member led committee to co-ordinate a multi-agency approach to tackle the threat of extremism and radicalisation in line with our Duty to Prevent".

Councillor Ojetola introduced the motion, and in doing so explained that it was vital Thurrock did not become complacent as young people from all backgrounds could be radicalised online and through the use of social media.

Councillor J. Kent welcomed the motion and explained a lot of work was being undertaken to ensure this was not an issue in Thurrock, however recognised that it was important not to be complacent. He proposed that the Constitution Working Group draft the Terms of Reference for the Member led group so that it could be referred and adopted by Council in September, which was agreed by all Members.

Councillor Gledhill welcomed the fact that there was political consensus and felt that the Member led group would be able to take a considered approach to prevent young people from being radicalised in Thurrock, stating that even one person would be one person too many.

Councillor Okunade expressed her support for the motion in order to be vigilant.

Councillor Gupta commented that there were excellent community relationships in Thurrock to prevent such issues and that it was important all strands of the community worked together.

Councillor Hebb stated that Civic Leadership on such issues was important.

Councillor Ojetola remarked that he was pleased there were no reported cases in Thurrock, welcomed the proposal for the Constitution Working Group to draft the Terms of Reference and stated that learning about such issues – and atrocities of the Holocaust – were important so that young people could learn lessons from history.

Upon being put to the vote, Members voted unanimously in favour of the Motion, whereupon the Mayor declared the motion was carried.

RESOLVED:

Radicalisation of youths seems to be quite rampant, doing nothing is not an option as parents are losing their children to extremism. We call on Thurrock Council to create a member led committee to co-ordinate a multi-agency approach to tackle the threat of extremism and radicalisation in line with our Duty to Prevent.

At 8.32 pm Councillor Gupta left the meeting.

53. Motion submitted by Councillor Aker

The Motion, as printed in the agenda, was proposed by Councillor Aker and seconded by Councillor Smith. The Motion read as follows:

“The Council calls on the Cabinet to initiate a local referendum for the residents of Greenwood House, Butler House and Davall House in Grays, to ask whether they accept demolition of the three blocks and the Council's proposals so far to re-house the residents. The Council calls for this referendum to be held before further consultation is carried out.”

Councillor Aker introduced the motion and in doing so reported that residents of the three blocks affected had attended surgeries to ask questions regarding the proposals. He expressed concerns that those who wanted to leave were being offered a reported sum of £4,000 and would be placed on a higher priority band of the Council's Housing Waiting List, thereby disadvantaging other residents in need of Council housing. He further felt that residents

should be given an opportunity to have their views heard and to be able to petition the Council in order to trigger a local referendum.

Councillor S. Little observed that she had worked alongside a previous Councillor on similar proposals in the past where extensive consultations had been undertaken, during which concerns had been highlighted regarding where the residents would be housed, how long the process would take, and the loss of Council properties. She reported that there were similar high rise blocks in Grays and Chadwell-St-Mary but also recognised that if the Council was committed to the regeneration of Grays a brave decision would need to be taken. She further explained that she felt a strong business plan needed to be developed so that a clear decision could be made, and that she did not think the considerable cost of a referendum would help the Council deliver the strong vision.

Councillor Worrall explained that Thurrock had a long and proud history of consulting with residents and did not think that a referendum would be beneficial in this case. She reported that a referendum would cost the Council a considerable sum of money and would not be able to deliver what the residents wanted, as a referendum by its virtue implied that whatever vote won would prevail. She explained that if a vote was won to demolish the blocks this may not be possible to deliver as the proposals had not yet been developed enough at this stage to identify all possible outcomes.

