

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 12 February 2019 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Wednesday 27 February 2019 at 5.00 pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Chair), Shane Hebb (Deputy Chair), Gary Collins, Mark Coxshall, James Halden, Deborah Huelin, Barry Johnson and Aaron Watkins

Apologies: Councillor Susan Little

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Sean Clark, Director of Finance & IT
Steve Cox, Corporate Director Place
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
David Lawson, Assistant Director of Law & Governance, and Monitoring Officer
Mykela Pratt, Strategic Lead - Resourcing and Improvement
Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service
Lucy Tricker, 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.

94. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 16 January 2019 were approved as a correct record.

95. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

96. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

97. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by discussing anti-social behaviour across the borough, and stated that since November 2018 there had been an 8.5% reduction in reports of anti-social behaviour in Thurrock. He also stated that there had been a 50% reduction in motorcycle nuisance, due to the Council's work with Essex Police. He continued by describing how that the Anti-Social Behaviour Team had been carrying out high visibility patrols, and how the CCTV scheme had been expanded to 30 locations around the borough. He

added that 11 injunctions had been brought against members of a local criminal gang, and urged all residents to report crime through 101, Essex Police, or Crimestoppers Anonymous, to help the Council and police tackle crime. He stated that Thurrock Council had given £1million to Essex Police to fund 6 extra officers, in addition to the 3 officers from Essex Police announced at Full Council, which were over and above the 15 officers coming to Thurrock due to the Police, Fire and Crime Commission Council Tax precept increase. He stated that the new officers would operate from the council offices and would be dedicated to addressing the Council's Community Safety Partnership objectives.

The Leader moved on to discuss the action being taken against people who litter and fly-tip around the borough. He stated that last week eight people had ended up in court due to failing to pay £150 fines for littering, with all of them having to pay £4000 between them. He added that in 2018, 3,433 people had been issued fines for littering, and those who did not pay fines would end up being prosecuted. He mentioned that he had joined officers, Essex Police and the Environment Agency on an operation to stop illegal waste carriers, and the team had stopped 30 vehicles, and issued fines for fly-tipping, littering and failure to produce proper documents. He reiterated the point that people who disposed of waste improperly would receive a large fine or prosecution.

The Leader continued by congratulating the planning team for being shortlisted for the Local Authority Planning Team of the Year at the Royal Town Planning Institute, which meant they were one of the best in the country. He congratulated everyone on the team and wished them luck for 24 April when the winner would be announced. The Leader finished his statement with the Clean It, Cut It, Fill It Update and stated that since April 2018: 2,852 potholes had been filled, 99% of which had been filled in on time, with 100% being filled in on time in November and December; 1,130 acres of grass cut; 1,739 fly-tips cleared; 3,015 tonnes of waste collected; and 3,338 fixed penalty notices issued.

98. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

There were no briefings on policy, budget and other issues.

99. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

100. Questions from Non-Executive Members

No questions had been received from non-Executive Members.

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

No matters had been referred to the Cabinet for consideration by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

102. Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2019-2020 (Decision 110501)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and began by stating that this report was due to commercial objectives now being embedded in the Council, and described how there was now a new commercial team which were ensuring that facilities such as the Thameside Theatre and Grangewaters were breaking even. He outlined the report and commented that the strategy listed the council's charges which was an amalgamation of lots of work, and ensured the council did not run at a loss and facilities became self-sufficient. He stated that the detailed list of fees and charges were noted in the appendices and added that overview and scrutiny committees had seen the report, and had made no changes.

The Leader echoed Councillor Hebb's sentiments that the council could not run at a loss, and felt it was good to see Thameside Theatre and Grangewaters break even, and even start to make small profits.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Agreed the proposed fees and charges, including those no longer applicable as per Appendices 1 and 2.**
- 2. Approved delegated authority to allow fees and charges to be varied within a financial year in response to commercial requirements, in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder.**
- 3. Noted the feedback from all Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings as per Appendix 3.**

Reason for Decision – as stated in the report
This decision is subject to call-in

103. Capital Strategy 2019-2020 (Decision 110502)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated this was the new name for the Treasury Management report, and the format had changed based on CIPFA guidance. He stated that the council were now receiving £13.6million in earnings from revenue and were self-sufficient. He added that during the next municipal year the council would earn £23.4million in earnings from revenue, which meant that only 1/5th of the Council's revenue was received from taxpayers. He then drew Member's attention to 3.2.2 of the report which outlined the costings format and highlighted that this report was also to approve prudential indicators and the annual minimum revenue position.

