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| <b>21 February 2024</b>  | <b>ITEM: 5</b> |
| <b>Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>        |                |
| <b>Annual Portfolio Report of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Regeneration</b> |                |
| <b>Report of:</b> Councillor Ben Maney, Portfolio Holder for Highways              |                |
| <b>This report is</b> Public   |                |
| <b>Version: Final</b>  |                |

## Introduction

This report sets out the approach and successes of the teams from Transportation Highways, Parking Enforcement and Regeneration.

The Council's emerging Transport Strategy and Transport Vision have continued to be developed and public and stakeholder engagement on the Transport Strategy, through the Your Place Your Voice sessions, will begin in the early part of 2024. This engagement will align with an extensive engagement exercise on the Council's Local Plan, Economic Development Strategy, and future growth aspirations.

The Transportation Services team have continued to develop and deliver an extensive programme of schemes, measures, and initiatives (as set out below) to support the council's strategic direction for enhancing the network. Key policy areas are addressed through ITB (Integrated Transport Block) funding, while broader areas gain focus from various grant funding awards and successful funding bids including the Active Travel Fund, Safer Roads Fund and Capability Fund.

As the cold weather falls upon us, the winter gritting crews have already started the season and they are actively keeping our strategic roads open for traffic.

The cold and wet weather takes its toll on our carriageway surfaces resulting in an increased number of potholes appearing across our road network, all of which will be inspected and repaired, continuing to meet the targets set within the KPI of 98% of potholes repaired within the allocated timeframe.

Keeping the borough moving whilst efficiently managing and co-ordinating roadworks remains a priority for the Network Management team as they continue to keep disruption to our residents to a minimum.

## 1. Transportation Services

1.1 In 2022/23, the Transportation Services Team continued to deliver a diverse programme of strategic and physical improvements for Thurrock's transport network with a focus on several key areas, including:

- long-term Transport Vision & Strategy
- design, prioritisation and implementation of schemes, measures, and infrastructure
- impact of new development upon the highway

- funding opportunities including Safer Roads Fund, Active Travel Fund Grant, and Kerb-it capital bids.
- 1.2 The Transportation Services team presented the emerging Transport Vision and interim Transport Strategy to PTR O&S and the Local Plan Taskforce, gaining approval to develop this work and progress towards consultation and engagement.
- 1.3 The Transportation Services team submitted the ITB capital programme for approval in February 2022, setting out how the £978,000 funding allocation from DfT (Department for Transport) is prioritised and utilised. In addition to the annual ITB allocation, the Transportation Services team gained additional funding and focused on progressing schemes including:
- o A126 Safer Roads Fund – reducing accident severity on the A126
  - o Kerb It – utilising capital bid funds to deliver Kerb it schemes in Aveley, Ockendon, Stanford le Hope and Chadwell St Mary.
  - o A1013 Treetops access – utilising capital bid funding to design and implement enhanced access arrangements to support development of Orsett Heath Academy.
  - o N13 cycle route – utilising funds to deliver extended walking and cycling schemes in Tilbury.
- 1.4 Other key highlights from 2022/23 include:
- Active Travel Fund – Award of Active Travel Fund allocations for Tranche 3 and Tranche 4 of the Governments ATF (Active Travel Fund) initiative to identify and develop Active Travel walking and cycling schemes within the borough.
  - A126 Safer Roads Fund programme – Continued implementation of the A126 Safer Roads Fund scheme to address and reduce the severity of collisions and incidents on this part of the network.
  - A1013 Treetops progress – Scheme design was completed, and implementation commenced to bring forward a signalised junction scheme for Orsett Heath Academy secondary school. The scheme will enable enhanced and safe access to the new school and playing fields on the A1013.
  - National Cycle Network Route 13 scheme progress – Initial phases of this scheme have been implemented through Tilbury to provide enhanced walking and cycling links on Calcutta Rd and Brennan Rd. This follows on from 4 years of continuous investment in this area through a combination of Council funding, development funding and external bids.
  - A13 East Facing Access – the A13 EFA (East Facing Access) Outline Business Case was progressed for submission to Department for Transport (DfT) through the Major Road Network funding opportunity. However, the scheme option, identified through this work was not supported by National Highways due to impact on the Strategic Road Network. As a result, the council is looking to work with National Highways to identify alternatives and submit a Strategic Outline Case for DfT consideration.
  - Kerb-it programme - In 2022/23, the Transportation Services team have delivered Kerb-it schemes in Plaistow Close, Stanford le Hope, Love Lane, Aveley, St Michael's Rd, Chadwell St Mary and Cruick Ave, Ockendon. These schemes have been well received and provide more consistent parking for residents.
  - Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership – A revised Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has been developed to support further opportunities for funding to enhance bus services. The BSIP looks at the interventions needed to improve bus routes, bus frequencies and fares – for example: making

improvements that avoid buses becoming stuck in congestion, resulting in faster journeys, and increasing how often buses run on the most popular routes.

- Strategic Transport Model - Thurrock Council has commissioned a new Strategic Transport Model to support the delivery of the new Local Plan and Transport Strategy. The 2019 base year model has been completed and the Local Model Validation Report (LMVR) is in progress. Modelling work will focus on providing a Do-Nothing scenario which will show the transport situation on future years.
- Thurrock Transport Strategy, Vision, and Baseline – The team have continued to develop the Transport Strategy (TTS) and Vision work to progress the long-term transport aspirations for the borough. A draft version of the TTS, Vision and baseline work were presented to PTR O&S and Cabinet enabling initial engagement to be undertaken.
- Electric Vehicle Charging contract and programme – The Transportation Services team have secured a strategic partnership contract to supply and manage and implement EV charging infrastructure in Thurrock. The Council has received c£600k funding from the Government Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) and the recent Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) bid to support installation costs for up to 78 new EV charging sockets.
- Road Safety - The Road Safety team continue to deliver a range of informative and engaging educational, awareness raising and practical road safety initiatives to all schools in Thurrock. Key highlights for 2022/23 include:
  - Bikeability Cycle Training delivered in 34 schools covering 2,025 learners.
  - Road Safety Pedestrian sessions delivered to 30 primary schools. These are conducted at the roadside to talk about potential dangers when crossing roads and best practise in using the Green Cross Code.
  - Young Driver Road Safety was presented to 3 secondary schools, using a mixture of visual presentations and group discussions. These sessions focused on informing Year 10/11 pupils on their responsibility when they become drivers as well as key information regarding the ‘Fatal Four’ of drinking/drug driving, speeding, seatbelts, and mobile phones.
  - Pedestrian training provided at 11 schools with 1004 pupils/parents trained.
  - Twilight Trail events at 18 schools for 540 learners and parents Junior Road Safety Officers (JRSOs) adopted in 12 schools.
  - 16 School Travel Plans completed online with Modeshift STARS to accreditation standards.
  - Scooter training provided at 18 schools and 784 learners.
  - Every school in Thurrock (54) will be offered a form of Road Safety Training for their pupils during the academic year 2022/2023.

## **2. Passenger Transport**

- 2.1 The bus shelter replacement programme commenced in February 2021, with a plan to renew shelters throughout the borough. Phase 1 saw 37 shelters to installed. The second phase saw 11 out of a further 37 replaced, with the remainder to be addressed in 23/24. Running alongside this programme 15 digital real-time information screens were installed within the shelters, with 5 large-scale screens at Grays Bus Station and other key sites. Phase 2 will be completed in the 2023/24 financial year.
- 2.2 13 new real time information screens (RTI) have now been installed including 5 displays within the environs of Grays Town Centre. The remainder of the RTI screens will be installed upon completion of the phase 2 shelter installations.

- 2.3 Thurrock Council continue to administer the English National Concessionary bus pass scheme to its eligible residents on behalf of Central Government. In 2022/23, 21,410 of which 19,410 were older person passes, 1,273 were disabled persons and 727 were disabled persons with a companion.

### **3. Network Management**

- 3.1 In the last financial year, the Network Management Team received over 11,000 applications to work on the Highway Network, granting 6,370 of those applications. 819 Fixed Penalty Notices were issued for non-compliance of permit conditions which has given the team greater control of the road network ensuring inconvenience to our residents and road users is kept to a minimum.

