

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 8 September 2021 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Monday 20 September at 5.00pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Leader), Shane Hebb (Deputy Leader), Mark Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Ben Maney and Luke Spillman

Apologies: Councillors Deborah Huelin and Allen Mayes
Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive

In attendance: Sean Clark, Corporate Director Resources and Place Delivery
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

33. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 7 July 2021 were approved as a correct record.

34. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

35. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

36. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by stating that the UK had now completed the final step of the roadmap out of COVID lockdown, with the return of schools, colleges and universities; as well as the reopening of shops, pubs and restaurants. He thanked all Thurrock residents for their determination and sacrifice during lockdown which now allowed the reopening of the economy. He stated that although Thurrock was now beginning to return to normality, COVID still remained present and rates were increasing, although not as dramatically as previously seen. He urged residents to be cautious by washing their hands more regularly, considering wearing a face mask where appropriate, and by respecting people's wishes to socially distance. He also urged residents over the age of 16 to get the COVID vaccine either by booking an appointment over the phone or online, or by attending a walk-in centre. He explained that even though people who were double jabbed could still catch the virus, they were less likely to become seriously ill and be

hospitalised. He summarised and stated that Thurrock had now delivered 198,614 doses of the vaccine: 106,551 of which were first doses, and 92,063 of which were second doses. He explained that the current rate of infection in Thurrock was 248 per 100,000 which was lower than the national average of 370 cases per 100,000.

The Leader moved on and described a new initiative recently launched in Grays to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. He stated that this was because £625,000 of funding that had been received, £432,500 of which had been from to a joint bid with the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. He stated that this scheme would provide additional lighting, additional CCTV, a Shop Safe communications system and two new Grays Community Engagement Officers, who would work in conjunction with the Grays Town Police. He commented that Grays would be seeing lots of regeneration projects, due to the £20m Towns Fund investment from central government and additional private investment.

The Leader then described how he had recently attended the removal of vehicle involved in fly-tipping with the Environmental Enforcement team. He stated that the offender had driven further to fly-tip than they would have done if they had used the waste and recycling centre, and had had to pay a large fine. He mentioned that fly-tipping was not a victimless crime, as the landowner or Council had to pay for the fly-tip to be removed, but the Council would continue to work to catch fly-tipping offenders. He stated that so far the Council had caught 136 offenders by utilising the new fly-tipping cameras that had been installed. He added that the team had also recently found six motorbikes, two cars, and six quadbikes that had been illegally stored in Council owned garages. He explained that the vehicles had been disposed of and the offenders fined. He thanked the residents who had made the reports, and urged residents to continue to report offenders either online, or via 101, as it helped the police and the Council to build a pattern of evidence.

The Leader summarised and highlighted the work of Clean It, Cut It, Fill It since April last year. He stated that 1992 potholes had been filled; 99% within target time; 38 fly-tips had been cleared; 728 tonnes of waste had been disposed of; and 1581 Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued for offences such as littering and spitting.

37. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Coxshall stated that the LTC consultation was drawing to a close and urged all residents to complete the consultation. He explained that Thurrock Council were currently completing their consultation response, but had been granted an extension to ensure it could go through the necessary internal governance processes.

Councillor Spillman stated that the housing team were working on a new initiative to replace private out of borough temporary accommodation with new temporary accommodation within Thurrock. He stated that this had previously

been agreed by the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, and would be funded through: purchasing stock through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA); using the Phi lease scheme; and repurposing a decommissioned sheltered housing building. He stated that currently providing temporary accommodation had to use £1.2million of general fund top-up, and also £100,000 per month out of the HRA to cover the difference between rent costs and housing benefit. He explained that by introducing new temporary accommodation within Thurrock this would reduce dependency on expensive nightly let accommodation and increase savings. He stated that this would allow the service to become cost neutral by 2022/23 and would ensure local residents remained in the borough. He mentioned that if people needed to be moved out of the borough for safeguarding reasons there would still remain a process in place for this to be achieved. He stated that he had set the housing team an ambitious target of ending out of borough temporary accommodation by the end of 2022, although this would be difficult due to the end of COVID support systems, such as furlough and the end of the ban on evictions, which could lead to an increase in homelessness. He summarised and thanked officers, Cabinet and the former Portfolio Holder for their hard work and commitment to this initiative and stated that there would be additional announcements and investments related to housing in the near future.

38. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

39. Questions from Non-Executive Members

There were no questions submitted by non-Executive Members.

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

Other than those items already contained within the agenda, no items had been referred to the Cabinet for consideration by an overview and scrutiny committee.

