

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 12 February 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Chair), Shane Hebb (Deputy Chair), Mark Coxshall, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Susan Little, Ben Maney, Allen Mayes and Aaron Watkins

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Tim Hallam, Acting Head of Legal, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Andrew Millard, Director of Place
Jonathon Wilson, Assistant Director, Finance
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.

65. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 15 January 2020 were approved as a correct record.

66. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

67. Declaration of Interests

There were no items of urgent business.

68. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by describing how in April 2017 the Grays Public Space Protection Order had been launched to tackle problems such as street drinking and anti-social behaviour in Grays. He felt these issues were caused by a minority of people, but had a disproportionate negative effect on residents, businesses, and people that shopped in Grays. He stated that although there had been a mixed response, more resources were now being used to support the Public Space Protection Order such as additional Environmental Enforcement Officers, more town-centre policing teams, and regular walkthroughs of Grays. He stated that officers were currently seeking an extension of the Order, and a consultation had been launched online for residents, businesses and high-street users to have their say. The Leader urged people to take part in the consultation, as resident feedback was

needed. He felt that the Public Space Protection Order was necessary as lots of future change and investment was coming to Grays.

The Leader then discussed the recent Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) awards, during which the Environmental Enforcement team had won Team of the Year, at this nationally recognised event. He felt this was testament to the commercial investment that allowed for additional Environmental Enforcement Officers. He added that the event had been very productive, as it allowed for officers and Members to share ideas with other boroughs, and bring back good ideas to Thurrock. The Leader also congratulated Redbridge Council and Braintree Council for their wins.

The Leader then outlined the Clean It, Cut It, Fill It Update, and stated that since April 2019: 1568 potholes had been filled (99% within target time); 987 fly-tips had been cleared; 2996 tonnes of waste had been cleared; 3487 Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued; 284 £400 fines had been issued; 268 people prosecuted for non-payment of on the spot fines; and 3 illegal encampments had been moved on. The Leader explained that Thurrock Council would soon be going to court to make the illegal encampment injunction permanent.

69. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Watkins thanked the environment team for their recent hard work dealing with Storm Ciara, and highlighted that 17 trees had fallen due to the high winds. He clarified that under the Tree Planting Strategy these trees would be replaced on a like-for-like basis, and added that another storm was due, and the team would again be out working to tackle any fallen trees or debris. The Leader extended his thanks to the team, and to landowners in rural communities who had helped to remove trees that had fallen across the road, as this helped keep the borough moving.

70. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

There had been no petitions submitted by members of the public.

71. Questions from Non-Executive Members

There had been no questions submitted by Non-Executive Members.

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

The Leader stated that one item, Item 13: Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2020/21, had been referred from Overview and Scrutiny Committees, so would be heard first.

73. Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2020/21

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that it outlined the services provided by the Council and the associated costs for 2020/21, as well as the proposed price changes and removed charges. He stated that the fees and charges outlined in the report helped the Council to meet its long-term financial plan, and was an amalgamation of hard work across every directorate in the Council. He stated that the proposed fees and charges had been benchmarked on market prices, and the market would continue to be analysed throughout the year to ensure balance. He commented that this report updated the Cabinet on specific fees and charges, and ensured that no department ran at a loss.

The Leader invited Councillor Rigby to speak on the discussions held at Cleaner, Greener and Safer (CGS) Overview and Scrutiny, as she had been the Vice-Chair in the Chair for the meeting that discussed the proposed fees and charges. Councillor Rigby explained how officers had outlined the changes that were proposed to fees and charges under the remit of CGS Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and all recommendations had been agreed. She highlighted that some Members of the Committee had felt concern regarding the increase of charges relating to sport, but that it had been explained to them as necessary to allow the department to be cost-neutral, and discounts were available to those that met certain criteria. She summarised and stated that no other issues had been raised.

The Leader thanked Councillor Rigby for her feedback, and felt that it was good to see Overview and Scrutiny understand the reasons for fees and charges increases to ensure cost neutrality. He added that the Council had a duty to supply services to residents, and this report would ensure that residents paid a fair price for those services. Councillor Huelin highlighted the fee increase for hiring rooms in libraries, and other commercial rents, but assured residents that community groups and charities would pay a lower fee. She added that Health and Wellbeing groups and the theatre would also pay lower fees.