Councillor Worrall further reported that if the motion was agreed and a referendum undertaken, this would require the Council to cease all consultation and stop talking with local residents, and that this would be an undesirable outcome for all concerned. As a result she felt the motion was ill thought through and poorly timed, following a substantial consultation period with local residents that included:

- In October 2014 the first residents meeting of the steering group had been held, which had met each month since in order to communicate and consult on the proposals.
- That in September 2014 a consultation was held and 377 responses received.
- In March-June 2015 a further second consultation was undertaken to which 202 responses were received.
- Two meetings had been held in June and July 2015, which had been attended by over 100 leaseholders and tenants.
- That a cross-party Housing Regeneration Development Board had been established, the first meeting of which was expected to take place the following week in order to discuss the future of the six high rise tower blocks in Grays, not just the three mentioned in the motion.
- That a third of the residents of the blocks referenced in the motion were taking actions to leave.
- That numerous reports had been referred to Cabinet for Members consideration, in order to reach the best decision.

Councillor Kerin thanked Councillor Aker for this motion, but added that he could not support the motion as he felt that it was a blunt instrument that was not an appropriate means of engagement with residents which would prevent any consultation from taking place.

Councillor Halden felt that the Council Consultation process was not fit for purpose, especially on planning matters, and observed that the consultation responses received had been poor. He felt that a referendum was a good opportunity for local residents to have their say.

Councillor Hebb advised Members of the definition of a referendum and felt that there was more work to do before a referendum could be held. He added that he was nervous of setting groups, parties and residents against each other and explained that a referendum inferred that a decision would be made on the outcome, which would not be the case in this instance. He further reported that spending money from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) on a referendum with no legal standing would set a dangerous precedent, but was sympathetic to the residents' concerns.

Councillor Coxshall observed that a 3.5% response rate to the public consultation was poor and felt that a referendum on such issues, and similarly the Frost Estate, was beneficial.

Councillor J. Kent explained that the consultation process was much more than simply an online or paper form, and that people had been knocking on the doors of each flat to engage with residents. He added that although he did not support the motion he welcomed the tone of the content as residents of the blocks affected had been part of this ward for over 20 years, and that many he now considered to be his friends.

Councillor J. Kent advised Members why the proposals were being developed and reported that residents from the blocks attended his surgeries each month to highlight their concerns and their desire to be housed elsewhere – as many residents felt that they were 'stuck' in the high rise. Whilst recognising that there were many residents who wanted to move out of the high rise flats, he acknowledged that there were also long-term residents who wanted to stay – for whom the flats suited their needs by being nearby to family members for help and support. He felt that the matter needed to be handled sensitively and with patience, not by using a blunt referendum, and observed that although there were two opposing sides – those who wanted to move and those who wanted to stay – there appeared to be no acrimony between the two groups and was concerned that a referendum would divide the residents.

Councillor J. Kent further reported that two workshops for residents and leaseholders were planned for August in an attempt to further develop proposals and explained that if all residents could not be satisfied moving forward then the Council would have failed in its efforts.

Councillor Speight observed that democracy did not start and stop at the ballot box and felt the consultations were essential in order to engage with residents and allow their views to be heard. He reported that community consensus had not been reached through the Frost Estate referendum, and that a referendum was not an appropriate mechanism to fix all solutions.

Councillor Cherry observed that there were residents of other high rise tower blocks in Chadwell-St-Mary and Tilbury who would have also preferred to have been rehoused, and was concerned that other blocks required more repair and maintenance than those suggested for demolition, which were of a good standard.

Councillor Maney recognised that there was a significant difference between a referendum and a consultation and explained that the issue was too important to allow only the residents who currently lived in the flats to determine its future, as if the decision was taken to demolish the blocks that would affect all those on the Council Housing Waiting List and residents for years to come.

Councillor Aker felt that the consultations undertaken so far had not given residents any clearer answers on the proposals and observed that the purpose of his motion was to make the decision making process and proposals clearer.

Upon being put to the vote, 12 Members voted in favour of the Motion, 29 Members voted against and 2 abstained, whereupon the Mayor declared the motion to be lost.

The meeting finished at 9.07 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**