

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 10 February 2021 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Monday 22 February 2021 at 5.00pm

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

Councillor Joycelyn Redsell, Chair of Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed to the Council's website.

93. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 13 January 2021 were approved as a true and correct record.

94. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

95. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Maney declared an interest regarding Item 15 (Active Travel Tranche 2) as he lived near one of the proposed development sites. Councillor Huelin also declared an interest regarding Item 15 (Active Travel Tranche 2) as she lived near one of the proposed sites. The Monitoring Officer thanked the Members for declaring their interests, and stated that as there was currently no detail regarding the scheme, they could still take part in the discussion and vote.

96. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by describing how COVID-19 cases across the borough had continued to fall. He urged residents to continue to follow the rules regarding lockdown, to only go out if necessary, and to always follow the 'hands, face, space' guidance, even if you had received the vaccine. He stated that the major incident that had been declared across Essex had now

been lifted as the NHS was no longer under such immense pressure, due to falling case rates. He commented that all residents should still follow the rules, and not try to find loopholes, as this would increase the number of infections and delay the end of lockdown.

The Leader then moved on and discussed how Thurrock was seeing a good take up in the number of people getting the vaccine, and described how the borough was ahead of the curve in administering the vaccine to the four highest priority groups. He stated that they were now working on an accelerated timeline and were following the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation guidelines by now offering the vaccine to disabled young people and their carers. He stated that the NHS were still delivering the vaccine to those residents who were housebound in priority groups 1-3, but this process took time due to logistics. He urged residents in priority groups 1-3 to contact their GP surgeries if they had not yet been offered the vaccine. The Leader then stated that Thurrock currently had three vaccination centres: Stifford Clays, Chadwell St Mary, and Thurrock Community Hospital. He thanked the volunteers and staff at the centres for all their hard work, particularly during this cold period. He encouraged all residents to get their vaccine once they had been offered it, and to visit the Essex COVID vaccine website if they had any concerns. He summarised and stated that there were also a number of vaccination scams, whereby residents were being contacted and asked to pay for their vaccine. He urged people to stay alert for these scams and reiterated that the vaccine was free to everyone.

The Leader then stated that the Thames Freeport bid, which had been backed by Thurrock Council and private companies such as Ford Dagenham and the Port of Tilbury, had been submitted to government on 5 February 2021. He explained that if the bid was successful, the new Freeport would lead to 20,000 new jobs across the borough, billions of pounds of private investment, new training opportunities for residents, and increased wages. He felt that there would be lots of long-term benefits and positive change if the bid was successful.

The Leader then highlighted the amount of rain that had recently fallen across Essex, which had led to increased surface water and flooding risk. He explained that private properties had the responsibility for any flooding that occurred on their land, and management companies often had responsibility for potential flooding risks in blocks of flats. He stated that the Environment Agency managed the local waterways and rivers and residents should report any issues they had directly to them. He commented that if residents had issues with blocked gulleys along highways that could cause flooding, then they should contact Thurrock's highways team. He summarised and described how the Environment Agency had introduced a flood warning system, which people could sign up to, who would then receive emails regarding potential flooding in their area.

The Leader then stated Thurrock Council had received £120million in COVID support from central government, which included £30million in business grants. He stated that Thurrock had also distributed £6.7million of support to

840 local businesses to help them during the pandemic. He explained that a further £2.4million had been distributed to 375 businesses and 184 hospitality businesses as part of Thurrock's discretionary grants and top-up fund. He felt that Thurrock were working hard to make the pandemic easier for businesses, and stated that grants were still being distributed to businesses that needed them.

The Leader summarised by explaining the latest COVID figures across the borough up until week ending 4 February 2021. He stated that two weeks ago Thurrock had been the 42nd highest local authority regarding COVID cases, but this had fallen to 86th out of 149 local authorities. He explained that last week there had been: 47 cases in residents aged under 18, a fall from 76 cases the week before; 203 cases in residents aged 18-49, a fall from 325 cases the week before; 58 cases in residents aged 50-59, a fall from 89 cases the week before; 17 cases in residents aged 60-69, a fall from 38 cases the week before; and 30 cases in residents aged over 70, a fall from 475 the week before. He stated that overall there had been 355 total positive cases in the week leading up to 4 February 2021, which had been 575 positive cases in the week before that. He summarised and stated that Thurrock had given out 5493 tests in the week leading up to 4 February 2021, and there were currently 201.9 cases per 100,000 across the borough.

97. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Coxshall stated that the Tilbury Town Fund bid had been submitted to central government last week. He explained that if the bid was successful then Tilbury would receive £25million of investment, which would fund a new youth centre, new jetty, new hub entrance, new car park for Tilbury Fort, and a new beach. He explained that the bid for the Grays Town Fund would be submitted later this year, which if successful would help fund a new beach in Grays, as well as other projects. He stated that if the bid was successful then the monies would need to be spent by 2025, so new services would appear in Tilbury within the next few years. The Leader thanked Councillor Coxshall for his hard work on the submission, and was pleased to see youth provision had been included as 83% of Tilbury residents had requested additional youth services during the 'have your say' consultation.

Councillor Watkins stated that due to the levels of snow across the borough, waste collection services had been temporarily closed to ensure the safety of staff. He mentioned that the staff had been redeployed to other services across the council, and stated that the service would be up and running again as soon as it was safe to do so. He commented that next week side waste would be collected alongside bins due to the temporary closure, and urged residents to follow Thurrock's social media which would outline any new updates. The Leader also mentioned that roads were being gritted regularly and vaccine centres were also being cleared of snow.

98. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

99. Questions from Non-Executive Members

No questions had been submitted by members of the public.

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

The Leader stated that Councillor Redsell was attending this Cabinet meeting, in her role as Chair of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee and would be asked to read her statement at the relevant item.

101. Draft General Fund Budget & Medium Term Financial Strategy Update (Decision: 110550)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that the report had originally been brought before Cabinet in January, before being submitted to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their review. He explained that the Council had a statutory duty to balance the Medium Term Financial Strategy, and this had been balanced since 2016 when the Conservatives had formed a minority administration. He explained that before this point, the Council had been in deficit, but the three main political parties had worked together during this period to balance the budget. He stated that since 2016 reserves had been trebled, and many years had seen budget surpluses which had helped to fund areas such as adult social care and mental health.

Councillor Hebb explained that due to the events of 2020 and the winding down of the investment strategy over the next 2-8 years, the Council would now have to work hard to balance the budget. He explained that all 49 members had previously agreed with the investment strategy, which had brought many benefits and investment to Thurrock. He then moved on and explained the commentary that had been received at the scrutiny meeting. He explained that the first comment the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee had made related to the need to seek funding from central government, to ensure Thurrock had continued support. Councillor Hebb explained that central government had already provided Thurrock with £140million of support, £30million of which had been distributed to businesses as grants. He added that central government had also spent billions of pounds on the furlough scheme to ensure people could keep their jobs throughout the pandemic. Councillor Hebb stated that central government funds still came from the taxpayer, but the Council had been submitting their accounts to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) monthly throughout the pandemic. He explained that as reserve levels had now trebled, part of the 'rainy day' fund would be expected to be used to balance the budget and fund services. He explained that Thurrock did continue to have conversations with central government surrounding funding and support, as well as through mechanisms such as the LGA, cross-borough Finance Portfolio Working Groups, and the IRRV.

Councillor Hebb then moved onto the second point raised by the Corporate O&S Committee, which concerned the rise in council tax. He explained that Thurrock had frozen council tax for some years, whilst other neighbouring councils had risen their levels dramatically, such as the London Mayor who had raised council tax by 31%. He explained that officers had been instructed by all elected members to increase investments to reduce council tax. Councillor Hebb outlined that 70% of the borough would only pay an additional 99p per week in council tax, with the remaining 30% of borough paying an additional £2 per week. He stated that support would be available for those residents who may struggle to pay their council tax. He highlighted that the majority of the council tax raise would help to fund adult social care and relieve pressure and vulnerability within the sector.