Councillor Watkins thanked Councillor Rigby for her feedback and stated that he understood the concern of the Committee regarding the sport fee increase. He commented that this increase would be a phased approach over a number of years, and the Council would work with groups and users to monitor the impact. He stated that the Council had to ensure cost neutrality, but also had to ensure services could continue to be supplied, and would receive the necessary upkeep. Councillor Watkins added that a new sport and leisure policy was currently being developed which would show the Council's commitment to sport across the borough. He also mentioned the new enforcement charges that were being added in this report, such as to tackle engine idling, which would improve air quality across the borough. He stated that the officers tackling engine idling would use a considered approach, and would focus on areas where drivers tended to idle, such as outside schools and at railway crossings. Councillor Watkins added that this would also help to reduce climate change. He summarised and highlighted less visible fees such as charges for people dumping refuse into sewers, as although this could appear a small problem, he felt that enforcement of this fee could help

keep the borough clean and tidy.

The Leader highlighted Councillor Watkins point that engine idling enforcement would be tackled using a focussed approach, and signs would go up in places such as bus stations and town centres where idling was common. He stated that the Council were working hard to move towards being cost neutral, and this report would help with that. He added that fees could fluctuate during the year.

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 Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property, and the relevant Portfolio Holder.

3. Noted the feedback from all Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

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

74. Housing Development Options List (Decision: 110524)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and stated that Site 20 from Appendix B had been removed. He stated that the report detailed a list of sites, which would help the Council to meet its target of 500 new council homes, and clarified that all sites met the 3R's policy of release, retain or reuse. He added that some sites fell within his own ward, but all sites would be going to further consultation and investigation, and this report did not grant planning application. Councillor Johnson stated that this policy was open and transparent, with the process being previously agreed by Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. He mentioned that if the report were agreed it would give consent for investigatory works, and not planning applications. Councillor Johnson clarified that any sites identified would meet the previously agreed criteria, and would go to a full consultation with residents and Ward Councillors, and objections to specific sites could be made at that stage. He clarified that no site identified within the report was closer to development than any other, and some might be further away from development, as could be dismissed once investigatory work and consultation had been completed. Councillor Johnson stated that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had discussed the report last night, and debated every individual site. He stated that the purpose of the report was not to discuss the merits or drawbacks of each potential site, but to agree the recommendations that they should go forward for further investigation. He summarised and stated that the report was trying to be open and transparent so residents and

Councillors could see the next stages.

The Leader stated that due to the general election and purdah, this report had had to go to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee last night, rather than at their previous meetings, but felt it would have been good to see the outcomes from their discussion. Councillor Coxshall added that the policy of the 3R's had been agreed when the Conservatives had first taken power, as it was important to shine a light on the reasons for decisions, particularly regarding land. He mentioned that as there would be a full consultation for each site, the outcomes of these could present new ideas that may not have been previously considered. He stated that it was important for members of the public and other Councillors to see how decisions were being made.

Councillor Little stated that she had a non-pecuniary interest as one of the proposed sites was in her ward, and echoed the Leaders comments that it would have been good to see the minutes from Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Little then proposed that Site 19 be removed from the report, as she felt it did not meet the 3Rs criteria, or the Cabinet agreed process, as the suggested site contained private houses that were not owned by the Council. She felt that the proposed Site 19 did not aid regeneration of the area and would disrupt children's education. The Leader clarified that the report did not focus on specific sites, but only allowed the next stage of investigatory work of proposed sites to go ahead. Councillor Little added that Highways England were also considering Site 19, as those residents living the area would potentially need to be compensated if the LTC route went ahead. She felt that this meant Site 19 was not viable, and did not want to waste officer's time if Highways England would need the site for LTC construction in a few years' time. Councillor Little therefore asked Cabinet to support the removal of Site 19 from the report. The Leader commented that he understood Councillor Little's concern as a Ward Councillor, as many Cabinet Members also felt concern regarding some sites within their wards. He highlighted the purpose of the report was to take the sites forward for further consultation, and the report did not provide planning agreement for any of the sites.