41. Financial Update - Quarter 1 2021/22 and Revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (Decision: 110580)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that it provided a rear view mirror look at the Council's finances during the first quarter of 2021/22. He stated that it projected a balanced budget for the 2021/22 financial year, but highlighted that some in-year budget pressures would need to be managed. He explained that a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) report presented to Cabinet in July 2021 outlined a pressure of £3.7million over two years, but this had been reduced to a pressure of £1.8million in 2022/23, therefore improving the financial position by £1.75million since July. He stated that he had attended the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

Committee on 7 September and explained that the Council had seen an increase in the collection of council tax and business rates, which had helped to offset some financial pressures. He added that numerous directorates had also been able to save money, such as public realm; and HR, OD and transformation.

Councillor Hebb explained that the Children's Services directorate were currently experiencing pressure of £1million due to an increase in the number of high need, high complexity, and large sibling group placements, which would lead to an overspend of £2.87million. He added that this would be offset using non general fund reserves and reduced expenditure elsewhere in the directorate. He stated that the team were also continuing with the internal foster care recruitment campaign, and were undertaking an ongoing review of high cost annual placements. He added that there would also be budgetary pressures in the Adult Social Care directorate due to delayed referrals and reduced income because of COVID. He stated that although there was some way to go, the Council was currently in a fiscally sound position.

Councillor Hebb then explained that the service review was currently ongoing, and budget consultation reports were scheduled for Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny; Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny; and Children's Overview and Scrutiny in October. He added that budget and asset reports were also scheduled for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November, ahead of the Cabinet meeting in February which would discuss the budget. He added that Thurrock were also supporting the resettlement of Afghan refugees, and properties had been offered by the Thurrock community to support this process. He summarised and stated that Thurrock Council had recently met with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to discuss how the Council could support this process, and although there were currently no costs associated with this, reports would be brought back to Cabinet if this were to change.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Commented on the forecast outturn position for 2021/22 and the revised MTFS.

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

42. Communications Strategy 2021-24 (Decision: 110581)

Councillor Duffin introduced the report and stated that it outlined Thurrock's Communications Strategy for 2021-24, and although it headed in the right direction there was still some way to go until it was complete. He explained that Thurrock needed to improve the partnerships it had with some external bodies, and he had asked officers to engage more with local and national media before the agreement of the strategy by Cabinet. He stated that once

this work had been completed, the strategy would be brought back before Cabinet for their sign-off.

Councillor Hebb explained that he had attended the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee where this strategy had been discussed, and felt there had been good debate about how Thurrock should market itself and be more aspirational. He added that a conversation had also taken place regarding how the communications team should use digital channels and how engagement should be monitored. He stated that Members had also discussed how the team engaged with local media partners and felt that it would be worthwhile to take a pause before moving forward with the strategy. The Leader added that Thurrock needed to sell itself to the wider community and work with media colleagues on a local, national and international scale.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Would engage with media partners to finalise the Communications Strategy 2021-24, before returning to Cabinet for approval.

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

43. Parking Enforcement Vehicle Removal (Decision: 110582)

Councillor Maney introduced the report and stated that it would help bolster the powers of the enforcement team by giving them the power to: removing vehicles when parked in contravention of parking rules and caused an obstruction; and removing vehicles of persistent evaders who were classified as drivers that had three or more unpaid or unchallenged Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs). He explained that these groups of motorists often did not register their vehicles with the DVLA, which made it difficult for the Council to chase the FPNs and recoup costs. He stated that not paying FPNs was not a victimless crime as it reduced the money available to the Council and therefore reduced the Council's ability to enforce against other anti-social behaviour. He added that those motorists who were persistent evaders were also usually engaged in other low level vehicle crime, such as unpaid tax or no insurance, which could also have an indirect impact on other road users. He stated that the enforcement team had estimated there were hundreds of persistent evaders currently in Thurrock and this report would help broaden their powers of enforcement and act as a deterrent.

The Leader questioned if the scheme would also be applied to HGV drivers and international drivers who were persistent evaders. Councillor Maney replied that it would cover all vehicle users who met the criteria for the new enforcement powers. He explained that those vehicle owners whose car was impounded under the new scheme would either have to pay the cost of the FPN and vehicle recovery, or would have their car sold to recover costs. Councillor Johnson asked if those persistent evaders who were Thurrock residents would have this vehicle debt linked to other debt within the borough,

such as non-payment of council tax. Councillor Maney felt that this was a good point and would look into the issue of linking the debt with other outstanding council debt owed.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved Thurrock Council's Parking Team to execute enforcement action against vehicles parked in contravention with priority vehicle removal of persistent evaders, as suggested by the Department of Transport within its statutory guidance.

2. Adopted the policy to remove vehicles which are parked in contravention of restrictions where a PCN may be issued if the vehicle is also parked in a manner that is obstructive or dangerous to other road users.