Councillor Hebb addressed the issue raised by Corporate O&S surrounding wider opportunities for commercial income. He stated that the finance team constantly worked to assess the fees and charges level, and ensure market driven decisions were made. He commented that Thurrock were also considering other ways of working, such as sharing resources with other councils, and working with the voluntary sector and private sector to deliver certain services. Councillor Hebb then addressed the final point raised by Corporate O&S Committee regarding the acceleration of service reform. He stated that the Council had worked hard on the service review since 2016 to ensure that services did not have to make hard and fast cuts quickly, but due to the investment strategy ending, the service review would need to be accelerated.

Councillor Hebb moved on and outlined the capital programme for 2021/22. He stated that £19million of projects and programmes had been evaluated and postponed or cancelled due to the pandemic. He explained that the Council would still be supporting infrastructure goals such as housebuilding and communities, for example by investing £1million into the Local Plan, and supporting the Thames Freeport bid. He explained that this work could help support businesses and residents, and therefore increase council tax and business rate collection. He stated that other projects would also continue to be funded, such as the A13 widening scheme, East Facing A13 access, the Purfleet regeneration scheme and the Stanford-le-Hope Interchange project, as well as HRA and highways infrastructure.

Councillor Hebb summarised and stated that difficult changes lay ahead for the Council, but he felt that Thurrock could navigate through the crisis and find positive outcomes.

Councillor Redsell then read her statement. She thanked Cabinet for allowing her to comment on fees and charges, as well as the sporting strategy. She apologised for the delay, but wished to put her views as CGS Chair, as well as the Committee's thoughts before Cabinet, on behalf of all clubs and sporting venues that had to pay fees and charges. She thanked the government for the help they had given to sports clubs through grants, and hoped that the Portfolio Holder would ensure help continued to be given to

sports clubs that needed it. She encouraged the Portfolio Holder to meet and engage with sports clubs, to ensure that young people and coaches across Thurrock continued to thrive. She felt that sports clubs coaches needed support, which would help Thurrock achieve its aims regarding increasing exercise opportunities for young people. She also felt that sports would be needed more than ever once the pandemic had ended, and thanked those who worked hard to maintain their clubs. Councillor Redsell summarised and felt that the fees and charges for sports clubs needed to be fair to all, and thanked Cabinet for listening to her statement.

The Leader thanked Councillor Redsell for her statement, and stated that a response would be provided at the fees and charges report item.

Councillor Watkins thanked Councillor Hebb and the finance team for their hard work on the budget. He stated that the environment team had seen benefits from previous budgetary surpluses, as these surpluses had helped fund schemes such as Clean It, Cut It, Fill It and Kerb It. He added that the Keep Britain Tidy scores had also improved since 2016 and were now regularly above average. He felt that these improvements in the department had been due to the investment strategy, which had brought money into the council and had been supported by all members. Councillor Watkins highlighted the Waste Strategy, which he felt had been agreed by a cross-party group and then criticised by opposition members, and he felt that all political parties should now work together to help the borough through the pandemic crisis. He stated that the environment team would continue to work to deliver and manage services. He also thanked Councillor Redsell for her comments, and stated that he would address these during Item 12 on fees and charges.

The Leader also thanked Councillor Hebb and the team for their hard work on the budget. Councillor Halden highlighted that before 2016 when the Conservatives had formed a minority administration, the Council had had little reserves, which he felt would have exacerbated the current COVID budgetary issues. He also added that it was good to see investment continuing in Tilbury, such as the redevelopment of the Manor School, the new Tilbury IMC, and the Tilbury Town Board, which would help to regenerate the area and showed that the budget covered the entirety of the borough. The Leader agreed and stated that lots of money had been invested in the borough during the pandemic, which included 67% increase in adult social care, and this would be partly funded through the additional 99p per week council tax increase for the majority of residents. He added that the rise in council tax would help those most vulnerable during lockdown, and would increase opportunities in the borough. He explained that the investment strategy would also start to wind down, but highlighted that this strategy had been agreed by all members and had been supported by organisations outside the council. He stated that the investment had helped Thurrock fund services, and any borrowing had always been paid back on time plus interest, which had helped the councils who had invested in Thurrock improve their own services too. The Leader added that every local authority had been affected by the pandemic, and local authorities were now more cautious with investments and

loans.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Considered the comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in section 12 of the report.**
- 2. Supported the proposed council tax increase of 1.99%.**
- 3. Supported a 3% Adult Social Care precept increase.**
- 4. Recommended to Full Council the capital proposals set out in this report and appendices.**
- 5. Endorsed the Early Years Funding Formula for 2021/22, as shown in section 9 and Appendix 5.**
- 6. Noted the proposed updated to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the remaining deficits in future years.**

