

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 8 July 2020 at 8.31 pm

Present: Councillors Terry Piccolo (Mayor), Sue Shinnick (Deputy Mayor), Qaisar Abbas, Abbie Akinbohun, John Allen, Alex Anderson, Chris Baker, Gary Byrne, Daniel Chukwu, Gary Collins, Mark Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Mike Fletcher, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Victoria Holloway, Sue Hooper, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Angela Lawrence, Susan Little, Ben Maney, Fraser Massey, Allen Mayes, Sara Muldowney, Bukky Okunade, Jane Pothecary, David Potter, Shane Ralph, Joycelyn Redsell, Gerard Rice, Elizabeth Rigby, Jennifer Smith, Luke Spillman, David Van Day, Aaron Watkins and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillors Colin Churchman, Garry Hague and Steve Liddiard

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Sean Clark, Director of Finance, Governance and Property
Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being streamed on the Council's on-line webcast channel.

123. Minutes

Councillor Holloway stated that on page 44 of the Appendix to the minutes she had raised a Point of Order and requested that this be added.

Pending the change to the minutes Members approved the minutes of Council held on the 26 February 2019 as a correct record.

124. Items of Urgent Business

No items of urgent business were received.

125. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

126. Announcements on behalf of the Mayor or the Leader of the Council

The Mayor welcomed everyone back to the Chamber either physically or through MST and stated it would be an honour and was delighted to be Mayor for another year and confirmed that GIFT would remain his nominated charity. The Mayor thanked all NHS staff for their hard work during this crisis and how they had put themselves at risk at this difficult time. The Mayor praised the 500 volunteers who had volunteered through the Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action which had shown an exceptional gesture and community spirit within Thurrock. Also thanking those volunteer groups, local companies and staff for all their hard work and time. The Mayor also stated that he had made a number of personal donations from his mayor's allowance to those groups and organisations to assist with the hard work that they were undertaking.

The Leader of the Council stated as this was the first Full Council of the 2020/21 municipal calendar and the first since the changes had been brought in since the country applied strict social distancing measures in the middle of March. That life had not been quite the same but here in Thurrock we had seen how our community had pulled together to fight this global pandemic and thanks to the actions and responsible behaviour of our residents over the last 16 weeks and for that the Leader thanked everyone who helped as a volunteer, who helped their neighbours, who helped their friends and family who all played their part to beat the virus and out of the 150 similar sized local authorities, the rate of positive tests per 100,000 residents over the course of the epidemic in Thurrock was the 33rd lowest in the country and thanked everyone who had played their part over the 16 weeks.

The Leader stated that when pubs and restaurants re-opened last weekend there had not been a mad rush and flouting of the rules as many predicted but instead there were orderly queues as people made sure to follow social distancing guidance and keep themselves and each other safe. The Leader thanked them all.

The Leader stated that the next stage in the battle to control the rate of coronavirus infection was Test and Trace and was delighted to state that Thurrock had excellent plans in place to ensure that everyone in the borough could be tested quickly at the first signs of symptoms and swift action could be taken to control possible outbreaks of coronavirus in the borough. That a Thurrock Local Operation Control Centre had been set up, with its main responsibility to identify and manage any potential COVID-19 outbreaks in what are deemed 'high risk' settings such as schools, care homes, primary care centres, work places and vulnerable groups within the borough. The work of this centre would include supporting local testing and contact tracing within these settings to manage outbreaks and prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Leader stated that anyone who felt any of the symptoms of coronavirus – that's a new continuous cough, high temperature, the loss or change to their sense of smell or taste – they must self-isolate and contact the NHS to book a test immediately. If residents were contacted by NHS Test and Trace to listen carefully to what they said, follow the guidance they give and make sure to answer their questions honestly.

All had achieved a tremendous amount to come together and do things none of us thought we would ever be called upon to do. People had stayed at home, not visited friends and family and made sure to keep their distance. The actions had made a difference and the threat posed by coronavirus had been reduced but the Leader stated we must remember that threat was still there and it was for all of us to make sure we continued to follow social distancing. That there was clear evidence to say that staying 2 metres apart was far safer than 1 metre – in fact the risk of getting infected by someone with the virus was 202% lower if you are standing 2 metres away from them than you are at 1 metre. The Leader urged all the borough's residents to remember that no matter what, social distancing was key to keep infection down and continue to observe 2 metre social distancing wherever possible in all Council buildings – including the libraries which began re-opening this week. The Council would continue to review this and ensure the latest guidance would be followed and had plans in place before any decision was made to re-open any council building or facility. The Leader was sure that as time went on we would see these social distancing rules change and the restrictions lifted to help bring us back to a normal routine and get our economy back on track.