Councillor Huelin echoed comments that it would have been nice to know what Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had discussed, and felt that the Chair of the Committee should have attended to outline those points. She felt that if the report was agreed, then consultation would be very important, and residents would need to be contacted individually. She felt that an advert in the newspaper or notice on a lamppost would not be sufficient for a consultation of this nature. The Leader agreed with Councillor Huelin's comment that good consultation would be necessary, and clarified that no sites would be moved forward without robust consultation with residents and Ward Councillors.

Councillor Jefferies declared a non-pecuniary interest as some of the sites were within his ward, and he had been contacted by local residents to make a representation on their behalf. He stated that the Council had a job to put forward sites for potential development and regeneration, and felt pleased to

see that full consultations would be conducted for every site. He echoed comments that he felt disappointed that the Chair of Housing Overview and Scrutiny had not attended the meeting. Councillor Watkins echoed comments that transparency regarding these sites was needed, and stated that sites could be reused if good ideas came forward from consultation. He stated that the Council had a housing quota and a Council Housing Policy that had to be met, to ensure that residents had access to high-quality housing. Councillor Maney echoed comments that he also felt disappointed that the Chair of Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not attended the meeting, and he felt that she should have attended to play her part in the governance process. He stated that also felt some sites listed in the report should not be used for housing development, particularly those relating to current community sites. He felt that some sites should be included in the list, but disagreed with the inclusion of others.

Councillor Hebb asked if the recommendations could be deferred until Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments had been received. He stated that ensuring good quality housing was one of the long-term ambitions for Thurrock Council, but felt that there needed to be public discussion. He described how he wanted the process to be open and transparent for residents, as the Council wanted to avoid issues such as those that had occurred with King Street Car Park. He stated that Cabinet Members had to balance two priorities, one being their Ward and potential development sites that they disagreed with, and the other being their civic duty priority to ensure that Thurrock Council fulfilled their housing needs.

The Leader stated that Councillor Redsell was a member of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and was present at Cabinet. The Leader confirmed with the Monitoring Officer that she had the right to speak at the meeting. The Monitoring Officer clarified that Councillor Redsell could speak in her capacity as Member of the Committee.

Councillor Redsell stated that she was speaking personally, and not on behalf of the Chair or Committee. She described how an estimated 60 people had attended the meeting, and she felt the meeting became very political due to the contentious item. She felt that the Chair should have informed residents beforehand that the report proposed sites for consultation, rather than confirmed development, as officers had had to answer many questions that could have been avoided. She added that the Chair had decided to go through every site individually; and had voiced her concern at this as if any Councillor were to go onto Planning Committee at a later date, then their view would be conflicted if they were to give an opinion about any of the sites at this stage. Councillor Little welcomed Councillor Redsell's comments and stated that as the Chair of Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not attended and the minutes were not available, the item should be deferred.

Councillor Johnson stated that he had received a note that the report had been formally endorsed by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, but the Chair had asked for it to be included in the minutes that she did not agree with all proposed sites.

The Leader thanked Councillor Redsell for her comments and attendance, and asked resident Mr. Alex Andonie to present his views. Mr. Andonie stated that he had attended the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and felt that many residents were distressed about some sites outlined in the report. He highlighted that eight projects were located in South Ockendon, including one five-storey development on a green space, located directly opposite a number of houses. Mr. Andonie added that consultation had already occurred regarding sites in Callan Grove and Culver Fields, with over 200 responses being collected, and asked if those responses would be included in the upcoming consultations. The Leader stated that those consultations pre-dated this process, and all new proposed sites would have new, full consultations.

The Leader then asked resident Ms. Patricia Campbell to make her representation. Ms. Campbell stated that some of the proposed developments were not in keeping with the surrounding areas, particularly one potential development which outlined three blocks of flats in an area of predominantly council housing, and felt this would be an eyesore for local residents. Ms. Campbell felt that green space in the borough was precious, particularly for local children who often played on green spaces and needed areas to run around. She stated that central government had mandated the protection of green spaces a few years ago, and did not want to see these precious areas being lost to development. Ms. Campbell felt that some of these potential sites were small, and more space would need to be found in a few years to manage a growing population. The Leader thanked both Mr. Andonie and Ms. Campbell for their representations, and highlighted that any HRA sites were ring-fenced for local residents who had lived in the borough for at least five years.

