

Thurrock - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

## Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **9 June 2020**

Due to government guidance on social-distancing and COVID-19 virus the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 June 2020 will be held virtually online. The press and public will be able to watch the meeting live online at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/user/thurrockcouncil> .

### Membership:

Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Jack Duffin (Vice-Chair), Colin Churchman, Garry Hague, Shane Ralph and Gerard Rice

### Substitutes:

Councillors Mike Fletcher, Sue MacPherson, Sara Muldowney and Elizabeth Rigby

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### Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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<b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>	
<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 26</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14 January 2020, 23 January 2020, and 10 March 2020.	
<b>3 Items of Urgent Business</b>	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
<b>4 Declaration of Interests</b>	

<b>5</b>	<b>COVID-19: Financial and Budget Implications</b>	<b>27 - 38</b>
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**Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:**

Please contact Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)

Agenda published on: **1 June 2020**

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# DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

## Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

## When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

**What is a Non-Pecuniary interest?** – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

### **Pecuniary**

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

**Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:**

- **Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;**
- **Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and**
- **leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon**

**If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps**

### **Non- pecuniary**

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature

**You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.**

## Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
  - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
  - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
  - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together
  
2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
  - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
  - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
  - Fewer public buildings with better services
  
3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
  - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
  - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
  - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 January 2020 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Colin Churchman, Mike Fletcher (substitute), Garry Hague, and Elizabeth Rigby (substitute) (*arrived 19.15*)

**Apologies:** Councillors Gerard Rice and Andrew Jefferies

**In attendance:** Les Billingham, Assistant Director of Adult Social Care  
Sean Clark, Director of Finance, Governance and Property  
Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service  
Sarah Welton, Strategy Manager  
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

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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.

### **14. Minutes**

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 September 2019 were approved as a correct record.

### **15. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **16. Declaration of Interests**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **17. Mid-Year Corporate Performance Report 2019/20**

The Chair stated that the agenda would be amended, and this item would be heard first. The Director Strategy, Communications and Customer Services introduced the report and stated that this was the Quarter 2 performance report, which was being heard at this time due to the cancellation of meetings because of purdah. She felt that this was a positive report as 74% of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had achieved their target, and overall there had been a positive direction of travel. She summarised and added that in line with a suggestion made earlier in the year by the Committee, any indicators that had missed their target included a 'route to green', which outlined steps being taken to ensure the KPI met its target in the future.

The Chair opened the debate and highlighted page 25 of the agenda and the

improvement in the KPI relating to tenant satisfaction. He felt that this was a positive KPI as it had exceeded its target and hoped this was partly down to focus placed on the KPI by the Committee. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services stated that feedback from tenants had been about the lack of communication between the Council and tenants, rather than specific repair complaints. She highlighted that because of the feedback the Council had started a resident's newsletter and developed upon engagement with the Tenants Excellence Panel, which kept residents up to date with any necessary information. She felt this was having a direct impact on the KPI, and had therefore increased tenant's satisfaction.

The Chair then highlighted page 26 of the agenda and the KPI relating to the percentage of bins collected on the correct day and felt it was good to see this KPI had also met its target, and added it was good to see a monthly breakdown. He then commented on page 31 of the agenda, and the percentage of waste recycled, as he felt it was disappointing to see this KPI had missed its target, and had shown a negative direction of travel in the monthly breakdown. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services responded that a Cross-Party Waste Management Working Group had been set-up in relation to recycling and waste management, which was currently consulting to get residents feedback on recycling. She added that pilot schemes had been tested for particular areas of difficulty, such as recycling in flats, to find options that could work across the borough. She also commented that Thurrock were running a social media campaign and regular press releases, which were tied into national media campaigns to increase plastic recycling. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services summarised and mentioned that officers were also going back into schools and visiting assemblies, so that 4000 children would receive additional education regarding recycling.

Councillor Fletcher stated that he was pleased to see that 'routes to green' had been added to the report, as he felt it showed a clear statement of how improvement would be achieved. He also asked how the information was collected regarding the percentage of tenant satisfaction KPI, and queried whether all tenants were surveyed or simply those that had complaints. The Strategy Manager replied that it was a random spread of tenants taken by an independent survey company, but would clarify the details with the relevant officers and reply via email. Councillor Fletcher then discussed the KPI regarding the number of library sign-ups and asked if there was a long-term library strategy in place, as many young people no longer used them. He also asked a question regarding the relevance of the KPI relating to the number of permanent admissions of older people to residential care homes. The Assistant Director Adult Social Care replied that although libraries had seen a large uptake of users, it had also seen large numbers of people become inactive, so the KPI had not been met. He added that a libraries strategy had been developed which would improve the libraries offer and improve IT facilities available, as well as making them more commercially viable and financially self-sufficient. He felt that as libraries became more linked with community hubs, the uptake of library memberships would increase. The Assistant Director Adult Social Care then answered Councillor Fletcher's



second question relating to older people in care homes, and stated that in recent years the perception of residential care homes and their need in the community had changed. He felt that in previous years the Council had wanted to reduce the number of people in residential care, as the theory was to keep people in their homes for as long as possible, but recently this idea had become untenable. He quoted a study which had been undertaken and had compared the type of residents in care homes in 2010 and now, which had found that people in care homes were now older (often having their first admittance over the age of 85) and had more complex care needs. He stated that for those people, residential care was appropriate, and so the needs profile of people had changed. He commented that Thurrock's first desire was still to keep people in their homes for as long as possible, but felt that it was sometimes necessary for people to be in residential care. He felt that although the KPI had not met its target, this was not related to poor performance, but simply a reality of life that some people needed residential care. He added that the KPI also included self-funders, compared to other Councils who did not include these people in their figures.

*Councillor Rigby arrived 19.15*

Councillor Hague echoed the Chair's comments that the direction of travel for the majority of KPIs was good. He questioned the figures around the recycling KPI as he felt these had not made any progress, and asked if the way of measuring the KPI had changed. The Strategy Manager replied that the measurements had remained the same, but the KPI was dependent on numerous factors some of which could not be controlled; one example being the weather, for example, a wet month would see reduced garden waste. Other factors included recycling in flats and contamination of bins. She added that low recycling rates was not just a problem for Thurrock as different boroughs and councils had different recycling policies dependent on which recycling centre they used, which could be confusing.

The Chair asked what level of recycling data the council had across the borough, and the Strategy Manager replied that the data could be broken down by round, and by day, and this helped pinpoint hotspots around the borough. She stated that these figures were provided to the Waste Management Working Group for their oversight. Councillor Fletcher added that he was the Chair of the Waste Management Working Group and had seen data relating to why people did not recycle, and their problems regarding recycling policies, which he felt would be good for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to see. He added that a successful pilot had been run to tackle recycling in flats, which had seen positive results. Councillor Rigby added that at the previous Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a detailed report on recycling had been presented, and felt it would be useful for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to see the minutes of this meeting. Councillor Churchman added that education regarding recycling was important, particularly around contamination and types of plastic that could be recycled.

The Chair then highlighted page 29 of the agenda and the KPI relating to the

number of places accessed by two year olds for early years education, and asked what the policy was on expanding placements at settings. The Assistant Director Adult Social Care replied that he would consult with officers and would answer via email. He mentioned that the performance of this KPI was dependent on the season, as over summer there was lots of movement of children, which settled down in September when children took up their places. He stated that the Quarter 3 figures showed that 80% of places had been accessed by two year olds, which showed improvement and met the KPI target.

**RESOLVED: That:**

**1. The Committee noted and commented upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators, in particular those areas which are off target.**

**2. The Committee identified any areas which required additional consideration.**

**18. Local Council Tax Scheme**

The Director of Finance, Governance and Property introduced the report and stated that this was an annual report that had to be agreed by Council, even though the scheme had seen no changes. He stated that Thurrock followed the national approach that mirrored benefit regulations, but as central government had slowed the work on Universal Credit, changes could not be made until 2020/21. He added that a more detailed report would be brought before the Committee once regulations had been agreed, which would hopefully be early in the next municipal year and would go to public consultation.

The Chair asked what the proposed review would look like, and what the outcomes of the review would be. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that the report would include any changes to housing benefit regulations, and the report would be brought before Committee to discuss those changes and options. He added that the review would then be signed-off by Cabinet, with consultation being based around comments from both scrutiny and the Executive.

**RESOLVED: That:**

**1. The Committee noted the analysis of the current scheme.**

**2. The Committee considered the recommendation that no changes are made to the current scheme for 2020/21.**

**3. The Committee agreed to undertake a full review of the scheme within 2020/21 once the government had confirmed further detail on the future of universal credit.**

## **19. Briefing on Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local Authorities**

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and stated that it summarised the recently published Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny, and discussed how it related to Thurrock. She commented that as it was statutory guidance, local authorities must have regard for it, which is why it was being brought before the Committee. She stated that any comments relating to the guidance could also be included in the ongoing scrutiny review if Members wished.