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

102. Capital Strategy 2021/22 (Decision: 110551)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that it outlined the mechanisms and instructions through which officers could undertake investments, such as through the Treasury Management Provision. He stated that last year Thurrock had announced the investment strategy would finish, and explained that this paper represented the beginning of the end. He said that the approach had helped fund services such as additional policing, increased funding for adults and children's social care; education; and mental health in schools. He explained that central government was now less supportive of councils being entrepreneurial in this way, and there was no longer the same accessible market, so investments that matured would not be renewed. He explained that this wind-down of the strategy would lead to a reduction of borrowing by £350million. Councillor Hebb then outlined that an Investment Shadow Board had been constituted in autumn 2020 to consider investments and provide democratic oversight, and described how this would continue, and the Terms of Reference would be agreed in May 2021. He explained that a summary of the Investment Strategy would also be published on the Council's website as an easy reference for residents to understand the process. He summarised and stated that the report had been agreed by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and had been made available at the Investment Shadow Board. He added that there were no new emerging recommendations, contrary to what officers had presented at the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2021.

Councillor Halden again thanked Councillor Hebb for his work on the report.

He felt it provided residents with an accurate summary of the investment approach. He stated that Thurrock had worked hard to pay off debt, but still had to pay off longer-term, hard-core debt which had been accrued before 2016. Councillor Coxshall questioned how much hard-core debt had been inherited. Councillor Hebb responded that approximately £280-300million hard-core debt had been inherited, and this was hard to pay off as it was almost irredeemable. He explained that Thurrock would continue to work through this debt and pay it off as quickly as possible, where possible. Councillor Hebb also explained that the level of borrowing set out in the table in the report was the top-level figure and borrowing would not always go up to this figure. He then drew Cabinet's attention to the table on page 48 which highlighted the difference in interest payable and interest receivable, and compared it to the graph from the previous agenda item, which outlined that the gap between spending power and spending requirement had now increased.

The Leader stated that the majority of borrowing which had been undertaken was short-term debt and had been repaid plus interest. He added that Thurrock had also invested in renewable energy, which remained stable throughout the pandemic, unlike other local authorities which had invested in shopping centres. He explained that the investment strategy had helped Thurrock earn money, which had been spent on services and residents, such as work on the A13, increased policing, and Clean It, Cut It, Fill It.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet recommended to Full Council:

- 1. The approval of the Capital Strategy for 2021/22 including the approval of the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement for 2021/22.**
- 2. The approval of the adoption of the prudential indicators as set out in Appendix 1.**
- 3. Noted the revised 2020/21 and 2021/22 Treasury Management projections as set out in Annex 1, paragraph 2.32.**
- 4. Noted the comments from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in section 5.**

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

103. Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2021/22 (Decision: 110552)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and explained that the Council ran a number of services which were operated through the payment of fees and charges. He stated that this provided a small component of Thurrock's spending power and highlighted point 3.3 of the report, which articulated the questions asked during the review of fees and charges. Councillor Hebb

stated that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee had encouraged new lines of enquiry, and this report showed these enquiries. He described how the team looked at market considerations when discussing fees and charges, and how they wanted to ensure that services could be self-sufficient, particularly during the pandemic.

Councillor Halden stated that the care market was at the heart of the adult social care fees and charges, and these proposed increases would help pressures within the service, as well as protecting the market. He stated that domiciliary care fees had been frozen for the previous four years, and felt that the system had become too reliant on income from other areas and was no longer self-sufficient. He stated that the increase in fees would be phased, and highlighted that the majority of residents would continue paying nothing, or only a proportion, as the system would remain means-tested. He explained that domiciliary care fees would increase from £13.06 to £17 and then to £18 over the course of the next three years, which would mean a 5.8% pay-rise for care providers in 2021/22. He felt this would help to stabilise the market and encourage carers to work for Thurrock Council. Councillor Halden then moved on and discussed the increase in fees in care homes, and explained that the cost would rise from £486 per bed to £532, which would help to boost the market.