Councillor Johnson thanked the residents for speaking and stated that the proposed sites on the list would re-enter consultation, but no planning decisions had yet been made. He urged residents to go through the consultation process again, as it was important for residents to make their voices heard. Councillor Coxshall also urged residents to get involved with the upcoming Local Plan process, as this would determine what Thurrock would look like for the next 40 years. He felt that Thurrock did not want any urban sprawl, and wanted to protect green spaces, which could only be achieved through the Local Plan. He stated that the site development consultation would be open and transparent and all responses would be read and analysed.

Councillor Hebb mentioned that half of all Cabinet Members had links to South Ockendon and knew the area well. He asked the Corporate Director Adults, Housing & Health/Interim Director Children's Services what form the consultation would take, and if residents who could not access the internet would still be able to have their say. The Corporate Director Adults, Housing & Health/Interim Director Children's Services replied that all sites would go through a full consultation process. Councillor Johnson added that the paper that had been agreed by Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in January had outlined the criteria for consultation.

The Leader again thanked the residents and Councillor Redsell for their involvement in the discussion, and urged residents to get involved with the consultations. Councillor Mayes echoed comments that the Chair of Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee should have attended to provide comments, and asked if sites could still be refused if the recommendations were agreed. The Leader replied that when the process began, a consultation period would start, and if clear reasons for refusal became apparent then sites could be rejected and other sites could be chosen. He stated that this process had been supported by Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in January 2020, and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had endorsed the recommendations in the this report, although the Chair had not supported all sites. The Leader commented that Cabinet should balance their priorities as Ward Councillors and their civic leadership role, but that all parties agreed with the need for more council housing across the borough. He stated that there were problems associated with developments on some of the proposed sites, but stated that some sites had been proposed for redevelopment as early as 2013 and 2015.

Councillor Jefferies left 8.03pm.

Councillor Coxshall agreed that he felt disappointed that the Chair had not attended the Cabinet meeting or given a formal response. The Leader again thanked the residents for their representations and Councillor Redsell for her thoughts and held a vote on the recommendations. Councillor Little stated that she would not endorse the recommendations as she felt Site 19 was not in-line with the 3R's policy. A vote was moved, the outcome of which was:

In agreement with recommendations: 8 (Councillors Gledhill, Hebb, Coxshall, Huelin, Johnson, Maney, Mayes and Watkins)

Against recommendations: 1 (Councillor Little)

Therefore the recommendations were agreed, 8:1.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the list of housing development site options to be taken forward for further detailed work, involving engagement with stakeholders and communities.

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

75. Incorporation of South East Local Enterprise Partnership

The Leader stated that as he had a pecuniary interest in this item, he would not be voting and would be removing himself from the room.

Councillor Gledhill left 8.07pm.

Councillor Hebb, as Deputy Leader, introduced the report and stated that this outlined the governance processes for the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), and sought agreement for it to become a limited company. He stated that SELEP boosted job growth across the region, and helped to improve the local economy. Councillor Coxshall highlighted the importance of SELEP for Thurrock, and felt that Thurrock was already seeing the results from schemes that had been bought forward by SELEP.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Noted that the Council will become a member of South East LEP Limited, with articles of association as set out in Appendix 1.**
- 2. Noted that the Council will sign the framework agreement as set out in Appendix 2.**
- 3. Agreed that the Leader will be the Council's initial member of the Board, with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Strategic Planning as alternate director.**
- 4. Agreed that the Leader will be the Council's initial member of the Accountability Board, with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Strategic Planning as principal substitute.**

Councillor Gledhill returned 8.09pm.

76. Procurement of Transport and Highway Contracts

Councillor Maney introduced the report and stated that it was a good news report as it ensured that money could be spent on delivering the Council's priorities, and could procure the necessary works contracts over the next 5 years, and deliver on the capital works programme. He highlighted point 2.5 on page 68 of the agenda and stated that this explained the rationale for the report, as spending had increased to £60million in year 6, which was over contract value and therefore needed a new procurement exercise. He stated that Cabinet had agreed the process for procurement in 2015.