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

44. Quarter 1 (April-September) Corporate Performance Report 2021/22 and Corporate Performance Framework

Councillor Duffin introduced the report and stated that it was a positive report as 77% of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had achieved their target, which was an improvement from 65% of achieved targets in the same quarter last year. He stated that there was also a positive direction of travel as 50% of targets had improved and 18% had remained static. Councillor Duffin felt there was still room for improvement and the team were striving for 100% of KPIs meeting target. He explained that those KPIs which were currently red included a 'route to green' which provided transparent commentary on the work being undertaken to ensure the target was met. He added that he was pleased to see the KPI on apprenticeships had met target as 30 new candidates had been interviewed as part of a webinar in July. He felt that apprenticeships provided people with the opportunity to upskill and change their skillset.

The Leader highlighted page 85 of the report and the KPI related to the payment of FPNs, and stated that this fell under his remit rather than Councillor Jefferies. He stated that some KPIs had been affected by COVID, such as the payment of FPNs, but the collections team were working to ensure collections were compassionate and all residents could receive the help they needed to pay their debts. Councillor Jefferies echoed comments made by Councillor Duffin related to the apprenticeships KPI, and felt it was good to see people of all ages undertaking apprenticeships.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

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

and the impact of COVID-19.

2. Identified any areas which required additional consideration.

3. Commented on the areas of focus for 2021/22 that will support delivery of the overall vision and priorities.

45. SEND Education and Residential Placements (Decision: 110583)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and stated that it would provide high quality education and residential placements for young people across the borough, in line with the Council's statutory duty. He explained that a recent needs analysis had indicated that within the next five years, the number of young people presenting with speech problems, communications problems, and Autism would increase, partly due to the lack of socialisation for young people during the pandemic. He stated that therefore the Council needed to provide additional specialist provision to meet the future need in Thurrock, and this report outlined the procurement plan to ensure the right places were available at the right times. He summarised and stated that this report would increase local capacity and make best use of resources as part of the overall SEND plan, which had been supported by the SEND Improvement Board.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed to commence the procurement of SEND education and residential contract(s).

2. Agreed the option to block purchase places through the contract(s) where this represents best value for the Council to meet demand.

3. Agreed to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children's Services, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder, to award contracts following completion of the procurement process.

4. In line with Rule 13 of the Contract Procedure Rules, agreed that the Corporate Director of Children's Services can seek to invoke the waiver provisions of the Contract Procedure Rules due to the nature of the services being purchased.

5. Agreed to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children's Services and the Portfolio Holder where:

a. the placement cannot be made on the contract to be awarded under the procurement exercise;

b. the purchase is required in order that the Council may meet its statutory obligations.

6. As requested by the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee,

reviewed their decision to declare Grangewaters as a surplus to SEND provision and looked at further use of Grangewaters to meeting the objectives for SEND provision.

7. Noted the completion of the SEND Sufficiency Assessment and agreed the publication of the document.

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

46. Supported Accommodation for 18-24 Year Olds (Decision: 110584)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and stated that Thurrock saw an increased number of Looked After Children compared to the national average due to the boroughs geographical location and the number of unaccompanied child asylum seekers, who were often 10-15 years old. He stated that this was a proactive report to ensure that all young care leavers could achieve, and were housed through the Head Start Housing project. He explained that this report would move away from spot purchasing housing options to block purchasing, which would reduce the high cost of emergency accommodation and support young people to live independently. He added that it would also reduce the numbers of young homeless people in Thurrock, and feedback from care leavers had been included in the report.

Councillor Spillman thanked Councillor Johnson and the team for their hard work on the report. He felt that it was good to see an integrated approach between Children's Services and Housing as this would ensure good outcomes for young people.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed to commence the procurement of contract(s) for supported accommodation for 18-24 year olds.

2. Agreed the option to block purchase places through the contract(s) where this represents best value for the Council to meet demand.

3. Agreed to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children's Services, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder, to award contracts following completion of the procurement process.

4. In line with Rule 13 of the Contract Procedure Rules, agreed that the Corporate Director of Children's Services can seek to invoke the waiver provisions of the Contract Procedure Rules due to the nature of the services being purchased.

5. Agreed to delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children's Services and the Portfolio Holder where:

A. the placement cannot be made on the contract to be awarded under this procurement exercise.

B. the purchase is required in order that the Council may meet its statutory obligations.

6. As recommended by the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, investigated opportunities to invest in housing to help meet the provision that Children's Services need to meet the supported accommodation requirements for care leavers.

7. Noted the joint work already in place and the statutory duties on the local authority, including to develop a jointly commissioned support offer for those aged 18+ who need additional support to be able to develop independence as an adult, and where possible this is extended to provide support for the 16-18 year olds.

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

The meeting finished at 7.51 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk