

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 20 March 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Susan Little (Mayor), Qaisar Abbas (Deputy Mayor), John Allen, Alex Anderson, Deborah Arnold, Paul Arnold, Gary Byrne, Adam Carter, John Cecil, Daniel Chukwu, George Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Robert Gledhill, Aaron Green, James Halden, Vikki Hartstean, Mark Hooper, Mark Hurrell, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Ben Maney, Jacqui Maney, Cici Manwa, Valerie Morris-Cook, Sara Muldowney, Augustine Ononaji, Srikanth Panjala, Maureen Pearce, Terry Piccolo, Georgette Polley, Kairen Raper, Joycelyn Redsell, Sue Shinnick, Graham Snell, Neil Speight, Luke Spillman, James Thandi, Lee Watson and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillors Gary Collins, Tom Kelly, Fraser Massey, Elizabeth Rigby and Sue Sammons

In attendance: Dr Dave Smith, Chief Executive
Claire Demmel, Executive Director Place
Daniel Fenwick, Executive Director Corporate Services/
Monitoring Officer
Gavin Jones, Lead Commissioner
Alix MacFarlane, Communications Advisor - Intervention and
Improvement, Interim Director
Kerry Thomas, Chief of Staff
Luke Tyson, Chief Intervention Officer
Ian Wake, Executive Director Adults and Health
Matthew Boulter, Head of Democratic, Scrutiny and Member
Services
Jenny Shade, Principal Democratic Services Officer

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

150. Minutes

Minutes of Council held on the 28 February 2024 were approved as a correct record.

Councillor Speight referred to his speech on the budget and had realised he had overstepped the mark by using the phrase "pen pushers". This was a potentially derogatory remark that could be perceived by some in the process of drawing up the budget as aimed at them and that was unfair.

151. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

152. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

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

The Mayor expressed her condolences to the sad passing of Basildon Mayor, Councillor Luke Mackenzie with a minute silence being held for members to show their respect.

The Leader made the following announcements:

Thanked all members for their hard work over the last 12 months and thanked those members retiring, Councillors Collins, Pearce, Snell, Thandi and Madam Mayor for their hard work and services to the community. The Leader also wished those members seeking re-election good luck.

Thanked Alix MacFarlane, Director of communications who would be leaving the council next week for the fantastic job she had done improving the communications of the council.

Welcomed new members of the Senior Leadership Team.

Stated the council had identified the extra savings required to balance the budget, this supported the administration's decision to not implement a 10% council tax rise.

Work would commence in the Town Hall in April and over the summer months to improve the safety for members and officers and to also improve access for those with disabilities.

Had attended the opening of the new Stanford Mosque and Thurrock Muslim Centre with Madam Mayor last week. Not only was this an important community centre but a place of worship for Muslims in the east of the borough.

In regard to the PAS review the administration had been committed to incorporating all elements of the recent review with some of the actions already being implemented, some requiring a new action plan which was being worked on and some incurring additional costs which required to be calculated and confirmed.

Referred to the complaints report that had been presented to the Standards and Audit Committee about the conduct of a councillor on potential racism.

154. Questions from Members of the Public

The Mayor informed the chamber that one question had been received from members of public.

From	To	Question	Overview of Response
Ms Sisterson	Councillor B Maney	In the name of transparency and accountability, how do you propose engaging with local communities in the decision-making process regarding the uses of s106 money arising from developments in their area?	The council was currently reviewing the engagement processes with regards to s106 allocations and appreciated there were currently differing levels of engagement with local communities across Thurrock and were keen to improve these at each stage of the 106 processes. Councillor B Maney stated the Council would take Ms Sisterson's suggestions about the offer of Aveley Football club for training pitches as part of developments using s106 money.

155. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

A petition was presented by Councillor Polley relating to inconsiderate parking at various locations within the ward, including but not exclusive to Stifford Road, Danbury Crescent and Garron Lane. Councillor B Maney provided a response.

A petition was presented by Councillor Polley relating to relating to a community request, for the councils help in identifying possible sites for a registered charity to set up an academy. Councillor B Maney provided a response.

A petition was presented by Councillor Redsell relating to reduce the speed limit on Woodview from 40 to 30, Blackshots roundabout to King Edward Drive. Councillor B Maney provided a response.

156. Petitions Update Report

Members received a report on the status of those petitions handed in at Council meetings and Council office.

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

There were no changes made to appointments.