The Leader added that although this report came to Cabinet annually, it was good to see officers and Members were coming up with new ideas to ensure the council was not reliant on taxpayer's money. He finally thanked the Section 151 officer and his team for their hard work.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Recommended to Full Council:

1.1. Approve the Capital Strategy for 2019/20 including approval of the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement for 2019/20

1.2 Approve the adoption of the prudential indicators as set out in Appendix 1

1.3 Note the revised 2018/19 and 2019/20 Treasury Management projections as set out in Annex 1 paragraph 2.32

Reason for Decision – as stated in the report
This decision is subject to call-in

104. Draft 2019/20 Budget Proposals and Medium Term Financial Strategy Update (Decision 110503)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report by stating that he felt the council had a strong financial outlook, as they were being proactive and using data analysis to ensure the council had a balanced budget. He outlined the recommendation that would be going to Full Council not to increase council tax for the next municipal year, unlike 95% of other councils, and stated that, if agreed, Cabinet would be recommending a council tax freeze. He described how Thurrock were a £0.5billion council, and were in a good position as they did not need to increase council tax. He drew a comparison between now and the 2003/4 budget when tax had to be increased by 48%. He added that this council tax freeze was due to Thurrock's reform and would not be funded by top-down cuts, or drawing on reserves. He added that the council had increased their 'rainy day fund' by 38%. He then highlighted children's services which had decreased their overspend by reducing demand through growth, having quicker response times, and increasing the level of care. Councillor Hebb stated that he felt there was still more to do, but Thurrock were now balancing the budget, which ensured that services were protected.

Councillor Hebb thanked the finance team, the commercial team, and the Section 151 Officer for all of their hard work on this, as he felt that thinking had changed and services had been reformed. He added that reform had taken place through the Council Spending Review; initiatives such as 'Fewer Buildings, Better Services'; commercial objectives pushing services; and increased investment principles. He stated that the council would continue to review the budget, and ensure it was secure, as well as continuing to deliver new houses and services. He mentioned that once the Council Spending Review was completed, it would be reviewed again to try and avoid additional burden on taxpayers. He highlighted that Thurrock had the most affordable council tax in Essex, as well as maintaining services such as weekly bin collections; investment into street scene; 24 new police officers due to work with Essex Police; tackling anti-social behaviour; 1000 new council homes;

new integrated medical centres; and an additional £250,000 into capital schemes. He felt that the council tax freeze would leave more money in resident's pockets to be able to provide for their families.

Councillor Hebb then discussed the capital plans which were outlined in the report such as £0.25billion on improving the landscape; Purfleet regeneration; Grays underpass; A13 widening; the East facing slip roads; and improvements to the cycle network. He felt that these capital projects would have a positive impact on young people, commuters, businesses and infrastructure as well as on the health of residents. He summarised by stating that there was numerous large-scale projects ongoing and there was lots to look forward to in the borough.

Councillor Halden opened the debate and stated he felt proud to see the balanced budget. He continued and drew comparison between Thurrock's budget and Essex County Council's budget, which although was 14x bigger than Thurrock, had only invested £1million into adult and children's mental health; compared to Thurrock which had invested £1million into just children's mental health. He also highlighted that Thurrock had given an extra £500,000 to help tackle the 'county lines' issue, as well as £500,000 into the Dedicated Schools Grant. He summarised and commented that he felt this was an ambitious budget.

Councillor Coxshall added that it had been good to see savings, particularly related to the 'Fewer Buildings, Better Services' scheme as this provided good services to Thurrock residents. He also highlighted Thurrock's 'Release, Re-Use, Retain' scheme on Council owned buildings which had given a £1.5million capital receipt in January 2019, and drew Cabinet's attention to point 5.6 in the report which showed the capital receipts could lead to the general fund, and then to the HRA, which could lead to increased housing.

The Leader added that it was good to see investments in areas such as children's mental health, and additional police officers, not come at an increased cost to taxpayers. He felt that the budget process was good, as it was supported by an evidence base and found additional money other than council tax. He highlighted that the 'Fewer Buildings, Better Services' scheme had increased the use of children's centres by 33%, as well as saving money which showed the scheme was working. He clarified that Cabinet were recommending the council tax freeze to Full Council, who could then approve. He finally thanked officers for their hard work every day on the budget and investments, and understood that recommending a council tax freeze went against the advice of officers. Councillor Hebb commented that investments were all linked to the economic plan, and felt the structures in place to monitor these were good.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Recommended to Full Council a council tax freeze**
- 2. Agreed the budget report set out through this report and appendices**

3. Recommended to Full Council the capital proposals set out in this report and appendices.

Reason for Decision – as stated in the report
This decision is subject to call-in