The Chair felt this was a good report, and felt that the relationship between the Executive and scrutiny would be improved by the introduction of an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol, which would ensure scrutiny could make an impact, work was collaborative, and scrutiny could be a part of the decision-making process. The Chair added that co-opting technical experts onto scrutiny committee's was also an idea that should be considered as they could provide additional input into the scrutiny process. The Chair summarised and stated that Members could email Democratic Services once they had digested the report and if they had any comments for the ongoing scrutiny review.

### **RESOLVED: That:**

- 1. The Committee noted the updated MHCLG Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local Authorities, published in May 2019.**
- 2. The Committee commented on any aspects of the guidance they would like addressed in the ongoing review of the overview and scrutiny function.**

## **20. Work Programme**

The Chair stated that the Communications Strategy was being moved to the first meeting of the municipal year, to allow an LGA Peer Review to take place in February/March that would include residents, Members and local newspaper editors.

**The meeting finished at 7.45 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](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 January 2020 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), Colin Churchman and Garry Hague, and Elizabeth Rigby (*substitute*) (arrived 19.02)

**Apologies:** Councillors Jack Duffin (Vice-Chair), and Gerard Rice

**In attendance:** Sean Clark, Director of Finance, Governance and Property  
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

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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.

### **21. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **22. Declaration of Interests**

There were no interests declared.

*Councillor Rigby arrived 19.02*

### **23. Draft General Fund Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy Update**

The Director of Finance, Governance and Property introduced the report and stated that an updated version of Appendix 2 had been provided to Members, as the table had been realigned. He described how the report explained the Council's current financial position, and had been discussed by Cabinet last week. He then outlined that in the previous six months there had been considerable pressures in some areas, and highlighted one area of pressure as children's social care, which had received additional funding and improved their OFSTD score at the last inspection. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property also highlighted that adult's social care was under financial pressure, which was common on a national scale, and pressure on the Housing General Fund, which was due to increased numbers of people presenting themselves as homeless.

The Director of Finance, Governance and Property then moved on to the forecasted financial position in 2020/21 and clarified that an indicative financial assessment had been carried out before Christmas, but the Council were still waiting on the final allocations of this due to purdah delays. He explained that preliminary findings from this appeared hopeful, and budget allocations had already increased, so he felt the Council were in a good

financial position. He added that last year the Council had undertaken a Spending Review and Fair Funding Review, but due to only one-year spending agreements from central government, these were not at the forefront, although the Council could make an estimate for the next two to three years. He stated that additional funding received would go towards adult and children's social care, and increased homelessness grants.

The Director of Finance, Governance and Property then moved on to discussing council tax and the governance process for setting this. He explained that the Cabinet recommendation to increase council tax would go to the relevant scrutiny committee for comment, which would then feedback into Cabinet in February, and would be sent to Full Council for decision. He stated that the proposed budget would see an increase in 2% for the adult social care precept, which was the maximum it could be raised by, and an increase in general council tax by 1.49%, which was not the maximum of 1.99%. He commented that this would increase the Council's base going forwards, as tax was a more stable income compared to investments.

The Director of Finance, Governance and Property drew the Committee's attention to paragraph 4.4 on page 9 and clarified the figures outlined in the table, including the current council tax banding, total number of properties, and average net charge, which took into account discounts, tax schemes and support provided. He stated that council tax bands A-C made up 70.4% of all properties, and a 1% council tax rise would equate to an additional 19p per week. He then drew the Committee's attention to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) on page 13 of the agenda, which outlined that the increase in council tax and adult social care precept would increase funding to the council by £1,337,000 working total, which would increase the surplus next year to £4million. He added that even with the proposed increase in council tax, the Council's surplus would only raise to £1.4million in year 2 and £45,000 in year 3. He clarified that without an increase in council tax, the council would be in deficit in the financial year 2020/21.

The Chair opened debate and stated that in total council tax would be rising by 3.49%. He queried the background to this, and asked what central government's policies were on local authorities increasing taxes, particularly special precepts. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property stated that the government had only proposed a one-year funding settlement, but central government had also struggled to fund adult social care. He stated that local authorities had ongoing powers to increase council tax and precepts, but local authorities were currently waiting on a White Paper for further clarification. The Chair then highlighted point 2.3 on page six of the agenda, and asked how the council were reducing staff expenditures. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that this was a continuing aspect of the council's budget, and included reducing sickness related expenditure and overtime costs; and monitoring the amount of agency staff compared to permanent staff employed by the council. He mentioned that this was regularly considered at Directors Board, and in previous years, a target had been set to reduce staff expenditure, but that was not the case in this financial year. He summarised and commented that a reduction in staff

expenditure would not be achieved through staff redundancies.

The Chair then queried the increase in budget allocation and asked how much revenue was included in this. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied and highlighted page 13 of the agenda, which stated that in 2020/21 an increase in tax would increase revenue by £3.1million, as well as an increase in business rates. He stated that almost £2.5million would be received from central government. The Chair asked if the working total surplus could be achieved in 2020/21 without increasing council tax, to which the Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that a net £2.6million could be achieved, but the surplus could not be carried forward.

The Chair moved onto discussing the position of investment and highlighted page 13 of the agenda. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property stated that borrowing was not just investment, but related to the amount of capital expenditure. He added that temporary revenue from borrowing could be used for investment and Thurrock Regeneration Limited (TRL), and that the base amount of investment related income was £1.7million, with the rest going to TRL. He clarified that the majority of information relating to investment was discussed in the next item, but the headline figure was £30million net income from investment. The Chair then asked about the CIPFA guidance, outlined at point 4.31 on page 8 of the agenda, and queried how much confidence officers had in this investment income, and whether CIPFA would change the guidelines relating to investment for Councils. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property responded that CIPFA only produced guidelines, and explained that the Council's investments were capital backed, compared to CIPFA guidance that mainly discussed non-capital backed investments. He stated that CIPFA were mainly worried about councils investing in property outside of the borough, particularly in areas such as housing and shopping centres. He commented that Thurrock were investing bond issues in the energy sector, and no property investment had been purchased. He clarified that he had spoken with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the National Audit Office, who had never said to not undertake investments, and were moving towards local government self-financing. He summarised and stated that he did not know if CIPFA or government regulations might change in the future, but if they did then the Council would revisit their investment approach. The Chair commented that if the rules were to change then that revenue stream would be at risk and issues would arise with investments, which would lead to a loss of funding. He asked if the investments revenue could be made-up from other streams if it were lost. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that if central government did change the rules regarding investments then a transition period would be put into place, and many other local authorities used investment in the same way as Thurrock. He stated that Thurrock had built into the budget increased interest payable which helped to stabilise long-term investments.

Councillor Fletcher asked three questions, the first being if officers were concerned that council tax was not being increased to its full amount, as officers had been concerned last financial year that it would have an impact.

He then asked about potential population increases, as 32,000 new homes were being proposed across the borough, and if this would have an effect on council tax income and had been factored into the budget. Finally, Councillor Fletcher asked about potential problems that were associated with capital projects, such as overspend and delays, and if these were included in the budget. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied to each question in turn and stated that in answer to the first question, officers felt worried when council tax was not increased to its maximum, as even a 1.49% increase reduced the Council's income by £4-500,000 per year. He stated that if council tax were increased by the maximum amount of 1.99%, the budget would be in surplus of £1.2million or £1.3million in year 3, compared to the current outlook of £45,000. He clarified that council tax was the most sustainable form of income for the council, as it was not affected by national changes, and because of this, he felt that council tax should increase by 3.99%. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property then answered Councillor Fletcher's second question and stated that some modelling work had been undertaken relating to the increased population and increased costs. He stated that expenditure would change if the population increased, for example, more would be spent on adult and children's social care, as well as the potential for a new waste collection round. He described how the finance team had been working with the planning team to discuss the increased amount of council tax that would be collected through population growth, as well as the increased expenditure. He summarised and stated that new houses, even with the increase in council tax associated with this, would increase the pressure on services for the Council. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property then answered Councillor Fletcher's third question and stated that the capital programme would be discussed as part of Item 6, but if a project overspent then funding would have to be found. He stated that the funding options were ranked, so external funding bids were the best way to fund projects, then through capital receipts, and finally through borrowing as there was costs associated with this such as interest and MRP, also known as depreciation. He commented that recently there had been lots of discussion regarding the funding of the A13 project, which had been through the audit process, but this would not affect the Council's funding until next year or the year after. He summarised and stated that when the funding results of this project were finalised, they would be built into the budget.