158. Overview and Scrutiny Function

The Leader presented the report that referred to the progress and decisions required to action improvement activity around the Overview and Scrutiny function. The report asked Members to support the introduction of a new Overview and Scrutiny Committee Structure with a view to further developing culture, skills, work programming and constitutional procedures of the function in future months.

Councillor J Kent stated the Labour would be supporting the recommendations this evening, this had been a lengthy process with lots of debate and opportunities for all members to have their input. Councillor J Kent stated he had seen a lot of scrutiny functions over the years but not seen a scrutiny function that really worked. Consideration had to be given on what support would be provided to scrutiny committees members in regard to types of questions to be asked and for external mentoring and coached to be in place.

Councillor Speight stated he would not be supporting the restructuring of the scrutiny function recommendation but would support as much as he possibly could during the process through the next municipal year.

The Leader summed up by stating it was important there was the full engagement and participation by members and that the right support and training would be provided so that better scrutiny of executive policies and decisions could take place.

The majority of Members voted in favour of the recommendation 1.1 with three members abstaining (Councillors Allan, Byrne and Speight).

Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations 1.2 and 1.3.

The majority of Members voted in favour of the recommendation 1.4 with one member against (Councillor Speight) and two members abstaining (Councillors Allan and Byrne).

The majority of Members voted in favour of the recommendation 1.5 with one member abstaining (Councillor Byrne).

Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations 1.6 and 1.7.

RESOLVED

- 1. Agreed the restructuring of the Overview and Scrutiny Function to consist of three committees: People, Place and Corporate, as detailed in this report and appendices.**
- 2. That the new Overview and Scrutiny committee structure starts for the municipal year 2024/25.**

- 3. Subject to the addition of two substitutes per political group to be added to each committee, agree the terms of reference of these committees at appendix 1 and delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to include them in the Constitution.**
- 4. Cease the Local Development Plan Task Force and the Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee from the 2024/25 municipal year in accordance with Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's (CfGS) findings and recommendations.**
- 5. Formally adopt the Overview and Scrutiny Protocol attached at appendix 2 and incorporate it into the constitution as part of the forthcoming revised Overview and Scrutiny Chapter.**
- 6. That the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force continues as a body until such time the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers creating a Lower Thames Crossing Task and Finish Group.**
- 7. That the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee be able to create two task and finish groups in addition to a Lower Thames Crossing Task and Finish Group.**

Councillor Speight raised a Point of Order, Council Procedure Rules, Paragraph 3.4 (f). He wished to make a formal complaint about the Leader's comments during his announcements on the conduct of Councillor Byrne regarding racist comments.

159. Greater Essex Devolution

The Leader presented the report that covered the actions taken so far and the next steps. The Government had decided to pause the negotiations until after the general election which had been disappointing. The Leader hoped that following the general elections, negotiations could continue to enable a greater prosperity and opportunities for our communities.

Councillor J Kent stated the pause was regrettable and a huge disappointment as the economics of scale across Essex was required to help improve economic regeneration. Stated that following the general elections, efforts would need to be increased to ensure a deal that worked in Thurrock and worked for the whole of Essex.

Councillor Halden reiterated from previous meetings that fundamentally a devolution deal was not needed, there was a need for local government reform. Members did not want reform as the reasons behind this were based on electoral consequences.

Councillor Speight agreed this was a missed opportunity with a need for joint working across a wide range of subjects and sharing of knowledge where all could benefit. He welcomed the whole concept of devolution and looked

forward to this hopefully starting over the next year, but the Council had to be very prudent and cautious.

The Leader summed up by giving reassurance that although devolution was not happening, the South Essex councils were working very closely together to try and bring ways of working together across partnership. Agreed the deal had got to be for the benefit of Thurrock especially Freeport as this was in the council's area. With the Leader on the Board, it also had the full support of both Members of Parliament who undertook a lot of work in Westminster to ensure any benefits from Freeports came to Thurrock.

Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendation.

RESOLVED

Full council noted the progress and current pause of the proposed Greater Essex Devolution deal.

160. Council Tax - Second Homes Premium

Councillor Snell presented the report that provided Members with further clarification to enable consideration of the revised recommendations set out in this report.

Councillor J Kent stated the Labour groups would be in support of the recommendations.

Councillor Speight stated this was a guessing game and although the council had the option to change their mind next year he questioned what signal this would send out. Reiterated from previous meetings that the second home policy had been brought in for second homes in rural and holiday areas.

The majority of Members voted in favour of the recommendation 1.1 with three members against (Councillors Allan, Byrne and Speight).

Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations 1.2 and 1.3.