105. Housing Revenue Account - Business Plan and Budgets 2019/20 Onwards (Decision 110504)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report by saying this was a statutory requirement, as the report confirmed the financial viability of the HRA and reviewed the 30 year HRA business plan. He commented that the report ensured residents safety in their homes as in 2018 8,500 homes were refurbished, and this figure would increase to 9,000 by the end of 2019. He also mentioned that in 2019 a schedule of external works on council properties would begin. He stated that the council had been working closely with contractors to reduce the time taken to complete repairs, and an independent survey had found that, of the 30,000 repairs undertaken, the majority of residents felt these had been good. He stated that the council had also helped 500 residents who were in financial difficulty, by offering advice and ensuring they could avoid issues such as homelessness. He added that there were now new CCTV monitoring cameras in place, and there had been a 10% reduction in complaints from 2017 to 2018, as well as reducing void re-let time by 5 days. He commented that ground had been broken for new council houses on the old Tops Club site in Grays, and work would begin next month in Claudian Way. He then discussed the government abolishing the HRA borrowing cap, and the central government policy of 1% reduction in rent per year, but added the council would pursue opportunities to secure funding for new council house building.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed the assumptions reflected in the HRA Business Plan, as summarised in the report

2. Agreed the budget information which is also provided

Reason for Decision – as stated in the report
This decision is subject to call-in

106. Re-Procurement of Temporary (Agency) Worker Contract (Decision 110505)

Councillor Collins outlined the report and began by stating it would allow for the re-procurement of the temporary agency worker contract, as the council currently had a contract with Matrix SCM, but this would be coming to an end in December 2019. He commented that this contract supplied agency workers

to the council, and had been working well over the past three years. He added that the council were trying to reduce the number of agency workers used, and across the 2018/19 financial year to date have seen a consistent reduction in spend on agency workers. He stated that the council did need to maintain a flexible workforce, particularly in areas such as waste disposal, and frontline care services. He felt that the contract type offered the best value for the lowest risk as they were a managed service provider who carried out pre-employment checks on all temporary agency workers and committed to the council's social values, and sourced workers from within the borough. He summarised and stated this was an opportunity for the council to review this service.

The Leader commented and stated this contract helped to save money as it could source harder to recruit roles, such as HGV drivers and social workers. He felt this was a necessary spend, even though the council was working hard to reduce the number of temporary agency workers used overall.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed to progress the re-procurement of a four-year Agency Staff Contract using the ESPO MSTAR3 Framework with a new contract to commence on 15 December 2019

2. Approved the delegation to award to the Director of HR, OD & Transformation in consultation with the Portfolio Holder in order to ensure maximum lead in time for service transfer as necessary

Reason for decision – as stated in the report
This decision is subject to call-in

107. Elizabeth Gardens Procurement for a Care and Support Contract (Decision 110506)

Councillor Halden introduced the report, as Councillor Little had been unable to attend the meeting, and stated this report was for the re-procurement for a care and support contract of 'extra care' housing, which fell between sheltered accommodation and residential care. He stated that at Elizabeth Gardens there was 24 hour care on-site, which catered for both older and infirm people, as well as younger people with a diverse range of needs. He commented that the contract was working well, and felt this report ensured elderly people were supported in Thurrock.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed to proceed with the retender of the Care and Support Services for Elizabeth Gardens.

2. Agreed the award of the contract should be delegated to the Corporate Director Adults, Housing and Health in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Adult and Children's Social Care.

Reason for decision – as stated in the report
This decision is subject to call in

108. Tree Planting Strategy

Councillor Watkins introduced this report and thanked Councillor Redsell for her motion on this matter at Full Council in July, and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He stated that this report introduced new policies, such as like-for-like tree replacement, and replacing trees in the same location if possible. He added that this report ensured that trees which had been removed in the past 3 years were replaced, which equated to 66 new trees. He felt this strategy helped the wider council ambition of the local plan, as it encouraged developers to plant new trees.

Councillor Coxshall stated that he felt this was a good idea, and hoped to see more trees planted in Stifford Clays, particularly along avenues. Councillor Halden also welcomed the report and commented that often to facilitate larger projects, trees had to be removed, so felt it was good to see a strategy in place to improve the environment and solidify policy. Councillor Hebb added that he felt it was good to see democracy working as this strategy had originally come from a Full Council motion, which was now being enacted. The Leader commented that Thurrock was currently undertaking lots of large scale projects, but did not want these projects to remove trees, so felt it was good to see they would be replaced. He echoed Councillor Hebb's sentiments that it was good to see democracy working as this strategy had gone through overview and scrutiny committee.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Considered the options available; Cleaner, Greener & Safer Overview and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend Option 1 as outlined the report (sections 3.5.1. and 3.5.2 for consideration.

2. Considered Option 3 (section 3.5.4) as recommended by Cleaner, Greener & Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the next financial year (2019/20)

The meeting finished at 7.51 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**