Councillor Halden explained that the budget still included a council tax cut for foster carers, which was equivalent to £1600 in a Band D property, as he felt this would encourage more Thurrock residents to become foster carers and reduce the £2million spend on foster agencies. He hoped that this figure would half over the next three years as more residents became approved foster carers. He then explained that Thurrock were the lowest spending unitary authority in terms of adult social care, and the third lowest higher tier authority, which meant that the service was already cost efficient. He stated that there was currently a £1.5million social care fund, as well as a £19million general fund, and as well as the proposed 3% adult social care precept increase, this would help to improve flexibility in the service.

Councillor Watkins replied to the comments made by Councillor Redsell and assured her that he wished to improve sports across the borough, and had been a key priority in his annual Full Council report. He explained that he regularly met with sports teams to discuss their concerns, and this would continue as the sporting strategy developed. He stated that he was aware of the concerns raised by the CGS Committee, but felt that the team had strived to balance fees and charges amongst all areas, whilst making sure that sports clubs could be self-sustaining. He thanked Councillor Redsell for her hard work regarding sports clubs and the Sports Council, as well as for her hard work finding external funding for clubs. He explained that funding could be found in numerous ways, including external grants, and the Council could help clubs fill in these funding application forms. Councillor Redsell agreed that sports clubs could raise money in other ways, such as through external funding, and felt it was good to see some clubs were beginning to find external funding streams. She thanked Councillor Watkins for opening a dialogue with sports clubs, and felt that sports could help young and old

people once the pandemic had finished.

Councillor Johnson noted the comments from the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee as listed in Appendix 3 of the report, and stated that some recommendations they had made had been taken on board, for example regarding carbon monoxide reports. He explained that the Housing O&S Committee had considered the fees and charges report at their meeting on 19 January 2021, and had accepted that the service charge increase would maintain the current level of services. He felt that the approach outlined in the report was the fairest way as it covered the service cost without stopping some important services running.

The Leader thanked Councillor Redsell for her attendance, and felt pleased to see that a scrutiny Chair had attended a Cabinet meeting. He summarised and stated that some fees and charges were set by central government, such as planning application costs, and hoped that local authorities would be able to set their own rates in these areas soon, as this would promote expansion and improve the local economy.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed the proposed fees and charges, including those no longer applicable, as per Appendices 1 and 2.

2. Approved the delegated authority to allow fees and charges to be varied within a financial year, in response to commercial requirement, in consultation with the Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property and the relevant Portfolio Holder.

3. Cabinet note the feedback from all Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings as per Appendix 3.

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

**104. Housing Revenue Account: Business Plan and Budgets 2021/22
(Decision: 110553)**

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and stated that this updated the HRA 30 year business plan to ensure that there was a sufficient income to pay for services. He stated that the proposed increase in rent would help to maintain the current level of service, and would ensure all residents lived in good quality housing. He outlined that the projects in Claudian Way and the Tops Club had now been finished, and the Calcutta Road project was almost finished. He added that the HRA New Build project, using return on right to buy receipts would increase the council's housing stock by 70 homes. He explained that the 1.5% proposed rent increase would lead to £462,000 additional monies for the HRA, which would be used to continue the Council's statutory duties, as well undertaking projects residents had wanted during the

consultation survey, which included the external decoration programme. He stated that the rent increase would equate to an average increase of £1.35 per week for residents, but would be covered by Universal Credit and housing benefit for those residents who were on it. He added that the money would also be used to help manage fire safety, tower block refurbishment and carbon neutral properties.

The Leader thanked Councillor Johnson for his report and highlighted that the proposed increase in rent would help maintain the current service level, and would provide, safe and secure housing for tenants. He stated that some tenants still lived in poor quality, old housing stock, which would need investment to keep up with modern lifestyles, such as working and teaching from home, which put a strain on older houses. He explained that he was aware of some residents with damp and mould issues, which would be tackled through investment. He added that plans were currently in place to increase the number of council houses in the future, and the housing team were currently looking at alternative buildings, which would require less maintenance and repairs.