Councillor Hague commented that he felt lots of work had been put into this budget by officers and Members from all parties. He felt that the Council's finances seemed stable, but asked if the increase in council tax was as low as possible, as although there was pressure on services, an increase in council tax could put additional pressure on residents. He was supportive of the increase in council tax, as it had not been increased by the maximum level, which would help residents who had their own financial priorities. He felt this would lead to growth for the council, whilst not over-burdening residents. The Chair also asked if residents in financial difficulty had been considered when writing the budget, as inflation and the cost of living had also risen. He highlighted that further mitigation to help some residents may be necessary, as some would experience a rise in rents, service charges, and council tax. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that an equality



assessment had been carried out and was attached as an appendix to the report and table 4.4 showed the real impact the council tax increase would have on residents. He added that the additional money raised through council tax could be used to support the borough's most vulnerable residents. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property then highlighted that only 50% of HRA tenants paid any rent, so the most vulnerable in society received the support they needed, but he appreciated that some people would be caught in the middle.

The Chair stated he felt the situation for some residents was already difficult as the economic situation could be tough. He outlined appendix 2 of the report and felt that although £900,000 of savings was being made, this could be increased through effective spending and finding further efficiencies. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied all directorates were searching for savings and efficiencies, but the MTFS proposed a modest figure, as if the figure was larger, directorates would be forced to make top-down cuts. He added that although the MTFS identified almost £1million in savings, officers would not just stop once this figure was met, and would continue to try to increase income, reduce expenditure and focus on efficiencies. He highlighted the work the procurement and commercial teams had done in finding savings, in collaboration with the transformation team.

The Chair then asked about a recent motion that had been brought to Full Council regarding climate change, and asked what actions had been considered in the budget to mitigate climate change and the impact this would have on residents. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that amounts from the budget surplus had been set aside specifically to look at air quality around the borough. He added that following the motion, Governance Group, which included the Leader, Monitoring Officer, and Leaders from all parties, had agreed to set up a Task Force to consider climate change, and its members would include elected Members, residents and external partners. He stated that this would fall under the remit of the Director of Place, and an update would be provided to Full Council next week.

The Chair then asked what obligations the Council had to fulfil in balancing the budget, as he understood that the budget had to be balanced for one year, not the full span of the 5 year MTFS. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that a balanced budget meant one that Thurrock could afford, so the Council could run at a loss if reserves could be used to fund this. He stated that Thurrock Council did not use this definition though and for Thurrock, a balanced budget meant one where income was equivalent to expenditure. He mentioned that the Council's Section 151 Officer he had to consider a three-year budget, and although it did not have to balance, he had to feel confident that the council could afford it. He clarified that he did not have to consider years four and five of the MTFS.

Councillor Rigby commented on the table at 4.4, and asked which residents could receive discounts on their council tax bill. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that the most common council tax discount was the single person discount, which included people such as one-parent

families, even if they had adult children that attended university, and widowers, who all received a 25% discount. Councillor Churchman then highlighted the residents who fell in the middle and were not overtly vulnerable, but not secure either, such as residents who were privately renting but were waiting for council housing, and had seen an increase in their service charges.

The Chair asked what the level of democratic oversight and accountability there was for corporate projects was, such as the proposed Civic Offices development. He proposed an additional recommendation which read as follows: "The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet and Council that the budget should include the following points:

1. A triple freeze be agreed for rents, service charges and council tax
2. Cabinet to scrap the Civic Offices project
3. Cabinet to agree to net zero emissions by 2030"

The additional recommendation was put to a vote, the outcome of which was as follows:

Votes for: Councillors Fletcher and Gerrish (2)

Votes against: Councillors Churchman, Hague and Rigby (3)

**RESOLVED: That:**

- 1. The Committee commented on the proposed council tax level with mind to the comments set out in the report.**
- 2. The Committee commented on the draft budget as set out within this report to inform final budget proposals at Cabinet on 12 February 2020.**

#### **24. Capital Strategy 2020/21**

The Director of Finance, Governance and Property outlined the report, and stated that the Capital Strategy was a new requirement for 2019/20 and incorporated the Treasury Management Strategy. He stated that the main purpose was set out on page 27 and provided a high-level overview of capital expenditure levels, capital financing and treasury management activity. He highlighted a number of tables to the committee which set out the summary figures including capital expenditure, capital financing, the Capital Financing Requirement, borrowing, and a summary of the overall treasury position. He described the significant press interest since Cabinet had considered the six-month position last week, and he addressed some of the comments that had been published, so the Council's position was clear. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property explained that although Thurrock were quoted as having the highest level of short-term borrowing, Thurrock were by no means the highest borrower. He outlined the reasons for short-term borrowing, which explained that Thurrock had taken the approach since August 2010. He clarified that the Local Authority and related Treasury Market had between £20billion and £30billion of cash available that had to be lent or deposited

somewhere, and estimated that had all of the Council's borrowing been through the Public Works Loan Board, Thurrock would be paying on average additional £15million per annum. He highlighted that the Local Authorities money markets were not linked to the bank base rate, and so were not as open to interest rate fluctuations, and was simply about the amounts of surplus cash available, and how much others needed.

The Director of Finance, Governance and Property then described some facts and figures from 2018/19 and described how the Council had taken out loans from a number of different Local Authorities, the duration of which were between one month and one year, with rates ranging from 0.4% to 1.15% depending on the duration. He then outlined what the Council used the funds for, mainly being capital expenditure on buildings, infrastructure and IT; and investments that were made relating to assets that Thurrock had security over and were repayable, which were mainly bonds on renewable energy assets that raised additional income that the Council could reinvest in frontline services. He described how three-quarters of the Council's borrowing was repayable on maturity, which was currently between three and eight years, but the bond issuer had the right to make early repayments. He stated that based on this, even if long-term borrowing had attractive rates, it would not be prudent to borrow for longer terms when the need was for a shorter period.

The Director of Finance, Governance and Property then drew the Committee's attention to Table 1 on page 27 of the agenda which set out projected capital and investment expenditure, and clarified that these were not always uniform as opportunities did not arise in that fashion. He clarified that over two years investments were forecasted as an average, and the prudential indicators had been adjusted in the budget report in February 2019. He then drew the Committee's attention to Table 7 on page 31 of the agenda, and mentioned that these figures were published every year and agreed by Members in February and whenever else was necessary. He clarified that actuals against these were then reported at least twice a year to Cabinet, and were part of the Council's accounts. He stated that the upper limit for 2019/20 was set at £1.453billion and the Council were set to be within that limit. He summarised and highlighted the table at 2.32 on page 41, which showed that the Council were projecting an annual surplus in the region of £30million, between interest payable and interest received that had been invested in frontline services, namely the environment and social care, as part of the approach to becoming financially self-sustaining.

The Chair opened debate and sought two areas of assurance, the first being that the Council were operating within agreed levels of risk and exposure, and the second being that there was a level of democratic oversight regarding investments. He asked how much Members saw of potential investments, and felt that even though those documents were commercially sensitive, strong levels of accountability were needed. He felt that an additional recommendation would be useful to ensure democratic accountability, and proposed an Investment Review Committee who could oversee the process. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that there was a level of risk associated with investments, but the biggest risk factor was a

change in central government policy, which currently appeared to be minimal. He felt that the majority of government bodies were concerned with investments in areas such as shopping centres, where economic fluctuations could affect income. He stated that Thurrock had not undertaken any investments such as these, and had invested in the renewable energy sector. He felt there was no real risk associated with this sector as there had never been any major disasters in a wind farm or solar park, and their investments were spread over 40 sites. He clarified that the Council were signed up to the assets and not the companies; were insured against loss; and had good maintenance contracts. He mentioned that the Council only invested when the assets were already up and running, and had been so for a year or more to ensure that they were working correctly and to see real yield figures. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property then discussed the level of democratic oversight, as it was difficult to differentiate between everyday levels of treasury management and bigger investments. He commented that any new venture over £10million and over one year had to go to the Council Spending Review, which was made up of Leaders from all groups. He mentioned that he had done some research into the levels of democratic accountability across a variety of Local Authorities, and some provided more freedom, whilst others provided less. He summarised and stated that he was already considering an informal Treasury Management Committee, or increased reporting through Key Performance Indicators.

A debate then ensued regarding the wording of the proposed additional recommendation and the following was agreed: “the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that it considers the best way to increase democratic oversight of investment.”

**RESOLVED: That:**

- 1. The Committee commented on the 2020/21 Capital Strategy for consideration by Cabinet at their meeting on 12 February 2020.**
- 2. The Committee recommended to Cabinet that it consider the best way to increase democratic oversight of investment.**

*Councillor Churchman left 20.22*

## **25. Draft Capital Programme**

The Director of Finance, Governance and Property introduced the report and stated that an updated Appendix 3 had been provided to Members, which removed the summer carriageway drainage works, and replaced it with the Ship Lane redevelopment programme.