The Leader stated that he felt glad to see this report come to Cabinet as it helped deliver schemes such as Kerb It, upgrades to Stonehouse Lane, and smaller projects such as the installation of zebra crossings.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Delegated authority to the Director of Place and the Director of Environment and Highways, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transportation, to decide the appropriate procurement route for the delivery of the Transport and Highways services and schemes for the next five years, commencing 1 April 2021.**

2. Approved the process to commence procurement of Transport and Highways services and schemes for a five-year period commencing 1 April 2021, which will be compliant with relevant EU Public Procurement Regulation, the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

3. Delegated authority to the Director of Environment and Highways, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Place and Environment and Highways, to award any contracts necessary for the delivery of transportation and highways services for a five-year period commencing 1 April 2021.

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

77. A13 East Facing Access Scheme Update (Decision: 110523)

Councillor Coxshall introduced the report and stated that this scheme had been long awaited by residents and Members alike, and felt it was good to see the scheme moving forward. He clarified that approval had been received by the Minister at the Conservative Party Conference, and could now progress to the next stage of development. He explained that the East facing access on A13 would relieve the problem of congestion, particularly at the Treacle Mine Roundabout, Sainsbury's Roundabout and at junction 30/31 of the M25, as the new access would mean that traffic could go straight from Lakeside onto the A13. He described that the next stage in the process, if agreed by Cabinet, would be to send the outline business case to the Minister for them to make a decision on, and then work could begin quickly. Councillor Coxshall mentioned that the proposed route of the LTC also contained similar problems to the current Lakeside access problems, as there was no local connectivity to the LTC, so residents would have to travel to Stanford-le-Hope and back on themselves to gain LTC access. He stated that Highways England were currently undertaking a second round of consultation, and urged residents to take part.

Councillor Watkins supported the recommendations as he felt that the new East facing access would reduce congestion at the Dartford Crossing, and help residents in Stifford and Chafford Hundred, as traffic would not be diverted through their residential areas. He added that this would also improve air quality in the area, and 3-4 Air Quality Monitoring Stations were currently being set up near to Lakeside and surrounding residential areas. Councillor Mayes also supported the recommendations as he felt it would reduce pollution, as the biggest pollutant in the borough was traffic. He felt concerned regarding the LTC scheme put forward by Highways England as he felt it would have a negative effect on people's health. He stated that the new East facing A13 access would benefit residents health as it would reduce congestion on the M25, ensuring more free-flowing traffic and less pollution.

The Leader highlighted that new traffic modelling projections showed the new access scheme would reduce congestion in the area, and at junction 30/31, by 40%. He stated that Thurrock remained opposed to the LTC, but wanted to ensure that if it was built in Thurrock, it was built right by design. He stated that the outline business case would be submitted to government, but every year the scheme was delayed cost more to the taxpayer, as the scheme increased in price by £1million per year due to inflation.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Noted and endorsed the work undertaken to develop the A13 East Facing Access scheme to date.

2. Noted and endorsed the Options Assessment process identifying the sifting process and prioritisation of schemes for submission to the Department for Transport.

3. Noted the funding implications associated with the A13 East Facing Access scheme options, as set out in Section 7.

4. Agreed that the Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Strategic Planning, submit the outline business case to the Department for Transport and continue to develop the full business case for the scheme.

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

78. Draft 2020/21 Budget Proposals & Medium Term Financial Strategy Update

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that this was a budget for residents, and would benefit elderly residents, mental health provision, infrastructure, leisure provision, air quality, and other Council services. He stated that the Council provided both statutory and discretionary services for residents, and due to continued service review, the budget would be balanced for the next three years. He stated that Council would have a surplus of £4.1million in 2020/21, a surplus of £1.4million in 2021/22, and a small surplus in 2022/23. Councillor Hebb compared this to the budget in 2016/17 when services such as street cleaning, the environment, and PCSO's could not be funded, and the Council were running a deficit. He stated that Thurrock were one of the lowest unitary authorities in the country in terms of council tax, but were still able to fund additional services from the General Fund such as new policing teams, anti-social behaviour enforcement, and mental health provision for schools. He highlighted that 97% of other council's had been unable to raise council tax under inflation, and the proposed 1.49% council tax increase would be ring-fenced for areas such as social services, and environmental enforcement.

Councillor Hebb highlighted that the majority of councils experienced pressure

regarding social care funding, but Thurrock had been able to continue to fund good quality services for elderly and vulnerable residents. He stated that the proposed 2% social care precept increase would go to services that needed it the most, such as an additional 5% funding for the Adults, Housing and Health directorate. He explained that Thurrock were also committed to working with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, and had promised an additional £700,000 for new police officers, as well as the additional 20,000 police officers promised nationally by the Prime Minister. He felt that these new police officers would make town centres safer and green spaces more accessible for residents. He added that £600,000 funding was also being given to the Youth Offending team to reduce reoffending rates and deter crime; and £600,000 was being given to deter illegal car parking on green spaces. He added that £400,000 was being spent on air quality, such as by implementing a new tree planting strategy, new cycle ways, and new 'switch-off' engine zones. He felt that this would have a positive impact on resident's health, as it would improve air quality and reduce the rates of COPD.

Councillor Hebb added that £500,000 was also being given to tackle mental health problems across the borough, by introducing an early intervention mental health service, which would intercept crises earlier. He mentioned that regeneration projects were also occurring across the borough, and improvements would be made to leisure and sports facilities, to ensure residents remained in the borough for their sport.

Councillor Hebb moved onto outline the capital plan, as good infrastructure was needed to ensure that residents could access services. He highlighted that a number of infrastructure projects were already underway, such as the Purfleet-on-Thames regeneration scheme, Grays underpass, Stanford-le-Hope interchange, new educational facilities, Aveley community hub regeneration, Civic Offices redevelopment, A13 widening scheme, regeneration for Tilbury Riverside Centre, and works to prevent northbound HGV access through Aveley. He added that work was also being undertaken to reduce the amount of rubbish that ended up in landfill, such as a new pilot scheme that had been rolled out to increase recycling in flats. Councillor Hebb also outlined proposals for new schemes in Coalhouse Fort, and thanked the work of the volunteers. He added that paving replacement schemes would also be undertaken in areas where footpaths were becoming loose.

The Leader highlighted that there had been no council tax increase last year, and this year the council tax was not being raised to its maximum level, but the council were still providing a surplus budget. He highlighted that some of the surplus money was being used to buy machinery to make the clean-up of graffiti more efficient, and felt that this would improve the look of Thurrock. He stated that these proposals would be going to Full Council for agreement in two weeks' time.

Councillor Watkins thanked Councillor Hebb and the wider finance team for their hard work in preparing the budget, and felt that there was a positive financial outlook that supported vulnerable residents. He felt that although the decision to increase council tax was not an easy one, and would affect

residents, the ring-fenced approach ensured that support would be available for the most vulnerable residents. He added that it was good to see the surplus being invested into strategies, such as the new tree planting strategy and air quality. He supported the capital projects outlined, particularly the new scheme for increasing recycling in flats, which had seen a successful pilot in 2019. The Leader added that £30million was also coming into the budget through investments, which helped ensure that council tax was not raised to its maximum level. He stated that the adult social care precept would be ring-fenced, which ensured a smoother process for the department to access the money and spend it on services. He added that the Police, Fire and Crime Commission was also raising its council tax precept, and although this was not the decision of Thurrock Council, it would ensure the police and fire services could continue their good work. Councillor Hebb summarised and stated that there had been significant service reform to ensure every service was fit for purpose.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Considered the comments from Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in Section 12 of the report.**
- 2. Proposed a 2% council tax increase towards the cost of Adult Social Care.**
- 3. Proposed a 1.49% council tax increase to meet the increasing costs and demands of all other services, and to move the council towards greater financial sustainability for the medium to longer term.**
- 4. Noted the budget report set out through the report and appendices.**
- 5. Recommended to Full Council the capital proposals set out in the report.**
- 6. Considered and allocated the budgeted surplus for 2019/20 as set out in Section 3.**
- 7. Endorsed the Thurrock 2020/21 Schools Funding Formula to be implemented as stated in Section 9, this being consistent with Cabinet's decision made in December 2018.**
- 8. Endorsed the Early Years Funding Formula for 2020/21, as shown in Appendix 6, and allowed the Schools Forum to consider that the rates to be implemented can be made permanent, following review of the January 2020 census data.**

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

79. Capital Strategy 2020/21

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that Thurrock Council had received £31million in investment this year, which would increase to £35million in the next financial year, and this money was used to benefit residents and services. He commented that this report confirmed the guidelines used by officers, and Cabinet had agreed this process in October 2017, 2018 and 2019, with cross-party agreement. He stated that the Council's Spending Review received regular oversight of investments, as well as Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and all officers had to ensure due diligence when undertaken investments, to reduce risk and increase security. He added that in 2018 and 2019, Full Council had agreed the limits for borrowing and investment, and two separate external auditors had agreed on the strategy and current spending levels. He clarified that 75% of debt was short-term debt, and 25% was spent on the capital programme, but that there were mechanisms in place under the Minimum Revenue Position to pay these back and earn money on investments.