The Leader stated that the pandemic had seen the Government make regular announcements and made clear how they were spending billions of pounds of taxpayer's money in support of residents and business to get through the pandemic and to move to recovery. Such as the:

- £2bn Kickstart scheme - directly pay businesses to create new, decent and high-quality jobs for any 16-24 year
- £111million paying businesses £1,000 to take on trainees
- Providing £2,000 to employers for each new apprentice they hire under the age of 25
- £32 million to recruit new careers advisors
- £17 million to support work placed the number of academies, including Thurrock supporting those who are out of work with the new skills they need to re-enter the jobs market
- Cutting VAT for hospitality and tourism from 20% to 5% for tourism and hospitality between 15 July 2020 until 12 January 2021
- Launching a new Eat Out to Help Out scheme

The Leader provided a Clean It Cut It Fill It update that since 13 March 2020, when social distancing guidance came into force, Thurrock Council had:

- Collected more than 2.25 million bins from people's homes
- Cleaned up over 600 tonnes of waste from the borough's streets
- Cleared more than 130 fly-tips
- Filled over 1,000 potholes – every single one within target time
- Issued 1,050 Fixed Penalty Notices for offences including littering, spitting and dropping cigarette butts
- Issued 66 £400 fines to fly-tippers
- Made more than 6,000 repairs on council homes

- Housed 37 people who were rough sleepers or at risk of rough sleeping
- Produced over 750 posters giving people critical advice about coronavirus
- Distributed government fund lifelines worth more than £21 million to more than 1,650 local businesses
- Dealt with 400 extra council tax support claims

The Leader thanked every single Council officer who had helped provide all those services to ensure that the borough remained safe and tidy.

127. Questions from Members of the Public

No public questions had been received.

128. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

Mayor informed Members that in accordance with the Council's petition scheme, one petition had been received.

Councillor Maney presented the petition on behalf of Councillor Redsell stating that residents had noted with concern Highways England's plans for the relocation of the Gammon Field traveller site as part of the Lower Thames Crossing project. They object strongly to the option of siting a new traveller site near existing residential properties in Long Lane, opposite the junction with Kerry Road. This further loss of green belt was deemed unacceptable and regarded this area as ill-suited for use as a traveller site.

129. Petitions Update Report

Members received a report on the status of those petitions handed in at Council meetings and Council offices.

130. Revised Political Balance

Councillor Gledhill presented the report that requested Council to confirm the calculations relating to the allocation of seats on committees following Councillors Spillman and Duffin becoming Conservative councillors on 11 May 2020.

The Mayor called a vote on this item to which Members voted unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the political balance and allocation of seats, as set out in Appendix 1, be approved.**
- 2. Council noted the manual adjustment requirements outlined in 2.2 and 2.4 and agree those adjustments proposed by group leaders at the meeting.**

131. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies, Statutory and Other Panels

The Mayor enquired whether Group Leaders wished for any changes to be made to the appointments previously made by Committees and Outside Bodies, statutory and other panels.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Gledhill, informed the chamber he had the following changes to make:

To appoint Councillor Anderson as Chair of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To appoint Councillor Redsell as Chair of the Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To appoint Councillor Ralph as Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To appoint Councillor Spillman as Chair of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To appoint Councillor Rigby as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

To remove Councillor Halden from the Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To propose Councillor Allen as Chair to the Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To propose Councillor J Kent as Vice Chair to the General Services Committee.

To remove Councillor Halden from the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To remove Councillor Redsell from the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Councillor J Kent, Leader of the Labour Party, informed the chamber he had the following change which had already been stated by Councillor Gledhill for himself to be appointed as the Vice Chair to the General Services Committee.

Councillor J Kent asked for advice on the how the removal of existing chairs from overview and scrutiny committees took take place without notice and no discussion beforehand. Ian Hunt, Monitoring Officer, stated that this action was permissible.

Councillor Byrne, Leader of the Thurrock Independent Group, informed the chamber he would be appointed onto the General Services Committee and

would gift the seat on the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force to Councillor Allen.

Councillor Massey, Independent Member, thanked the Administration for the gifted seat on the Licensing Committee, General Services and Lower Thames Crossing Task Force and proposed that Councillor Allen be appointed on the Standards and Audit Committee.

Councillor Allen, Independent Member, stated he would confirm his appointment of the seat on the Standard and Audit Committee after this committee.

Councillor J Kent questioned as no notice had been provided could alternative nominations be made. The Mayor stated that other nominations could be put forward and these posts would be put to the vote.

At 9.01pm, Councillor Gerrish called a Point of Order and questioned what constitution rule deemed it possible for incumbent chairs to be removed. Ian Hunt, Monitoring Officer, stated that it was Constitution Procedure Rule 27.4, Appointment of Members to Committees. Councillor Gerrish stated that this procedure rule did not mention the removal of chairs and vice chairs.