### **4. Highways Infrastructure**

- 4.1 The council manages and maintains highway assets which consist of over 545km of carriageway and over 700km of footway & cycle ways. Through last years' capital programme 42 roads have been attended from resurfacing to large scale patching works and 17 footway reconstruction schemes have been delivered.
- 4.2 Efficient and effective programme management and delivery through effective asset management has enabled us to maintain Level 3 in the DfT's Highway Maintenance Efficiency Programme, the highest level available. This has enabled us to secure the maximum funding available for the upkeep of our roads.
- 4.3 On our structures, 30 principal inspections were completed last financial year as part of an annual rolling programme. The results of the inspections help form the basis of our future work programmes and priorities. These inspections have allowed the Highway Infrastructure Team to identify the need to complete major works of key structures within the Borough such as the Orchard Road footbridge, Fort Road bridge and Stoneness Road bridge.
- 4.4 The Highways Infrastructure Team has implemented a Central Management System (CMS) to our street lighting stock. The new system allows us to remotely monitor over 17,000 streetlights. The CMS means officers can view all our streetlights from any computer and provide a live status on faults and energy usage, among other things. The scheme has seen a reduction in CO2 emissions of 33 tonnes which has been achieved through a reduction in energy usage from pre-install resulting in the Authority using 92000 kWh less energy and thus achieving a projected saving of £180,000.
- 4.5 The Council has been successful in receiving an additional £314,000 of funding from DfT in January of this year, specifically for targeting Highway Maintenance. As a result, the Highway Team have already deployed a dedicated patching team working around Borough targeting roads in need of patching. In addition, a further 4 sites have been added to the machine surface programme and 2 additional footway schemes.

### **5. Reactive Maintenance**

- 5.1 545km of the highway network requires safety inspections which are completed by our Highways Safety Inspectors. Last fiscal year we carried out 3,100 routine safety inspections and over 2468 ad-hoc inspections derived from customer enquiries via our Highway Report It website, resulting in the identification and repair of over 4,302 potholes by the in-house team, exceeding the KPI target of 98% for pothole filling within the allocated timeframe. This shows our continued commitment to the 'fill it' campaign.

5.2 In addition to the above, a further 3,159 customer enquiries were received and processed via the Highways Report It app for other highway related issues last financial year. The in-house Highways Team continues to be on hand as they dealt 225 out of hours emergencies last fiscal year, along with 241 emergency call outs being attended to during working hours.

5.3 The Jet patcher was deployed successfully. Addressing over 1197 repairs over a 7-week programme. It enabled us to target not only the standard intervention level type defects, but also those defects which we might not originally address but still receive complaints about. However, the main benefit for the Council is that this treatment services a preventative measure to slow the deterioration of the Network by sealing the carriageway network before the onslaught of winter and reduce the potholes identified over the winter.

## **6. Gritting**

6.1 Last winter we experienced unprecedented weather conditions. Weather monitoring commenced in October and the gritters were on standby for action. Last season we completed 57 runs in total.

## **7. Parking Enforcement**

7.1 The Parking Enforcement Team continue to provide high visibility, proactive and reactive parking enforcement patrols across the borough in response to parking contraventions. They promote and encourage sensible and legal parking by enforcing in a fair and transparent way in accordance with legislation, policy, and procedures.

7.2 The Parking Enforcement policy sits in support of and underpins the overarching Transport Strategy. The main objectives are to help maintain the free flow of traffic on our roads and in council-managed car parks to support the safety of all road users; assist the efficient movement of traffic; increase compliance and to maintain access to services and amenities.

7.3 Priority is given to, ensuring main traffic routes are clear of obstruction to enable free traffic flow across the borough wide road network. On a rotational basis, Officers continue to support daily patrols across residents parking zones, enabling residents to have ease of access to permit areas for themselves and their visitors. They also provide high visibility, robust enforcement patrols to hot spot school locations to encourage and promote sensible and compliant parking behaviour.

7.4 The Parking Team provide Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) work on a rotational basis Monday – Saturday across a variable shift pattern during core hours, with a smaller resource of officers who work a dedicated Twilight Shift in support of the evening economy, in particular HGV (Heavy Goods Vehicles) nuisance parking.

7.5 Officers are also flexible and will provide additional ad hoc enforcement out of hours including Sunday in support of, or in response to operational requirements, special events and service requests.

7.6 HGV parking requires daily monitoring and robust enforcement presence, with the Twilight officers patrolling known hotspot locations daily.