Councillor Hebb highlighted an additional recommendation that had been made by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for additional democratic oversight on investments, and although he felt there was currently a robust process, the Cabinet would work to review democratic oversight. He stated that a piece of work would be undertaken by Governance Group to work out the scope of this oversight, and what it might look like, and this would be outlined in the next financial outturn report.

The Leader welcomed the additional recommendation for increased oversight, and felt pleased to see that a piece of work would be undertaken regarding this. He felt it was important for financial decisions to be appropriately scrutinised, ensuring no confidentiality rules were broken. He also felt pleased that the external auditors had shown no concern with the process.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet recommended that Full Council:

- 1. Approve the Capital Strategy for 2020/21, including the approval of the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement for 2020/21.**
- 2. Approve the adoption of the prudential indicators as set out in Appendix 1.**
- 3. Note the revised 2019/20 and 2020/21 Treasury Management projections as set out in Annex 1, paragraph 2.32.**
- 4. Considers the recommendation from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to further increase the democratic oversight of investment activity.**

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

80. Housing Revenue Account - Business Plan and Budgets 2020/21

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and outlined how it considered rent and charges for the coming financial year, to ensure that HRA stock could be financed and maintained. He highlighted comments made by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in section 7 of the report, and stated that they had disagreed with the proposed increase in rent and service charges. He felt that these increases were necessary as they improved the quality and quantity of HRA stock. Councillor Johnson then compared current rents, which averaged £87 per week in 2019, with average rents in 2015/16, which had averaged £90.18 week. He stated that even with the proposed rent increase of an extra £2.36 per week for residents, rental costs would still be less than in 2015/16 and would be the lowest in Essex. He highlighted that the extra money raised through rent increases would be used to fund projects such as external decoration, new door entry systems to increase security, and garage renovation or regeneration to decrease the amount of anti-social behaviour. He stated that there had been lots of consultation with residents regarding the proposed rent and service increases, including with the Tenants Panel, and eight face-to-face consultation sessions attended by the finance and housing teams, which had been visited by 113 residents. He highlighted that these increases were necessary to ensure a viable HRA budget, and ensure that all tenants lived in safe and secure accommodation.

The Leader opened discussions and stated that HRA rent had increased under the Labour administration, even though central government had mandated year-on-year rent decreases. He highlighted that if Cabinet agreed Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations to not increase rent and service charges, then the Council would not be able to build as many new council homes, undertake repairs, or facilitate new housing projects, as the HRA would lose £2.3million income in 2020/21. He understood that some residents might find it difficult to pay the extra rent increase, but Thurrock still had the lowest rents in Essex, and HRA rents were cheaper than in the private sector. Councillor Maney agreed that the rents should be increased, as HRA rents were cheaper than private sector renting. He queried why non-council tenants that paid rent on garages appeared to receive a cheaper rate than council tenants and the Leader replied that an answer would be provided in writing. Councillor Watkins stated that residents depended on Thurrock services and policies, and the proposed rent increase would help to fund these necessary housing services.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Agreed the changes included in the base budget for 2020/21.**
- 2. Agreed an increase in domestic rent of 2.7% in line with the 30-year HRA business plan from 6 April 2020.**
- 3. Agreed a 2.7% increase in service charges for 2020/21.**
- 4. Agreed the Leaseholder charges for Homeownership services, as**

detailed in paragraph 5.8.

5. Agreed the changes to garage rents, as detailed in paragraph 3.11.

6. Agreed the approval process for specific acquisitions that affect the HRA, as detailed in paragraph 4.5.

7. Considered the recommendation made by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in Section 7.

The meeting finished at 8.58 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