Councillor Redsell added that she had received feedback from residents near the new Chadwell housing site, who had felt that the new accommodation looked lovely.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Agreed the changes in the base budget for 2021/22.**
- 2. Agreed an increase in domestic rent of 1.50% from 5 April 2021, in line with the 30-year HRA business plan.**
- 3. Agreed the increase in service charges to reflect the costs of running each service, in line with the 30-year HRA business plan, from 5 April 2021 (detailed in table 5).**
- 4. Agreed the charges for garage rents (paragraph 3.10).**
- 5. Considered the recommendation made by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee set out in section 7.**

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

**105. Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) Update
(Decision: 110554)**

The Leader introduced the report and stated that Thurrock had been part of ASELA for three years, and all six local authorities who were part of the group had worked hard to implement cross-boundary working and improve infrastructure for all south Essex residents. He stated that ASELA had already

received £24million in funding from central government for the digital connectivity full-fibre project, as well as strategic planning. He added that ASELA had also received central government funding for infrastructure, transport studies and difficult brownfield site development. He explained that £20million of funding had also been received for a South Essex University which would focus on apprenticeship degrees, and would be the first in the country. He added that ASELA had received £5million in funding for a South Essex Estuary Park, which would be shared across the proposed Joint Committee. He stated that ASELA also had longer term goals such as super-fact broadband connectivity, which had already begun work. The Leader highlighted that Southend-on-Sea Borough Council had chosen a different method for fibre connectivity, which he felt proved that each individual council could undertake their own projects outside of the ASELA framework. He explained another long-term project was for £250million of funding for pipeline infrastructure, which would help deliver housing on sites which had planning permissions but no infrastructure. He added that ASELA also wished to improve economic development across the whole of South Essex, through increased employment, construction and through the support of key sectors. He explained that ASELA had also been endorsed by the Thames Estuary Growth Board who felt that the group removed arbitrary local authority borders for cross-party working.

The Leader highlighted that this report did not create an ASELA council, or remove current governance processes. He added that the report also did not insist that all government housing targets be located within one authority, and Thurrock would not lose planning powers. He stated that each local authority within ASELA would be considering the report which proposed a joint committee to help improve the south Essex economy and bounce back from the pandemic.

He summarised and stated that a Memorandum of Understanding would be brought to Cabinet in March, which would consider the merger of Basildon and Thurrock Councils into one, larger unitary authority. He stated that this would not happen immediately, and each Council would closely examine the implications of a merger, as well as the impact it could have on adult social care, transport and waste. He explained that government wished to see local authority reform, and although this had been paused due to the pandemic, he felt it would be good to have improved local governance consensus.

Councillor Halden thanked the Leader for his report and felt that it demonstrated the good work that ASELA had undertaken, as well as their future plans. He outlined that the future Memorandum of Understanding would not create a unitary authority, but would open the conversation, and would highlight how the proposal could benefit both authorities. He felt that one, larger unitary authority could have benefits for both parties, but stressed that the proposal coming to Cabinet in March would not be a commitment. The Leader added that the announcement due in March would also not cease the work of ASELA, as ASELA looked at the whole of South Essex in a collective way.

Councillor Coxshall felt that the Memorandum of Understanding would show residents the benefit of merging the authorities, for example on projects such as the A13 widening which could be continued on into Basildon, and the East Facing Access on the A13. He felt that a merger would increase synergy between the two authorities and reduce competition. He added that the government had proposed the largest local authority in fifty years and felt it would be good for Thurrock to be leading on this. The Leader added that local government reform was also a Conservative party manifesto pledge, which ensured local sovereignty continued and people's views were heard. He felt that Thurrock and Basildon created a natural economic corridor, with the A13 and A127 running through both. He stated that the proposed Joint Committee outlined the report would show collegiate working to central government and improve the levels of funding given.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Noted the updates provided in the report.**
- 2. Approved the establishment of a joint committee, under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, to oversee ASELA and provide enhanced transparency and accountability in the new delivery stage of its work programmes.**
- 3. Approved the governance arrangements of the joint committee as set out in Appendix 1 and the related Joint Committee Agreement and Terms of Reference.**
- 4. Appointed the Leader of the Council to represent the Council on the Joint Committee with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Strategic Planning as substitute.**

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

106. Active Travel Tranche 2 (Decision: 110555)

The Leader and Cabinet voted to extend standing orders.