At 9.04pm the meeting was temporarily adjourned.

At 9.13pm the meeting restarted.

Ian Hunt, Monitoring Officer, referred Members to Chapter 4, Paragraph 3.1 Scrutiny Procedure Rules of the constitution that it was the function of the Council to appoint chairs of committees also the Annual Council had an obligation to set the appointments of chairs. At every Annual Council membership would be set for each committee for the forthcoming year but Chapter 2 of the constitution allowed the Council to appoint Members to each committee at the next convenient meeting thereafter.

Councillor Holloway referred to an email sent from the Monitoring Officer on the 23 April 2020 stating as there had been no AGM, the positions of chairs, vice chairs and members on committees would remain the same and seemed to be contradicting his own guidance and asked for further clarification.

Ian Hunt stated the provisions under the meeting legislation under the COVID legislation stated that where there were appointments already in place these could be carried forward but this did not stop the Council from making any changes.

The Mayor then conducted a vote on the following seats:

A vote took place between Councillor Ralph and Councillor Holloway for the chair of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The result of that vote was that Councillor Ralph would take up that position.

A vote took place between Councillor Allen and Councillor Kerin for the chair of Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The result of that vote was that Councillor Allen would take up that position.

A vote took place between Councillor Redsell and Councillor Fletcher for the chair of Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The result of that vote was that Councillor Redsell would take up that position.

A vote took place between Councillor Anderson and Councillor Okunade for the chair of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The result of that vote was that Councillor Anderson would take up that position.

A vote took place between Councillor Spillman and Councillor Worrall for the chair of Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The result of that vote was that Councillor Spillman would take up that position.

A vote took place between Councillor Rigby and Councillor Okunade for the chair of Corporate Parenting Committee. The result of that vote was that Councillor Rigby would take up that position.

Members confirmed Councillor Baker as Vice Chair of Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members agreed for Councillor Van Day to take up the post of Vice Chair on Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members agreed for Councillor J Kent to take up the post of Vice Chair on General Services Committee.

There remained a vacancy for Vice Chair on the Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chief Executive clarified these appointments to Members.

132. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2019/20

The Mayor referred Members to the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2019/20 as published in the agenda.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2019/20 be noted.

133. Full Council Meetings

Members agreed to the future dates for Council.

134. Report of the Cabinet Member for Finance

Councillor Hebb, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Transformation, presented his portfolio holder report and stated that COVID-19 had put unimaginable impacts on the United Kingdom and thus residents of the borough. Councillor Hebb expressed his sympathy to all those families who had been impacted by the virus.

Councillor Hebb stated that now work needed to start on the structured plan to ensure the safe return to livelihoods and education of residents and thanked all key workers for their efforts and sacrifices made during this crisis.

The portfolio holder report had been structured to summarise the pre-COVID-19 performance of the department and economic resilience position; COVID-19 – the actions the Council had taken and helped delivery during the crisis and the emerging out of the COVID-19 crisis on building the Council's economic resilience.

Councillor Gerrish stated that Thurrock had appeared on the Top 10 local authorities that would be severely impacted by the COVID-19 fallout. That this would be challenging for residents and businesses in the borough and questioned what the Council's plans were to action this and when this would be actioned for the future. Councillor Hebb referred to the one-off £150 discount being allocated to each recipient of local council tax scheme. With long terms plans being discussed with the Councillor Coxshall, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, in regards to the Local Plan.

Councillor J Kent thanked all Council staff for helping to keep residents of the borough safe and particularly thanked Sean Clark and his staff in acting quickly and efficiently in supporting local businesses with the £20 million Government support. Councillor J Kent stated that one fifth of Thurrock local businesses missed out on that grant and questioned what was being done to support them. Councillor Hebb stated that £20 million Government money had been given to support those businesses in the borough. Councillor J Kent raised concerns that this would have an impact on Impulse Leisure who had already made redundancies and was potentially opening in the next two weeks. Councillor Hebb stated that discussions were taking place.

Councillor Byrne thanked Councillor Hebb for his help in supporting local residents.

Councillor Allen thanked the portfolio holder for the financial support provided to Thurrock residents and thanked senior officers in highways who had fix potholes that had been reported.

Councillor Duffin thanked the portfolio holder for the report and questioned the local council tax scheme for existing tax payers and for those going forward. Councillor Hebb stated the maximum of a one-off £150 discount being allocated to each recipient of local council tax support was a fit for purpose benefit.