*Councillor Churchman returned 20.24*

He outlined the capital programme and stated it was made up of a variety of areas of expenditure including IT, housing stock, and projects. He described

how there had been a need to invest in housing stock and the Council's approach had now changed to being a corporate landlord. He outlined that there were three 'pots' which were digital, property, and service review, all of which received numerous bids. The Director of Finance, Governance and Property described the variance between how much people thought they needed for a project, and how much was actually needed, and described how a separate budget had been set up for feasibility studies and business cases to reduce this variance. He then highlighted Appendix 1 of the report that outlined the existing capital programme, and Appendix 2 that outlined that future and aspirational projects. He clarified that the Committee were not agreeing the individual projects listed as these were only examples, but just the overall amount of spending. He then highlighted Appendix 3 which were actual projects not included in 'pots', but allocated funding in their own right.

The Chair opened debate and highlighted page 58 of the agenda and the proposed project relating to the Integrated Medical Centre in Tilbury, and asked what the phasing for the project was, and if this was certain to go ahead. The Director of Finance, Governance and IT replied that it had been double-counted as its funding had been agreed, but was still going through the process of business case and feasibility. He explained that this project was complicated as it involved a number of external partners who all had different accounts processes, and factors such as rent charges and spacing was still being negotiated. Councillor Fletcher asked why only the Tilbury IMC was considered in the report, and the Director of Finance, Governance and Property replied that it was because it was the only IMC that the Council were responsible for delivering. He clarified that the other IMCs were being run by external partners, and the Purfleet IMC was included as part of the Purfleet regeneration project.

**RESOLVED: That:**

**1. The Committee commented on the specific proposals set out within this report.**

**The meeting finished at 8.32 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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## Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 March 2020 at 7.00 pm – Inquorate Meeting

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**Present:** Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair) and Shane Ralph

**Apologies:** Councillors Colin Churchman and Gerard Rice

**In attendance:** Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service  
Sarah Welton, Strategy Manager  
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

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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.

### **26. Minutes**

As the meeting was inquorate, the minutes could not be approved.

### **27. Items of Urgent Business**

The Chair stated that part of the Committee's remit was to consider business continuity, and asked what business continuity preparations were being put in place to deal with potential disruptions due to Coronavirus. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services replied that Public Health England provided the latest updates on their website every day at 2pm, and currently 373 people had tested positive for the virus, and 6 people with underlying health conditions had passed away. She added that the Portfolio Holder, Directors Board, and Group Leaders were being provided with daily updates of the situation, with all Members receiving weekly updates on a Friday. She added that the Essex Resilience Forum and Thurrock Council had already considered the business continuity plans for a normal flu pandemic, and the impact it could cause for service delivery and the wider workforce. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services explained that due to Coronavirus all services were currently in the process of reviewing their business continuity plans. She added that the Council already ran an agile workforce, with many staff members having the ability to work from home, and a list of critical services had been compiled which may need support from other services during a potential Coronavirus pandemic. She clarified that the Communications team were signposting residents to the government and Public Health England's websites to ensure they were provided with the most up-to-date information, but the UK were currently in the containment phase. She summarised and stated that the Communications team, Public Health England, and the Emergency Planning team were currently working together to monitor the situation, and were working hard to

ensure that business continuity plans were up to date.

The Chair asked what the process was for reviewing business continuity plans, and asked when they would be complete. He felt particular concern for critical services such as adult social care, as the service helped the most vulnerable residents. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied that most services had business continuity plans and the review would hopefully be finalised by the end of the week. She stated that the adult social care department was a priority for the emergency planning team, and work would be ongoing to minimise the impact of Coronavirus. The Chair asked if Coronavirus was likely to have a disproportionate impact on some frontline services, and asked what plans were in place to ensure these services received the necessary support. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service responded that if necessary, staff members could be trained to work for other services, or a cross-service working policy could be implemented.

Councillor Ralph questioned the policy that was in place for homeless people if Coronavirus became a pandemic. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied that she did not have the detail, but this would be covered in the housing business continuity plan, but the service would continue to support homeless people throughout a potential pandemic. She stated that as homeless people were considered vulnerable residents, they could be prioritised and a triage support system was already in place for the service. The Chair asked what was being done for frontline staff to ensure they were aware of the necessary precautions, particularly those working with more vulnerable residents, and asked what the process was for cascading this information to vulnerable residents. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service replied that frontline staff were being signposted to Public Health England's website for the latest information, and could then cascade this information to service users. She added that social workers and other teams working in care facilities were also being kept up-to-date with information, and were often more ready for flu pandemics due to the type of residents they worked with, for example elderly people who were more vulnerable to illness. She added that the Council were also working with Thurrock's Community and Voluntary Services (CVS), but no particular issues had been raised to date.

## **28. Declaration of Interests**

There were no interests declared.

## **29. Quarter 3 (Month 9) Corporate Performance Report 2019/20**

The Strategy Manager introduced the report and stated that she felt it was positive as 85% of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were on target, and 60% were better than in 2018/19. She highlighted that some KPIs had not reached their target, but more detail was provided within the report, with a 'route to green', which focussed on plans in place to ensure the KPI met its target, and any issues were mitigated. She also highlighted the success of the



apprenticeships KPI, and stated that the apprentice levy had now been successfully embedded into the Council's policy, with the end of year apprenticeship target being met in January. She thanked the Committee for their support on this target, including inviting the HR team to discuss apprenticeships in 2019.

The Chair congratulated the team for the positive KPIs and direction of travel. He felt it was good to see the 'route to green' being included, and congratulated the team on the successful apprenticeships KPI, which he felt had been championed by Members of the Committee. He drew the Committee's attention to page 28 of the agenda and the KPI relating to the percentage of waste recycled, reused and composted, as he felt the 30% outturn was low, compared to target. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services replied that the target had not been met partly due to the ongoing impact of the recent wet weather, as this impacted on the amount of waste being composed, as residents were not out gardening or cutting grass and therefore not putting their brown bins out for collection. She stated that the missed target was also due to issues such as recycling in flats and issues regarding access. She explained that following a pilot scheme, a programme was being launched in May 2020 to tackle recycling in flats, and the Waste Management Working Group were currently consulting residents on their opinions regarding recycling and how to improve it across the borough. She added that there was also detailed analysis and engagement regarding recycling communications, and stated that the message was currently focused on metal recycling, and had previously tackled plastic recycling. She described that the communications team were trying to simplify the message around recycling, as it could be quite a complex topic for residents to understand. She added that the council were also engaging directly with schools to spread the recycling message.

Councillor Ralph stated that he was part of the Waste Management Working Group, and one of their main focusses was education regarding recycling. He added that the team had also worked on a new bin sticker campaign in flats to increase the recycling rate, and help continue to maintain low contamination rates in bins. He added that a public consultation was currently underway, and lots of residents were taking part. Councillor Ralph then questioned the KPI on page 24 regarding the number of young people who reoffend after a previously recorded offence, and stated that the KPI was significantly better than the national average. He felt that crime rates around Thurrock continued to rise, and asked how the data relating to the KPI was collected, and how much the police influenced reoffending rates. The Strategy Manager replied that due to the data collection, the data was in arrears every quarter, but was a specific KPI that related to intervention in young people, rather than the overall crime level.

The Chair stated that as the meeting was inquorate, the recommendations could not be agreed. The Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service added that as the report would be presented to Cabinet the following day, comments from the Committee would be included in the Portfolio Holders update.

### **30. Verbal Update: Overview and Scrutiny Review**

The Democratic Services Officer explained to Members the progress that had been made on the review, since Members had last received an update in 2019. She stated that there had been a few delays in progressing the report, such as purdah at the end of 2019, and delays regarding governance. She added that all research for the review had now been completed, as well as the Scrutiny Symposium event, and the first draft of the review was almost finished. She clarified that three main themes had emerged from Members comments and officer research, which included increasing the impact of scrutiny; improving scrutiny's policy development role; and improving Member training.

The Democratic Services Officer moved on and asked for the Committee's comments on the formalisation on the relationship between Cabinet and scrutiny, which would help to finalise the draft Executive-Scrutiny Protocol. The Democratic Services Officer summarised and stated that a meeting between the Leader and the Committee had now been arranged for Tuesday 7 April, which would discuss the relationship between Cabinet and the Executive, and was the final stage in the review process. She clarified that once the comments from this meeting had been included, the review would be signed off by all scrutiny Chairs, as well as the Executive, and would then begin to be implemented.

The Chair thanked the Democratic Services Officer for her hard work on the review, and felt it was positive to see it was nearing completion. He stated that he felt a formal briefing note would be a better way for feedback to get to Cabinet from scrutiny, and asked that comments from Cabinet be reported back to scrutiny, for a circular process. Councillor Ralph added that a verbal update for Cabinet Members might also be necessary as it could open a broader discussion. The Democratic Services Officer clarified that both options could be pursued, and a circular reporting process was being included in the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol.

### **31. Work Programme**

The Chair stated that as this was the last meeting of the municipal year, there was nothing to add to the Work Programme. He thanked officers and Members for their hard work on the Committee, and wished the Committee luck for the future.

**The meeting finished at 7.45 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

## DATE

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<b>9 June 2020</b>	<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>COVID-19 Financial and Budget Implications</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Jonathan Wilson, Assistant Director Finance	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sean Clark, Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report sets out the impact from the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Council's General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets. There are a number of budget pressures set out that include direct expenditure to manage the effects of COVID-19, indirect costs that have arisen from impacts on contractors and reductions in income.

Members should note the position reflected within this report provides a snapshot of the impacts and as there remains significant uncertainty on when lockdown will be fully lifted or, indeed, what ongoing impacts there could be over the short, medium and longer term.

The report also sets out wider COVID-19 potential impacts on the 2021/22 budget. Council considered a report on 26 February 2020 that set out budget surpluses of £5.8m and £4.1m for 2020/21 and 2021/22 respectively. The surplus in the current year will help the Council address the financial pressures in 2020/21 but the impact on council tax and business rate collections, along with ongoing expenditure and income pressures, will put the Council into deficit in 2021/22 if we do not take action to bring the budget back into balance. Fortunately the council has been able to strengthen its reserves position in recent years with an increase in the General Fund balance from £8m to £11m but also with a Financial Resilience Reserve that stands at a further £6m. Whilst it is preferable not to access these reserves they do provide additional security against financial pressures.

The report also sets out the financial support to businesses that has been provided nationally that Local Government has been tasked to deliver.

## **1 Recommendations:**

- 1.1 **That the committee notes the assumptions and financial implications set out in the report.**

## **2 Introduction and Overall Projected Financial Impact:**

- 2.1 This report provides an update on the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and sets out how the financial pressures link to the delivery of key services and support to our communities.

### Summary Financial Position 2020/21

- 2.2 The impact of financial pressures arising from COVID-19 on the GF balance in 2020/21 are currently projected to total £9.7m which covers the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 July 2020.
- 2.3 Direct grant funding to support the council totals £9.21m to date and this meets the majority of the initial impacts set out above.
- 2.4 The wider concern are the impacts for the remainder of the financial year both in terms of additional costs and ongoing reductions in income. This remains under assessment.
- 2.5 There will be further impacts on Council Tax and Business Rates income as set out in the report but it is noted these do not impact on 2020/21 but will need to be mitigated from 2021/22 onwards through the Collection Fund.
- 2.6 Consequently the Council (and the sector as a whole) expects significant additional funding to be required. In addition the Council has frozen non-essential spend and this applies to both capital and revenue projects.
- 2.7 The information is based on current knowledge and will fluctuate on a regular basis depending on our assessment of new and emerging risks and opportunities. The Council continues to engage in an ongoing dialogue with MHCLG and regular returns are submitted to ensure the full range of financial impacts are clear.

## **3 Background - Government Support to Local Government, Businesses and the Community**

- 3.1 There have been a number of initiatives and support to be delivered through Local Government. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has provided specific funding to address COVID-19 financial impacts totalling £3.2bn. Further measures have been taken to support the Council and the wider business community as set out below:

### Wider sector funding and support:

- £1.3bn has been provided directly to CCGs to support local authorities enhance the hospital discharge process.

- £0.600bn for local authorities to ensure care homes can continue to halt the spread of COVID-19 by helping them cover the costs of implementing infection control measures to reduce transmission.
- DHSC have announced a fund of £0.300bn for test and trace services. The funding is intended to help each local authority develop tailored outbreak control plans, working with local NHS and other stakeholders.
- A Hardship fund of £500m for those receiving Council Tax Support.
- A fund of £50m to support reopening of the high streets.
- Funding to tackle rough sleeping of £3.2m.

Measures taken by Central Government to Support Local Authority Cashflow:

- An upfront payment of the Business Rates Grant to support cash flow.
- The deferral of £2.6bn in business rates payments to central government until July to support cash flow.
- £850m of existing social care grants to be paid up front in a move to support cash flow.

Further Direct Support to Businesses administered through the Council:

- £1.8bn of Business Rates Relief.
- £12.3bn of Grant Support to Rural and Small Businesses as well as the Leisure, Hospitality and Leisure sectors to local authorities in England.
- A further £617m to provide support to those businesses with ongoing premises costs but are not on the rating list. This is a discretionary scheme that must be set by individual councils.

**Financial Impacts in Thurrock**

3.2 The following funding and support has been provided to the Council and the wider business community in Thurrock:

Direct Revenue Funding to manage the effects of COVID-19:

- Thurrock Council received a total of £9.210m to address COVID-19 pressures.
- Thurrock Council has been allocated £1.007m to distribute to care homes to implement infection control measures that reduce the spread of COVID-19.

- Funding to support Test and Trace will be provided to help each local authority develop tailored outbreak control plans. Allocations are to be confirmed.
- The Council has been allocated £0.156m of funding to support a range of practical safety measures to reopen high streets safely including new signs, street markings and temporary barriers.
- The Council has been awarded £1.3m from the Hardship Fund. As a minimum, each Local Council Tax Scheme (LCTS) recipient will receive a further discount of £150 or less if the current liability is less.

#### Support for Local Businesses in Thurrock:

- Business Rates payments for all businesses were deferred for the month of April.
- 2,401 businesses will pay no business rates in 2020/21 due to the Small Business and Rural Rate Reliefs.
- Business rate relief has been extended to all businesses within the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure sector with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000.
- A grant scheme covering all businesses that are in receipt of one of the reliefs above As at the 27 May 2020, 1,597 grants have been paid out of an estimated number of 2,018 with a total of £20.455m from an estimated total of £23.770m.
- The government has announced a further discretionary scheme for small businesses with a total of £1.237m to allocate.

#### **General Fund Budget Pressures 2020/21**

- 3.3 Set out below is a summary of the significant General Fund budget pressures in services based on actual and forecast impacts to date over an initial 4 month period. Whilst some impacts are already known there remains significant uncertainty on the impacts of COVID-19 as lockdown is released and thereafter. It is expected there will be financial impacts beyond the initial period under consideration.

#### Adult Social Care

- 3.4 There has been significant activity to ensure the local social care capacity was sufficient to address the expected increases in demand due to COVID-19.
- 3.5 The focus has been on:
- stabilising the care market.



- ensuring emergency care facilities had sufficient capacity for people leaving hospital.
- providing more financial resilience in the care sector.
- taking actions to reduce hospital admissions.
- ensuring there is sufficient Personal Protective equipment available to staff.

This has been reflected in:

- 10% across the board resilience up-lift for 4 months to stabilise local provision and address income shortfalls and increased staffing costs.
- Establishing local Step-Down provision - for example rapidly re-opening Oak House Residential Care home to take COVID positive patients discharged from hospital.
- Block booking, for a period, vacant beds within Thurrock to secure local provision.
- Work is also ongoing to enable swab testing to be available to care home staff to enable effective management of any virus outbreaks.

3.6 The financial resilience costs are projected to total £1.27m. A further £0.41m is required to ensure there has been sufficient additional capacity available locally and circa £0.13m to reflect the projected increase in homecare demand. Finally the additional PPE requirements are currently projected to be £0.24m and additional staff costs to cover increased demand and sickness related to COVID-19.

3.7 Looking ahead the care sector will be facing significant challenges. This is a national issue as care homes in particular face reduced occupancy, increased costs and ongoing requirement around infection control. Action will be required to avoid significant business failure as the sector recovers from the pandemic and adapts to a changed market.

#### Community Shielding

3.8 In Thurrock 9,536 residents have been identified as needing to shield at home for 12 weeks as they are considered clinically extremely vulnerable of a high risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19.

3.9 Locally, Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action was established and is a partnership between Thurrock Council and Thurrock CVS working with Stronger Together and the voluntary sector to support anyone self-isolating without friends or family to support them.

3.10 The government tasked Local Authorities to meet needs in the period before food deliveries could be achieved. The majority of council purchased food

boxes were delivered in the initial weeks of operation, prior to government purchased deliveries settling in. The Local Authority is expected to fill any gaps linked to food deliveries.

3.11 The total projected cost of the operation to date is £0.25m.

Children's Services

3.12 The key impact is the availability of placements for children looked after and is a critical function of the local authority. Whilst placements are generally available it is predicted that demand may increase due to provider staff absence, in addition the availability of local placements is crucial especially if we have reduced staffing levels as this will decrease time spent travelling.

3.13 This has been applied to both LAC placements and Head Start Housing as shown below:

Directorate	Detail	Total for 4 month period
Children's Services	Block Purchasing of Placements	156,233
	Head Start Housing	177,328
<b>Children's Services Total</b>		<b>333,561</b>

3.14 Wider impacts include supporting care leavers and children looked after laptops have been purchased to support access to online learning; prior to the government scheme.