Councillor Maney introduced the report and stated that it provided an update on the national allocation of funding to support active travel schemes. He drew Cabinet's attention to point 3.4 which outlined the active travel plans, and highlighted that public engagement would help to shape the delivery of the programme. He stated that the active travel scheme had been devised by central government during the pandemic to increase cycling opportunities and improve footpaths, to ensure people could access more sustainable travel. He explained that Thurrock had submitted their bid last year, and the Secretary of State for Transport had agreed to give Thurrock £690,000 in tranche 2, on top of the £280,000 which had already been received during tranche 1. He explained that the schemes listed only included an indicative cost, which was

very approximate, as no design work or consultation had been undertaken. He added that the schemes listed in the report exceeded the government funding allocation, but explained that this was deliberate as the Council could then present a broad range of schemes to the public, which could then be funded through a Section 106 Agreement or other funding streams if necessary. He summarised and stated that government were also considering a tranche 3 of the scheme, and any additional schemes outlined in the report could potentially be funded through later tranches.

Councillor Halden stated that he was a ward councillor in Homesteads and felt pleased to see that £250,000 investment could come to his ward. He felt pleased to see that the scheme provided space for a cycling route which would make roads less obstructed and improve safety for cyclists. He thanked Councillor Maney and the team for their hard work on the report, and questioned whether the Branksome Avenue project would be funded through tranche 2. Councillor Maney highlighted point 2.3 of the report which explained how the team had arrived at the proposed schemes, which included through resident and cycling groups comments, and ward councillors feedback. He thanked Councillor Halden and Councillor Collins for their dedication to their ward, and to the Branksome Avenue scheme, which would be funded through tranche 2 if it approved by residents, officers and the Portfolio Holder.

The Leader felt it was good to see a bank of schemes in draft, which could be ready to go if further funding became available. He felt that if some of the projects within the scheme were funded through a Section 106 agreement, this report would increase Section 106 transparency.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Approved the approach to develop and implement a programme of Active Travel Tranche 2 schemes.**
- 2. Approved the engagement and consultation process required to inform the Tranche 2 programme.**
- 3. Approved the requirement to delegate authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, to review and make local changes to the Active Travel Tranche 2 programme taking into account local views and priorities.**

Reason for decision: as outlined in report.

This decision is subject to call-in.

107. Adoption of the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance & Mitigation Strategy Supplementary Planning Document and Partnership Agreement (Decision: 110556)

Councillor Coxshall introduced the report and stated that it formed part of government legislation to mitigate against coastal erosion, which included a

small charge on new house builds until 2038 to offset any potential erosion. He stated that only 500-600 new homes would be affected by the charge over the period of the scheme, and the charge would help fund park rangers, for example in Langdon Hills, to ensure the protection of birds and wildlife. He stated that this report formed part of Thurrock's 'play' strategy as it would protect the coast and open spaces. He added that the report was a statutory duty in partnership with Chelmsford City Council, which would help both councils save money, and would be monitored through a Steering Group.

Councillor Halden thanked Councillor Coxshall for his work on the report, as he felt that climate change could cause serious erosion along Thurrock's coast, and the new scheme would help to protect birds and wildlife. The Leader supported the work being undertaken to protect against erosion, and felt pleased to see that it was a collaborative effort with Chelmsford City Council.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Adopted the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) 2018-2033 (January 2019) as set out in Appendix 1.**
- 2. Adopted the Essex Coast RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (June 2020), as set out in Appendix 2.**
- 3. Adopted the RAMS Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report, as set out in Appendix 4.**
- 4. Authorised the Director of Place to join the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership on behalf of Thurrock Council, via a Partnership Agreement with the 11 Essex Authorities and Chelmsford City Council, as the Accountable Body (for the first item) and put into place operational processes to implement, collect, monitor, and pay the tariff contributions collected in the Thurrock Borough to the Essex Coast RAMS Accountable Body.**

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

The meeting finished at 9.31 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**