- 7.7 The Manorway, Stanford-le-Hope is a known hotspot location for HGV parking, but the area has not been decriminalised, which means the Parking Team are unable to use Civil Enforcement powers at this location. The inability to issue PCNs on The Manorway makes it an inviting hotspot for HGV parking and criminal activity associated to HGV parking, such as fuel theft.
- 7.8 Alternative enforcements solutions were required and the Parking Team, in close partnership with Thurrock Council's Environmental Enforcement team, looked at innovative enforcement solutions that would achieve long-term sustainable solutions. The combined activity by the two teams support the council's Operation Canberra – a joint enforcement initiative that successfully gathered vital evidence in support of criminal enforcement action under Section 43 of the Anti-social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014.
- 7.9 Operation Canberra began in February 2021 and continues to receive enforcement resources to date.

### Operation Canberra Results

| From April 22 to March 2023                                    | Total |
|--|-------|
| Total Community Protection Warnings (CPW) issued               | 142   |
| Total Community Protection Notices (CPN) issued                | 39    |
| Total Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) issued linked to CPN breach | 219   |

- 7.10 As a result of a successful business case in Nov 2021, the parking team were granted approval to increase the establishment level of front-line CEOs by a further 8 CEOs.
- 7.11 To date, the service has recruited, trained, and deployed 8 new front-line CEOs to fill all these posts. However, due to staff turnover this is an ongoing process to maintain a full establishment of officers.
- 7.12 This has increased the permanent parking enforcement resource by 100% over the last 12 months and the parking team now consists of 18 full-time CEOs (Civil Enforcement Officers), who deliver a full and robust service, providing an enforcement presence across the whole borough.
- 7.13 In addition, we also employ 4 agency officers to maintain consistency of patrols and to ensure a fair and thorough spread of enforcement activities borough wide.
- 7.14 The CEOs are employed on a cost neutral basis and their salary costs are offset from revenue received from penalty charge notice income. Once the parking team have stabilised with officers in the approved posts, the service will start to review shift patterns and work rotas with the aim towards delivering a 24/7 parking enforcement service.
- 7.15 The Parking Team are responsible for the management and enforcement of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) and Permitted Parking Areas (PPAs) as well as 8 Off-street pay-and display car parks across the borough. The most recent being the introduction of the new car park in Tamarisk Road, South Ockendon in March 2023. In addition to the restricted chargeable car parks,

there are 5 unrestricted off-street car parks available 24 hours a day, free of charge.

- 7.16 In the financial year 2022/2023 the Parking Team generated an overall parking income surplus of **£75,993.34** for the financial year. This surplus was made up of income received from On-street/Off-street Pay & Display parking charges, permit income and penalty charge notice income. The surplus income from civil parking enforcement is restricted to transport-related issues including the operation of public passenger transport services, highway or traffic improvement projects, and certain types of environmental improvement along with the maintenance of parking restrictions. This requirement is detailed in legislation – Road Traffic Regulation Act 1084 – Section 55.
- 7.17 The overall pay and display revenue for on street and off-street increased from **£230,893.10** in 2021/22 to **£326,758** in 2022/23. This is an increase of **41%**. The overall customer transactions increased by **25.52%** from **158,327** in 2021/22 to **198,568** in 2022/23.
- 7.18 Parking transaction data confirms the car park occupancy has increased year on year since 2020 and we are seeing a gradual return to the pre covid levels of occupancy.
- 7.19 In 2022/23, the pay and display tariff linked to all restricted car park was realigned to deliver a more consistent customer charge delivering one set tariff at all car parks, except for Canterbury Parade South Ockendon, which is still subject to one free hour parking for all customers.
- 7.20 The number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued on-street increased by **18.07%**, with PCNs issued being **23,089** in 2021/22 compared with **27,261** in 2022/23. The number of PCNs issued off-street increased by **30.47%**, with PCNs issued being **1,516** in 2021/22 compared to **1,978** in 2022/23.
- 7.21 The overall number of PCNs issued for both on-street and off-street parking contraventions increased by **18.83%**, with PCNs issued being **24,605** in 2021/22 compared to **29,239** in 2022/23.
- 7.22 The parking service continues to support all PCNs, notice processing, appeal and representation functions and employs 3 City & Guild qualified Notice Processing and Appeals Officers.
- 7.23 During the year 2022/2023 the Notice Processing Team, as a result of PCNs issued, dealt with **1,574** informal representations and **1,322** formal representations which were submitted in line with the statutory parking appeals process, with only 79 cases being progressed to the independent adjudicators at Traffic Penalty Tribunal.
- 7.24 There was an increase in appeals and representations received compared to the last financial year, which would be expected due to the increase in PCNs issued.
- 7.25 The Parking Appeals and Notice Processing Officers are also responsible for responding to enquiries and complaints and provide advice and guidance to the residents and members of the public.