3.15 In addition Schools were asked to remain open over the Easter holiday period to support key workers and vulnerable children. Consequently additional Home to School Transport costs have been incurred, where the Council has a statutory duty to provide transport.

3.16 Going forward there is concern of an increase in demand for children's services once the sector returns to business as usual. This could have an associated financial impact.

Other Significant Expenditure

3.17 The Council has wider additional costs arising from the response to COVID-19. This has included additional subsidies to local bus providers to ensure services remained open to residents at a reduced level during the lockdown process – this is projected to cost £0.52m over the 4 month period.

3.18 The Council is also working with Essex partners to ensure there is sufficient mortuary capacity available across the Essex, Thurrock and Southend areas – this has been held at a specific level as the position is assessed and can be scaled up or down as required. The current facilities are expected to cost up to £0.14m.

- 3.19 The Council has reconfigured the Household Waste and Recycling Centre to address social distancing requirements and enable the facility to reopen. This has required detailed traffic management planning to support this and the associated costs are under assessment.
- 3.20 The Council has provided significant additional capacity to provide rough sleepers with accommodation during the pandemic and the expectation is this will continue into the future. The projected costs over the initial 4 months is currently £0.11m but remains under review.
- 3.21 The response to the pandemic will also directly impact on the delivery of savings plans for 2020/21 and this is estimated to total £0.233m over the period.

#### Ongoing Expenditure

- 3.22 Members should also be aware that savings on non-COVID budgets are minimal. Government instructed local authorities that where contracts were in place – the highest value example being Home to School Transport – that payments should still be made despite the services not being provided either all or at a much lower level than originally budgeted.

#### Income

- 3.23 Officers are currently estimating a shortfall in fees and charges of £2.3m. Key areas include Environmental Services, Parking, Planning, Children's Services (Catering, Thurrock Adult Community College, Grangewaters and Music Services) and the Thameside Theatre.
- 3.24 Not being able to progress the Thurrock Regeneration Ltd projects has an impact on the investment returns that would have started in this financial year. Members will also be aware that there were also pressures in the last financial year and these roll forward into this financial year. The financial impact is estimated at £2.4m.
- 3.25 Investments entered into in previous years continue to be robust and pay interest/dividends as expected. Due to Covid-19, resources have been focused on delivering services and so no new investments have been progressed – as such, new investment targets for 2020/21 will be revised down.
- 3.26 Members need to be aware that there are significant commercial considerations when discussing investments and Local Authority inter-lending. There will be a specific report on this at the July 2020 Standards & Audit Committee.

#### General Fund Summary 2020/21

- 3.27 The financial pressures set out above total circa £9.7m which covers the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 July 2020. Grants received to support the council totals £9.21 and this meets the majority of the initial impacts set out above.

3.28 This does not include the impacts for the remainder of the financial year nor does it include the impact on Council Tax and Business Rates which is set out below. Consequently the sector expects significant further funding to be required to meet the overall expected impacts in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

#### **4 Council Tax and Business Rates**

4.1 These elements remain under review but early indications suggest Council Tax income levels may be significantly impacted by the wider economic position. This is reflected in Council Tax receipts reducing by 5% compared with the prior year and circa 800 applications for the LCTS scheme (of which circa 400 have been accepted to date).

4.2 Business Rates income is protected by both the funding of reliefs for affected sectors from MHCLG and a safety net mechanism but there remains a smaller level of risk related to the economic uncertainty for the business sector as a whole.

#### **5 Impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)**

5.1 The overall impact on the MTFS will be determined by:

- The level of the final additional costs and income losses that crystallise in 2020/21;
- The level of MHCLG financial support to address pressures faced by the sector;
- The ongoing financial pressures resulting from decision made in response to the pandemic (particularly in Adult Social Care); and
- The impact on Council Tax and Business Rates in both the current year and next year.

5.2 There are a range of possible outcomes that can be modelled, especially when considering a council tax base of circa £70m per annum. Considering a reasonably moderate level of losses: A 5% Council Tax reduction in collection; 20% increase in LCTS claimants; and a 10% fees and charges reduction there will now be a significant funding gap in 2021/22 and action will be required to finance this shortfall.

#### **6 Housing Revenue Account**

6.1 The impact on the Housing Revenue Account has been limited to an increase in the debt risk associated with the rental income stream. The wider concern remains that this risk increases as the wider economic impacts of the pandemic develop. April data already indicates a significant increase in Universal Credit claims as unemployment rises and this is likely to feed through into increased debt concerns for local residents. The impact associated with the first 4 months of the year is £0.22m but remains under review.

## **7 Capital Programme**

- 7.1 It is currently too early to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the capital programme. On existing projects there are likely to be claims for contract extensions and social distancing on site whilst, for any new projects, delays to commencement is likely to have inflationary pressures as well as the impact of any new working requirements to manage social distancing.
- 7.2 A review of the current capital programme is taking place to determine affordability in the context of the wider financial issues noted in this report.

## **8 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 8.1 This report sets out the current projected financial impact of COVID-19 and the impact on the delivery of the 2020/21 budget and the wider expected impact on the MTFS. The impact on services remains under consideration to assess the full impact and to enable the reassessment of priorities to address the expected shortfalls in funding.
- 8.2 The MTFS assessment indicates it is likely to be difficult to set a balanced budget in 2021/22. The key factor underpinning this will be the wider economic impact on Council Tax and Business rates income levels.
- 8.3 It is noted that there are no expected surpluses over the four year period of the MTFS once the financial impact of COVID-19 is included. This will be revisited later in the year once the wider impacts are known.

## **9 Reasons for Recommendation**

- 9.1 The Council has a statutory requirement to set a balanced budget annually and to review its adequacy of reserves. This report sets out the potential impacts on the delivery of the balanced budget for 2020/21 and the MTFS over the next four years.

## **10 Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 10.1 The budget planning governance structure includes involvement and consultation with officers, Portfolio Holders and Members.

## **11 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 11.1 The initial impact of COVID-19 has impacted on the wider delivery of frontline services and the financial impact remains under consideration to assess how the council delivers both its statutory services and priority areas.
- 11.2 The budgeted surplus for 2020/21 remains at risk but will provide further financial resilience to support the Council response to the pandemic.

## 12 Implications

### 12.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**  
**Corporate Director of Finance, Governance  
and Property**

Council officers have a legal responsibility to ensure that the Council can contain spend within its available resources. Regular budget monitoring reports will continue to come to Cabinet and be considered by the Directors' Board and management teams in order to maintain effective controls on expenditure. In the context of the financial impact of COVID-19 austerity measures are being communicated across the Council in order to reduce ancillary spend and to ensure that everyone is aware of the importance and value of every pound of the taxpayers money that is spent by the Council.

The budget report issued in February 2020 set a balanced budget based on the assumptions in place at the time. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a significant shock to the economy and resulted in significant unplanned expenditure and income losses as set out in the report.

The full impact of this is not yet known but the ability of the Council to deliver a balanced budget in 2020/21 remains uncertain. The most significant uncertainty is on the impact of the pandemic on council tax and business rates income going forwards. This combined with the additional costs and local income losses will be significant. The ability to deliver the budget will then depend on the final proposed level of mitigation from central government. The impact is likely to be even more significant in 2021/22 when the wider economic picture becomes clearer and any collection fund losses from the current year need to be funded.

The longer term outlook will be influenced by the ongoing review of financing in the sector. This has been deferred to 2021/22 at the earliest so there remains significant uncertainty underpinning the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Council continues to liaise with Government to develop a mutual understanding of the issues to enable appropriate actions to be taken by both.

### 12.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Ian Hunt**  
**Assistant Director of Law and Governance,  
and Monitoring Officer**

There are statutory requirements of the Council's Section 151 Officer in relation to setting a balanced budget. The Local Government Finance Act 1988 (Section 114) prescribes that the responsible financial officer "must make a report if he considers that a decision has been made or is about to be made involving expenditure which is unlawful or which, if pursued to its

conclusion, would be unlawful and likely to cause a loss or deficiency to the authority". The financial impact of the pandemic on the Council remains under review to ensure the responsibilities set out under s114 of the Act can be met.

### 12.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**  
**Community Development and Equalities  
Manager**

There are no specific diversity and equality implications arising from the report.

### 12.4 **Other implications (where significant – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)**

The wider concerns are set out in the report. The major concern is that core services cannot be delivered at the expected level as a consequence of responding to the pandemic.

### 12.5 **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Budget working papers
- MHCLG funding announcements
- Wider sector responses

### 13 **Appendices to the report**

None

### **Report Author:**

Sean Clark

Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property

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<b>9 June 2020</b>	<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Impact of COVID-19 on the Current Agile Working Programme</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Not applicable
<b>Report of:</b> Andrew Mulholland, PMO Manager, Corporate Programme Team	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Gary Staples, Assistant Director Transformation	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

In December 2019 phase two of the Agile Working Programme aimed to deliver a modern, dynamic workforce that delivers our services from locations other than the traditional working environment of one designated desk/workstation per person in a Council building. The overriding ethos being “work is **what** you do – not **where** you do it”.