RESOLVED

- 1. That Council approved the introduction of a 100% council tax premium (in addition to normal council tax) on properties classed as 2nd Homes from 1 April 2025.**
- 2. That Council noted that in approving 1.1, that Council retains the option to amend or revoke the decision before it comes into force on 1 April 2025.**
- 3. That Council approved in line with 1.2, the decision will be returned to Council for review, within budget setting reports for 2025/26.**

161. Local Government Boundary Commission England Boundary Review 2024/2025

The Leader presented the report that had set out the outcomes of the Boundary Working Group following its consideration of the Local Government Boundary Commission England request for submissions from political groups on ward boundaries. The Leader made one amendment to recommendation 1.2 to include the Vice Chair as part of the consultation.

Councillor Morris-Cook stated it had been her pleasure working on this working group and made two amendments to recommendation 1.1 in that the name of newly created ward was to be confirmed and with reference to the two members, one member be appointed from west Thurrock wards and the second member from one of the wards in the east of the borough.

Members voted unanimously in favour of the two amended recommendations.

RESOLVED

- 1. The Members' Boundary Review Working Group recommended that Full Council make a submission for the creation of a new Purfleet-on-Thames ward (name to be confirmed) with two members. With one member coming from the west Thurrock wards and one member from the east of the borough.**
- 2. To delegate to the Executive Corporate Director for Corporate Services in his role as Monitoring Officer (and his nominee) authority to draft and submit the agreed consultation response following consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Working Group.**

162. Annual Pay Policy Statement 2022/23

Councillor Snell presented the report that stated the Localism Act 2011 required the Council to publish an Annual Pay Policy Statement, which must be approved in advance of the financial year to which it would apply.

Councillor J Kent stated this report had been debated at the General Services Committee and would support the recommendation.

Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendation.

RESOLVED

Approved the Council's Annual Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 attached as appendix 2.

163. Verbal Update from the Best Value Commissioner

Gavin Jones, Lead Commissioner, provided members with a brief summary of the letter that commissioners had written to the Secretary of State on the 22

January 2024, this was the first letter that had been written under the new commissioner regime. It had been promising in the terms of the way the council had accepted where it was and its ownership of the recovery plan. This had been clearly evidenced across the whole council, and evidenced by the council accepting the enhanced improvement and recovery plan that was required. The context of the financial position for the council remained very precarious and there was no line of sight within the current intervention period as to how the council would achieve financial sustainability. Progress had been made in a number of areas, such as the ability as a council to take some difficult decisions, which were quite painful around the budget and around services. This had been evidenced by the Council proving it was prepared to make very difficult decisions on behalf of their residents.

Gavin Jones stated the best value inspection report had highlighted the issue between member and officer relationships and how that was not positive, there had been some considerable improvement in that where there was respect improving on both sides from members to officers but equally officers to members. The report also highlighted where that was not being consistent but was confident and hopeful that situation would improve and see a continued improvement as those relationships which were so fundamental for the good running of the council.

Another key theme was improving the council's capacity and capability that had played out during the recruitment programme, it was noted commissioners had been impressed the council had attracted some very high calibre staff. This was a credit to the council in terms of how well this had been managed but would need to continue to provide supportive culture for those officers who felt they wanted to stay with the council and be part of that for the long term.

Seen some considerable improvements around governance since the last report and recognised, particularly within the governance recovery board, very good engagement from members. It had also been clear for the commissioners the improved decision-making which had been helped by better forward planning of agendas and to continue the focus that was required for good quality discussion as well as on performance reporting. Recognised the extremely good work in terms of performance management and insurance framework and encouraged the council to build on that and particularly the use of data.

In regard to finances, members were aware of the situation. Noted the forthcoming elections would be taking place with a possible a change of administration or a change in the make-up of groups but encouraged all to remain focused on the financial challenge that the council faced.

Gavin Jones summed up in that looking forward and building on those things the council had done, maintain the robust focus on finances, develop at pace the transformation programme, developing a new operating model and looked forward to seeing the emerging Corporate Plan.

At 8.27pm, Gavin Jones left the chamber.

164. Revised Political Balance

The Leader presented the report that requested the Council to confirm the calculations relating to the allocation of seats on committees following the resignation of two councillors (Councillor Jack Duffin and Councillor Alex Anderson) from the Conservative Group and becoming non-aligned independent Members.

Councillor J Kent was pleased to note the report.