- 7.26 In the financial year 2022/2023 a total of **4,738** unpaid parking fines (PCNs) were registered as debts with the Traffic Enforcement Centre (TEC). TEC is a debt registration point for local authorities that have decriminalised on street parking charges. As a result, **£43,409** in unpaid debt revenue was recovered which contributed towards the income surplus.
- 7.27 The parking team have been working in partnership with highways in improving lines and signs across the borough to ensure they are up to prescribed standards to ensure fair and consistent enforcement can take place. Civil Enforcement Officers report any defects in lines or signs and refer faults to the Highways team to be scheduled for repairs.
- 7.28 The parking team have continued to push forward and strive to improve service delivery, as part of this we are continuing to grow and increase the front line resource to keep up with demand for an enforcement presence.

## **8. Parking Permits**

- 8.1 In March 2022 the Parking Team implemented a new fully integrated parking permit solution which replaced the antiquated paper permit process.
- 8.2 The permit processing team which sits within the customer service function issued **60,253** virtual permits between April 2022 – March 2023. These include several types of permits such as residents, business, and visitor.
- 8.3 The benefits of Virtual Permits are detailed below:
- Permits are issued through a customer-facing web-solution, enabling users to virtually apply for, change and surrender permits, 24/7
  - Reduces development input on dated system – saving time and money
  - Drives efficiency and accuracy of application approval and payment
  - Improves customer service and reduces administrative burdens on front office and back-office teams.
  - Digital Permits – activated immediately upon approval of application.
  - The Mobile Permissions Checker will automatically fetch all relevant permit data when the VRM is scanned by the ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Reader) function in the CEO (Civil Enforcement Officer) handheld
  - Visitor parking can be activated in advance and then if the visitor changes their mind these can be cancelled up to midnight the day before.
  - Eco – friendly solution
  - Automated renewal reminders
  - Improves the experience of visitors
  - Reduce number of lost and stolen permit

## **9. Highways Development Management and Traffic**

- 9.1 The Highways Development Management Team have focused on developments including Thames Enterprise Park and Orsett Heath Academy as well as significant applications such as the East Tilbury residential application, Thurrock Airfield residential application, Thurrock Retail application, the Mardyke application and Local Development Order (LDO) 2 for the DP World site.



9.2 The team continues to provide specialist advice for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) and their related Development Consent Orders (DCO).

## **10. Planning**

10.1 In order to ensure a clear focus on the improvement of our planning service, as part of the Council's Senior Leadership restructure we have created the post of Chief Planning Officer at Assistant Director level. We have had an interim in post since August and have just completed the recruitment process for a permanent appointment. We expect to announce an appointment shortly.

10.2 At the end of October, we welcomed the Local Government Association, Planning Advisory Service to undertake a peer review of the Planning Service. We are aware that areas of the service need improvement and an independent review challenging policies, strategies, performance, cultures and behaviours is an important part of the process of improvement planning. Officer and Member peers from other authorities met with members, staff and stakeholder and have set out 11 recommendations. Officers are currently working on an implementation plan which we will bring before Councillors soon.

10.3 At an Extraordinary Council Meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> December Councillors overwhelmingly supported proposals to go out to consultation on the Thurrock Local Plan: Initial Proposals document (Regulation 18), We have been without an up to date local plan for too long and this was an important step towards delivery. Consultation commenced shortly after the decision and runs until 19<sup>th</sup> February. A range of consultation events have been organised across the borough.

## **11. Lower Thames Crossing**

11.1 The Council has consistently opposed National Highway's current proposals for the crossing as they do not meet National Highways own objectives for the crossing and will create significant issues for Thurrock and Thurrock residents and businesses. We have fought hard for changes to the proposals or at the very least for improvements and mitigations that will help to address our concerns. National Highways have consistently failed to address these.