To achieve the objective it was agreed there is not one single solution; but a suite based on 3 key disciplines - Technology, Workspace and Culture.

This report considers the impact of COVID-19 across the three Agile Working disciplines, the current activity and the future steps for the Agile Programme.

It demonstrates how the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated change and overcome many of the barriers perceived to prevent an Agile working environment. The speed of change has resonated across the organisation and it is clear we will not be returning to Old Ways of Working. Harnessing the benefits is now an integral part of our recovery planning and helps deliver the ambition of ‘fewer buildings and better services’.

One of the, as yet intangible, benefits of an agile working ethos is that of its alignment with the Government’s commitment made to the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), back in October 2019; to reduce the UK’s emissions to an ambitious net zero emissions target by 2050. Subsequently The Council too passed a resolution declaring a climate emergency with the aim to reduce its emissions in support of the Government’s commitment. Now with evidence that less of our workforce having to travel in, or to, the Borough in order to deliver our services is

achievable, we are absolutely confident that we can help contribute to the desired climate change objectives over the longer term.

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

### **1.1. The Committee comment on the content of the report and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Ways of Working.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1. What do we mean by Agile? Agile is a concept that work is an activity we do, rather than a place we go. This concept enables people to work in ways that is the most effective both to them and an organisation. It places an emphasis on a change in culture or work-style and encompassing the technology across the organisation.

2.2. There is evidence in both private and public sectors that agile working can provide a range of benefits for personal, business and the environment. The high-level benefits of agile working are commonly described as:

- Greater productivity and services delivered more effectively
- Focusing on outcomes rather than processes and being seen
- The costs and environmental impacts of work reduced as space is shared and used more intensively, less road travel and commuting
- Reducing the running costs of the organisation through making best use of our assets
- People having more choice about when where and how they work, supported and connected by effective and appropriate use of technology
- People having the opportunity to lead more balanced and healthier lives. Improving work-life balance and reducing sickness
- Improved reputation as employer of choice
- The ability to change the hours of operation to suit its customers without necessarily having to extend the operational opening times of buildings
- An agile workforce enables greater flexibility with staff shift patterns to enable the delivery of remote services - when they are needed most

2.3. Rather than specific targets, good practice describes agile in terms of maturity and how flexible officers feel about their approaches to working and technology.

2.4. Thurrock first adopted the initial agile working concept under an IT Connect project within the Civic Offices refurbishment programme that was completed in early 2016. However, current drivers towards better utilisation of office space, creating more effective ways of delivering services to our customers through use of technological advances and supporting transformational regeneration schemes meant that we had to do more.

2.5. The Council's most recent Pulse staff survey, ran independently, provides some insight. The results for 2019 includes:

- 77% of staff believe that the Council offers flexible approaches to working
- 76% say they are able to strike the right balance between work and home life
- 75% feel they are able to work in a flexible and agile way within their role
- 71% of staff said they were given enough authority to make decisions
- 55% of staff said they were satisfied with the IT systems and processes in place to support them to work flexibly and in an agile way

All of the indicators are above the national average and have improved over the 2 year period from the previous survey.

### 3 Current Agile Programme

3.1 In December 2019, various activities were considered to understand the appetite and feasibility of re-energising agile working further and to inform the next steps of an Agile Working Programme. This, along with good practice guidance from the private and public sector, had identified some enablers for a more comprehensive agile approach for the Council.

These included, but were not limited to:

- Better desk-to-field telephony continuity for agile workers and/or wider availability of mobile devices
- Fully utilising existing technologies already available to staff (such as conference calling and screen sharing etc.)
- Better working, meeting and collaboration spaces
- A different mindset towards work ethics and utilization of office space
- An improved understanding of culture, communication and staff's availability/manageability when not always visible

3.2 The ambition for Thurrock is to have a trusted, technology enabled agile workforce who are able to choose the best place to work in order to deliver excellent services to its customers - whether that is from an open, collaborative office work space, remotely or from home.

3.3 The Agile Design Principles agreed for Thurrock are:

No.	Design Principle	Design Statement
1	Managed by performance	Staff managed by performance and outcomes rather than presentism
2	Everyone is capable	Flexibility is the norm rather than the exception. It is assumed everyone is capable of working agile irrespective of role or person

3	Effective locations	Work takes place at the most effective location and time, relevant to the task, customer, individual and team needs
4	Balancing choice with business needs	Agile working balances personal choice with responsibility to meet the needs of the business
5	Activity-based workspace	Workspace is allocated to activities, not individuals or hierarchy
6	Connectivity everywhere	Collaboration and connectivity can take place virtually everywhere
7	Continuous challenge	Traditional and new approaches are continuously challenged to make sure they are fit for purpose

3.4 To achieve the ambition, a range of projects and activities were brought under a single corporate programme reporting to People Board. This incorporates a number of sub-projects and specifically delivers across three disciplines:

1. **Technology**; in conjunction with Digital Board ensure staff have more flexibility and choice in how they deliver service by providing mobile devices as standard for all staff who are classed as an agile worker.
2. **Workspace**; in conjunction with Property Board ensure that, primarily, the Civic Centre office space is developed and designed to accommodate an agile working environment, using appropriate furniture and space to maximise agile working and collaboration opportunities. This will create the blueprint for all other Council buildings.
3. **Culture**; in conjunction with People Board programmes embed trust and confidence with the concept and tools for agile working by providing a comprehensive agile culture change programme together with any appropriate digitally re-skilling of the workforce.

3.5 The current programme includes three phases of development, as outlined below.

<b>Agile Programme Overview</b>
<b>Phase 1 – February to September 2020</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish Programme</li> <li>• Proactive focus on Civic Office, libraries and hubs</li> <li>• Technology roll-out</li> <li>• Concept trials for workspace</li> <li>• Culture and engagement mobilisation</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2 - October 2020 to September 2021</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of Civic Office activity</li> <li>• Embed culture change and technology as standard working practice</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider workspace analysis</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 3 – October 2021 to September 2022</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider roll-out across other Council property assets</li> <li>• Co-ordinated with Civic extension</li> </ul>

#### **4 The impact of COVID-19 and the response by the organisation**

- 4.1 The Agile Working programme was already in-flight prior to the COVID-19 pandemic breaking out. As a consequence, some tasks have since been delayed but many others have now been accelerated. This was an unavoidable but accepted risk to the programme. Most significantly there was a dramatic and positive change in mind-set as to how to deliver services remotely. Many previously perceived barriers to agility were quickly overcome and a new demand for technology enhancements was prevalent.
- 4.2 Pre-empting restrictions likely to be imposed, prior to lockdown being announced, an Agile “test” day was held on Tuesday, 17 March 2020. This tested business continuity and was a success, with 992 unique log-ins recorded from home locations and 449 at other site locations.
- 4.3 Since the Government’s directive to Work from Home was formally issued w/c 23 March, a similar number of remote log-ins has continued at around 1500 on any given day throughout the lockdown period.
- 4.4 Throughout the duration, Agile messaging, support and advice for those working from home has been incorporated into regular bulletins utilising multiple communication channels.
- 4.5 Each of the three disciplines within the Agile programme has had to adjust, at pace to ensure business continuity. Below this is explored in a more detail.

#### **Technology**

- 4.6 Phase 1 of the Microsoft upgrade to MS 365 had already started in March 2020 and was originally scheduled to be rolled out over 12 weeks into May. This was 90% complete by the end of April including:
- Migrating on premise e-mail to Microsoft 365 Cloud
  - Migrating mobile email on phones/tablets from Blackberry to Intune
  - Migrating two factor authentication (2FA) from the Google authenticator to Microsoft authenticator
- 4.7 By end of March, there was an urgent need to enhance the council’s conference calling capability. Microsoft Teams scheduled for the summer 2020 was quickly brought forward to April.

- Within 2 weeks, 970 users had Microsoft Teams capability including guidance on how to use it
- 4.8 The approach to Digital devices has been a mixture of using your own device and the issuing of IT approved kit e.g. phones and laptops, for those that work remotely. A mobile thin-client device had been approved as part of the programme, this was cheaper and more reliable than traditional laptops but provided the same level of functionality for the majority of workers when using the Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) that was already in place since the completion of the previous IT Connect project.
- 4.9 As part of the Agile programme, 90 mobile thin-client devices and 120 mobile phones had already been ordered in February but delivery was delayed due to supply chain constraints with no new date.
- By end of March, 100 alternative laptop devices were sourced and prioritised to service users. Over 300 mobile phones have now also been made available. This means in total there are 800 mobile computing devices, and 1600 mobile phones in use across our services.
- 4.10 Through earlier Agile pilots, used to inform the new Agile programme, we had identified access to desk phones to be a barrier to enabling full agility. However, fortunately, a range of solutions had been tried and tested just prior to lockdown.