Members voted unanimously in favour of the two recommendations.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the political balance and allocation of seats, as set out in Appendix 1, was noted.**
- 2. That Group Leaders make any changes to seat allocations in accordance with the new proportionality.**

165. Questions from Members

The mayor informed the chamber of the number of questions received to the leader and cabinet members.

From	To	Question	Overview of Response
Councillor Speight	Leader	The issue of how the additional fee for brown bins might be paid, option to pay the additional amount through council tax but residents given one option, to pay by one payment – online and as a lump sum. Does the Portfolio Holder not believe that this penalises those who will struggle to pay by having to find £80 in a single amount, and that it disadvantages those in the borough that do not have	Leader was not aware of any discussions or meetings that had taken place where it had been discussed or agreed that payments for the garden waste subscriptions could be made through council tax payments as this would not be possible. Residents wishing to join the service could do so online or, they can call the councils contact centre where a subscription to the service can be set up and the payment taken. Residents who may have difficulties preventing them from joining the service online or through the contact centre can get a friend or relative to help them to apply on their behalf. The Leader confirmed council had provided good communication with every household receiving a letter explaining the new

		access to online services?	services.
Councillor Speight	Leader	Can the Portfolio Holder give the chamber details of provisions being made to offset the problems of flooding in the Stanford West ward?	Site meeting took place on 18 March with Stanford West Ward members to engage members before a wider public engagement took place to create a flood management scheme for Ruskin Road and Runnymede Road area to mitigate potential flooding in the SLH West ward. The engagement exercise will be undertaken after the Local Elections. Leader promised to provide a written response to Cllr Speight to update him on the £4.3 million piece of land purchased by the council which may now not be useable due to flood risk (former Daybreak Windows).
Councillor Polley	Leader	Would the Leader please advise if any schemes under the Essex Police safer streets initiative have been put forward for Thurrock.	In the year 2021/22 as part of round 2 of safer streets funding, we were awarded £432,000 with £193,380 match funding for use within Grays High Street. In 2023/24 we were awarded £16,320, which formed part of a wider Essex bid for resources to support the Transport Safety Officers Department for Transport pilot, with information leaflets / personal alarms, torches and anti-drink spiking awareness forming part of that funding. Additionally in 2023/24, through the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's office, Thurrock was awarded £9,286 for addressing violence against women and girls in Corringham (CCTV improvements, additional officer patrols and self-defence classes) and £15,417 for Operation Dial to address anti-social behaviour in West Thurrock and Chafford Hundred station. Looking ahead for 2024/25, we will receive £5,589 to install a new lamp column and CCTV overlooking the playing fields in Aluric Close and a further £10,731 for the Transport Safety Officer, again Essex wide. The Leader agreed that the 79 new

			officers was great news and how fantastic it would be if more female police officers were recruited.
Councillor Polley	Councillor D Arnold	Would the Portfolio Holder please advise what consideration will be given to existing work programmes	It was not for cabinet to determine the work plans of overview and scrutiny committees it would be for the chair and committee members to have oversight and give consideration of existing and setting their own work programmes.
Councillor J Kent	Councillor B Maney	As the State Cinema is falling further into disrepair, will the Portfolio Holder update us on efforts the council is taking to fulfil its responsibilities to ensure the upkeep of this listed building	Since ownership of former state cinema changed in June 2023 work has been undertaken to try and safeguard the future of this local landmark. Owners have now appointed a contractor who has produced a method statement which will form the basis for a scheme of urgent repairs. Owners have also submitted pre planning applications.

166. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

Councillor Speight spoke on the East Thurrock Community Association premises and reported that a significant amount of progress had been made and made tribute and thanked all officers who had worked with the committee members of that association. Councillor Speight hoped that soon he would be able to report the premises had become a genuine part of the local community which was owned by the local community for the local community.

167. Minutes of Committees

The minutes of committees as set out in the agenda were received.

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

Councillor Speight raised a Point of Order Council Procedure Rules, Paragraph 3.4 (j) and (r). He asked that the chamber be informed of any updates between meetings if a motion had been withdrawn at a previous meeting which had been indicated it would be resubmitted at the next meeting was not then resubmitted. The Mayor thanked Councillor Speight for his comment and stated the matter would be referred to the Constitutional Working Group.

Councillor Redsell recorded her disappointment that her Motion raised at October 2023 council meeting to establish a task and finish group to look at options for tackling school parking across the borough would not be brought to committee until July.

A full recording of this meeting can be viewed from the following link:

[Council - Wednesday 20 March 2024, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

The meeting finished at 9.00 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**