Councillor Worrall raised her concern that there would be no new or further initiatives going to be put through TRL whilst Cabinet made a decision on the best models. That as chair of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee she had not been told of any of those plans, those 12 sites had been relied upon and there had been no business model. Councillor Worrall asked for clarification on how much of the original budget had been spent and on what. Councillor Hebb stated this was a firm commitment that the right model would be delivered and would go to Cabinet in the second half of this year.

Councillor Redsell thanked Councillor Hebb and his team on behalf of all the businesses that the Council had helped and questioned would the Council be worse off in regards to collection rates from business rates as a result of the new exemptions. Councillor Hebb stated that this would not impact the Council with grant being passed to the Council.

Councillor Hebb agreed to provide written responses to the remaining questions from Councillors Ralph and Abbas if they so wished.

135. Report of the Cabinet Member for Social Care

Councillor Halden, Portfolio Holder for Children and Adult Social Care, stated it was an honour to present his portfolio holder report being full aware the borough had started to recover from a public health pandemic and was entering into an economic downturn following the COVID-19 crisis. As part of the portfolio holder report, Councillor Halden noted:

- 90.5% of Looked After Children were visited being completed within timescale.
- 95% of hospital discharges had taken place on time.
- To resolve to keep the extra care beds in place even when the surplus capacity was clearly more than sufficient.
- The main message would be to keep investing to support the care market.
- Serious Case Review – the Children Services and Adult Services teams had been rated “good” by Ofsted but the Council could not become complacent.
- An economic vulnerability taskforce in Thurrock had been formed between the child safeguarding board, adult safeguarding board, supported by TLS and Inspire.
- To support care leavers and vulnerable young adults and protected from those who would seek to exploit them.
- Work to improve the system to support the unaccompanied asylum seeking children population.
- On Finance, the Council entered the economic downturn in a robust position which was vital on the approach of social care going forward.
- COVID-19 had put pressures on and it would be a difficult time ahead.
- Address the gap between domiciliary charges and cost of care workers.
- Those plans to improve the care market would be presented to overview and scrutiny committees.

- To improve access to Youth Offending Services.
- The recovery would be hard and difficult but would be ambitious and rigorous.

Councillor Halden thanked all officers, key workers for their tremendous efforts during the crisis and was extremely proud.

Councillor Okunade thanked the portfolio holder and raised a concern on Home School Transport proposal. Councillor Halden stated this proposal would fall under Councillor Jefferies portfolio but was able to state that those routes deemed unsafe had been properly reassessed and confirmed that any individual plan for a disabled child in the borough would not change.

Councillor Holloway thanked the portfolio holder for his report and echoed those thanks given to social care staff, domiciliary carers, volunteers and officers. That every COVID death had been a tragedy for the borough but stated the protocols that Thurrock had in place had worked well. Councillor Holloway questioned the key pressures of domiciliary carers to ensure their pay wage was consistent to those in neighbouring boroughs. Councillor Halden stated the Council had a firm footing in domiciliary care, had made increases in pay but had to look at closing the gap in the changes of care.

Councillor Halden summed by noting the support of this portfolio holder report.

136. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that there was 1 question to the Leader had been received and 6 questions to Cabinet Members. Those questions not heard would either receive a written response or have the option to withdraw and resubmit.

At 10.31pm the Leader of the Council was taken unwell and left the chamber and would provide Councillor Kent with a written response to his question if Cllr Kent so wished.

At 10.40pm Councillor Duffin left the Chamber.

At 10.58pm, Councillor J Kent, called Point of Order to suspend Standing Orders by 30 minutes. The Mayor used his discretion to finish this item and offered Councillor Fish to option to resubmit his question or receive a written response.

As the item fell due to time limit of meeting Councillor Fish requested that his question be resubmitted to September Council.

A copy of the transcript of questions and answers can be found at Appendix A to these minutes.

137. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

This item fell due to time limit of meeting being met.

138. Minutes of Committees

This item fell due to time limit of meeting being met.

139. Update on motions resolved at Council during the previous year

This item fell due to time limit of meeting being met.

140. Motion submitted by Councillor Kerin

The Motion, as printed in the Agenda was proposed by Councillor Kerin and seconded by Councillor Rice. The Motion read as follows:

This Chamber calls on Thurrock Council to celebrate and thank our National Health Service by marking the 5th July, every year, with the raising of the National Health Service flag outside the Civic Offices.

Councillor Kerin stated it was an honour and a privilege to present this motion in recognition of all the hard work and commitment made by NHS staff. With the NHS recently celebrating their 72nd birthday this motion would be an opportunity to recognise, reflect and remember. Councillor Kerin stated that on the 5 July 1948, the NHS and social care services were established with 2020 being the most challenging year in history.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion. Members voted unanimously in favour of this Motion to which the Mayor announced the Motion carried.

The meeting finished at 11.06 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