Three discreet telephony solutions were prioritised for roll-out to enable full agility;

- Landlines were diverted to mobiles wherever possible to maintain individual in-bound communication channels open
- Adaptors were provided that connected to home broadband routers and enabled current desk phones to be used at home and “hunt groups” to be retained
- A virtual service desk was set up to support our TCCA Community Response initiative that utilised ring-fenced landline numbers that divert to a number of mobile phones set up in a pseudo-hunt groups.

Within a week of lockdown, **all** telephony services were able to function remotely.

- 4.11 The reliance on paper, printing and scanning had also previously been identified as a barrier to greater agility. Services that rely on traditional mail correspondence, for example, would have to find alternatives for this and balance the need for printed matter, as part of legislated guidance or formal proceedings.
- Office printing for April reduced significantly by around 80%. Printing at home remains a challenge to enabling full agility due to the need to comply with GDPR guidelines. Whilst meaning there will be a need to restrict

printing at home it also raises an opportunity to explore further ways to continue with such printing reductions post-Lockdown.

## **Culture**

- 4.12 Raising awareness of agile ways of working, using change champions and training on technology were planned for late spring 2020. However the lockdown created an immediate need to support staff whilst working from home for a much extended period - including their health and well-being.
- 4.13 With the amount of on-line advices available and in use it was important for the Council to give clear and concise information about expectations - including how to work remotely and continue to be effective.
- 4.14 This meant we had to rapidly accelerate communications to the workforce. Within a week of lockdown advice was available on the Intranet covering:
- How working from home can work for you
  - Health and well-being advice
  - Guides and walkthrough for digital products
  - EAP – Employee Assistance Programme
- 4.15 This has been added to and enhanced daily. The expanded offer includes:
- Oracle learning community
    - Additional content to help staff embrace;
      - remote working
      - adapting to change
      - being 'visible'
      - maintaining learning
  - Links to specific agile related information and policies brought under a single intranet page
  - Agile working as a team and Local Charter
  - A range of tips and tricks to overcome challenges of remote working such as;
    - maintaining productive habits when working from home
    - keeping your team connected when working at a distance
    - providing confidence to team members during uncertainty
    - changing behaviours to increase safety for yourself and those around you
  - Online social community
- 4.16 Good practice in change management recognises staff “champions” of the change can improve and embed the desired culture. During lockdown those traditional routes of access to colleagues for support and advice may no longer be available. The IT team noted a 400% increase in contact via its online self-service portal 4ME.
- 4.17 The agile programme intention to develop change champions during May has been delayed slightly and is expected to launch in June. At the same time we intend to launch a staff survey to understand better how staff are feeling about

the current situation from an engagement perspective, and produce a comprehensive staff guide on further agile working.

## **Workspace**

- 4.18 The original programme intended to trial different types of office environments. To give office space a focus on collaboration settings, space booking and to move away from traditional desks. Prior to the lockdown announcement, Interactive screens had been installed in some meeting rooms at the civic offices, plans had been drawn up for converting some space to a model agile office and an initial feasibility trail for meeting room and hot-desk booking was scheduled to start in April.
- 4.19 These activities have been delayed and will need to be revisited, both in light of new back to work guidance for offices and social distancing, and how the new normal way of working will operate post lock down measures. In the longer term we could potentially be a lot more ambitious with the reduction in office accommodation across our asset portfolio and drive further efficiencies.

## **5 Conclusion relating to the impact of COVID-19 on the Agile Programme**

- 5.1 Due to the impact of the Coronavirus, the exact timings and content of the phases of the Agile programme are subject to change. In particular, activities relating to Technology and Culture have been brought forward very successfully. Changes to create an agile Workspace however have been delayed as these are mainly subject to guidance from Central Government for example on maintaining social distancing.
- 5.2 It was generally recognised that changing the mind-set of people to work agile would be the most challenging task to sustain. However the current period of home-working has been a catalyst for a change in agile thinking. Whilst the COVID-19 crisis has meant many of our plans have rapidly been brought forward, and perceived barriers to agile working have been overcome in the short-term. It is still one of the biggest challenges to sustain the approach, or at least the mind-set that work has not necessarily got to be done in an office.
- 5.3 In addition whilst home-working does limit some choices and may not be the most efficient way to undertake **all** tasks, either for the customer, the Council or the individual, home-working should be integral to how we see the options for agile workspaces.

## **6 Next phase of Agile working**

- 6.1 To understand how staff are currently feeling during this difficult period the Council is undertaking a Pulse survey to better understand employee engagement levels across the organisation.
- 6.2 The results are expected within the current phase of the Agile programme and will add value to the next phase of agile working programme later in 2020.



That phase will need to deliver against the question; How do we sustain agile working, capitalising on the best out of our new ways of working?

6.3 We expect to see a home-working setting as the first choice, the default workspace. Only coming into civic buildings where collaboration with others face-to-face for example, is a preference in order to deliver a better outcome. Along with some bookable desk and spaces to accommodate those that can't work from home.

6.4 What that means across the 3 Agile disciplines;

- **Technology;** A reliable, consistent technology offer, both at home, office and other remote settings, to support a change in work style, and any local service delivery challenges.
- **Workspace;** Making sure home environments comply with health and safety guidance for those who work the majority of the time at home (and the office space can support any longer-term guidance to minimise the impact of Coronavirus) and a redesign of the office space away from traditional seating layouts.
- **Culture;** Embedding new ways of working such as, ongoing staff support for health and well-being, practical and visual technology guidance, staff management skills that ensure staff remain connected so the social element of work is maintained.

## 7 Implications

### 7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**  
**Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property**

The Agile Programme had approved budget allocated as part of Digital Board and Property Board initiatives. Expenditure has been within existing budget. However with the uncertainty with regards the long-term implications of the Coronavirus the overall budget requirement and financial implications will need to be reviewed.

The first phase review is scheduled for October 2020. Its anticipated adjustments will be required for work spaces both in the Office, and at home to fully realise ambitions for agile.

Existing funding can be redirected as required to meet any new initiative with any further requirements being built into the 2021/22 budget process.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Ian Hunt**  
**Assistant Director of Legal and Governance,  
and Monitoring Officer**

The report addresses the key legal implications arising from the Agile work programme.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project  
Monitoring Officer**

An assumed benefit of agile working is to improve the work-life balance of staff. Adaption of the work place would need to ensure DDA and DSE assessments are considered. The staff Pulse survey will bring some clarity to assumptions around the impact on staff and diverse groups. Following which it will be important to consult with broader user groups via the normal channels. Any proposals to formally change working policies will be subject to Equality Impact Assessment and formal consultation.

## 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder

None

## 7.5 Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

## 8 Appendices to the report

None

### Report Author:

Andrew Mulholland  
PMO Manager  
Corporate Programme Team

## Work Programme

**Committee:** Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Year:** 2020/21

**Dates of Meetings:** 9 June 2020, 8 September 2020, 10 November 2020, 12 January 2021, 9 March 2021

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
<b>9 June 2020</b>		
COVID19 – Financial and Budget Implications	Sean Clark	Member
Impact of COVID-19 on the Current Agile Working Programme	Jackie Hinchliffe	Member
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>8 September 2020</b>		
LGA Peer Review – Communications Strategy	Karen Wheeler	Member
Commercialisation Strategy	Sean Clark	Member
Grays Regeneration Thameside Complex	David Moore/Andy Millard	Officer
Quarter 1 Corporate Performance Report	Sarah Welton/Karen Wheeler	Officer
Scrutiny Review	Lucy Tricker/Matthew Boulter	Member
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>10 November 2020</b>		
Community Forum Chairs Invite	Natalie Smith	Member

## Work Programme

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>	<b>Requested by Officer/Member</b>
Quarter 2 Corporate Performance Report	Sarah Welton/Karen Wheeler	Officer
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>12 January 2021</b>		
Local Council Tax Scheme	Jonathan Wilson/Sean Clark	Member
Draft General Fund Budget & MTFS Update	Jonathan Wilson/Sean Clark	Officer
Capital Strategy 2021/22	Jonathan Wilson/Sean Clark	Officer
Capital Programme 2021/22	Jonathan Wilson/ Sean Clark	Officer
Mid-Year/Quarter 2 Corporate Performance Report	Sarah Welton/Karen Wheeler	Officer
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>9 March 2021</b>		
Quarter 3 Corporate Performance Report	Sarah Welton/Karen Wheeler	Officer
Work Programme	Work Programme	Work Programme

**Next Municipal Year:**

# Work Programme

**Clerk:** Lucy Tricker

**Updated:** 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020

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