11.2 The Council's Lower Thames Crossing team negotiated hard with National Highways last year, to secure an improved agreement with National Highways to ensure that most of the cost of our attending the Examination into the proposal, between June and December last year, would be met by National Highways and not by the Council or Council tax payers.

11.3 We were as a result able to present our case in the strongest possible terms at the Examination, entering 31 submissions in response to the proposals. The Council's response has been praised by the Thames Crossing Action Group in their latest newsletter where they acknowledged '*What was clear to us, was what a great job the council's LTC team did.*'

11.4 A decision is now in the hands of the Secretary of State, Michael Gove. We believe that his Examiners should either recommend refusal of the proposals as they stand or at the very least, make approval conditional on a range of improvements and mitigation measures, that we have put forward, being delivered.

## **12. Purfleet-on-Thames Regeneration**

- 12.1 PCRL were appointed by Thurrock Council (TC) to deliver the Purfleet on Thames regeneration project. 8 years on from the Development Agreement PCRL had not secured a funding partner and of the 2,600 homes proposed only 34 units in phase 1A had commenced.
- 12.2 In October last year Cabinet heard that as a result there was a material risk that the development milestones as set out in the funding agreement with Homes England to support key infrastructure could not be achieved. Given the prolonged and continued default position there was a real possibility that Homes England will invoke provisions with the funding agreement, withdraw the HIF funding and commence legal proceeding against the Council to clawback grant expenditure to date.
- 12.3 Cabinet delegated authority to endeavour to negotiate a tripartite exit agreement with Homes England and Purfleet Centre Regeneration Limited and if that was not a viable option to agree a mutual withdrawal, with Homes England, from the funding agreement.
- 12.4 It was not possible to negotiate a tripartite agreement, but the Council and Homes England have now terminated the funding agreement, without any claw back of the funding provided to date.
- 12.5 Cabinet also delegated authority to take all steps necessary to terminate the Development Agreement and other associated agreements following the termination of the Grant Determination Agreement and the Back to Back GDA if it was considered this was the best option for the Council.
- 12.6 Despite further efforts by PCRL to secure funding it was clear that this could not be achieved on terms that were satisfactory to PCRL shareholders or the Council, so we have now, with the agreement of the PCRL Board terminated the development agreement.
- 12.7 The Council remains committed to delivering high quality regeneration in Purfleet on Thames with the supporting infrastructure, town centre and station improvements, and this decision now allows us to move forward and consider alternative delivery options. We are working closely with Homes England and potential funding partners and intend to bring options before Cabinet soon. In the meantime, Swan Housing will complete the homes in Phase 1A1 and Sanctuary Housing Group will progress Phase 1A2.

### **13. Property & FM**

- 13.1 The Council's Asset Disposal Programme has been accelerating over the year as the team has made significant progress in carrying out due diligence on our assets as many of our historic records were incomplete or out of date.
- 13.2 As at the end of January due diligence was underway on 63 assets, 2 disposals had completed, 11 disposals were in solicitors hands, 13 properties were on the market with a further, 14 expected to come to cabinet in June.
- 13.3 At auction on 25<sup>th</sup> January 5 smaller properties sold for a combined total of £1,580,000 against reserve prices totalling £660,000.
- 13.4 The Property Team have been working to address a high backlog of outstanding lettings, lease renewals and rent reviews to commercial tenants, many of which go back several years. The team are forecasting to complete 68 updates this financial year with a total increase in rent received of £1,013,000 a year from the previous sum of £3,528,000. The benefit of this increase will be seen across 2023/24 and 2024/25.

13.5 The target of an increase of £350,000 for 2023/24 is forecast to be exceeded by £226,000 (net of rental lost due to asset disposals).

#### **14. Current Emerging Issues**

14.1 In relation to the recent dialogue relating to the Tilbury to Gravesend ferry service, officers and elected members are exploring potential alternative external funding options to reduce or remove the need for public subsidy and provide better value or commercial viability. Senior members have met with the ferry operator, and we have arranged collaborative joint meetings with Kent County Council and Thurrock officers to discuss further. Colleagues at Kent County Council are undertaking a consultation on the future of the ferry and have produced consultation materials to enable views and comments, from ferry users and residents, to be captured and assessed so that all parties can better understand.