

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 8 December 2021 at 7.22 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Monday 20 December 2021 at 5.00pm

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

Apologies: Councillor Luke Spillman

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services and Governance Manager, and Interim Monitoring Officer
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the recording to be made available on the Council's website. The Leader apologised for the late start time, which was due to a previous Council meeting that had overrun.

57. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 10 November 2021 were approved as a correct record.

58. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

59. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

60. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement and informed Members and residents that the level of the new Omicron COVID-19 variant was rising around the UK, with the first case officially being detected in Thurrock. He explained that the Council would be working with health agencies to prevent the spread of Omicron and processes had already been put in place to manage the case identified within Thurrock. He explained that government guidance had changed on 30 November 2021, and had again changed 30 minutes before the start of the Cabinet meeting, extending the use of face coverings from Friday. The Leader stated that some media outlets had recently reported incorrectly on mask wearing guidance, as masks were currently only mandatory in shops and on public transport, unless exempt. He stated that there was currently no legal requirement to wear masks on the street or in

offices, although mask wearing guidance would be updated from Friday. He explained that people who were exempt from wearing masks did not need to show proof of this, such as written evidence or ID, but could wear a lanyard to show their status if they felt it was appropriate. He stated that although the situation regarding COVID-19 felt the same as last year, the situation was different this year as the majority of people were now vaccinated, which offered protection against the virus. He urged residents to be safe when meeting family and friends over the Christmas period, such as by opening windows and doors to allow for ventilation, and being considerate of others wearing masks or social distancing. He stated that COVID rates in Thurrock had increased from 616 per 100,000 last week to 1082 per 100,000 this week, which meant that Thurrock was currently the 21st highest upper tier local authority in terms of COVID rates. He stated that the under 49 age group currently accounted for 86% of all COVID cases in the borough, and this was also the age group with the lowest vaccine uptake. He stated that the government had recently extended the booster vaccine scheme for those aged 40 and over, and urged all residents to get the booster jab when offered.

The Leader moved on and stated that the Council had recently set-up a Shop Local Scheme, which encouraged local residents to shop locally and shop safely over the Christmas period. He stated that 30 small businesses had now signed up to the scheme, and free parking in Council car parks for every Saturday during December had also been agreed. He added that he had recently met with Council officers and the police in Grays high street and train station where they had been liaising with the public and asking where local residents felt safe and unsafe, to ensure resources were being distributed to the best places. He commented that this was an ongoing programme which would help tackle crime around the borough.

The Leader highlighted that this was the last Cabinet meeting before Christmas and wished everyone a merry Christmas and happy New Year.

61. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Johnson highlighted that a statement had recently been made to a local news outlet regarding the consultation for two nurseries in Thurrock, which he felt had been incorrect. He stated that the local news outlet had reported that the date for the potential closure of the nurseries had been extended from March 2022 until August 2022, but clarified that the date of potential closure had always been August 2022. He stated that this was included in the minutes of the July Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which stated that if the procurement process did not find a new provider the nurseries would be closed during the summer term of 2022. Councillor Johnson explained that it was always the intent of Thurrock Council to find a new provider once the consultation period had finished, and felt pleased that the agreement to find a new provider had received cross-party support.

62. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

63. Questions from Non-Executive Members

There were no questions submitted by Non-Executive Members.

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

The Leader stated that a briefing note regarding Item 12 had been received from the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which reflected their conversations from the meeting the previous night. Other than those items already contained within the agenda, no items had been referred to the Cabinet for their consideration by an overview and scrutiny committee.

65. Financial Update - Quarter 2 2021/22 (Decision: 110590)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that there had recently been un-contextualised reports in local media outlets regarding the Council's finances, which he felt could be harming to the borough. He stated that the investment approach had generated approximately £115mn of income, after £16mn interest paid had been deducted from the entire capital borrowing requirements, and not just investments. He commented that all Councillors had unanimously voted for the increases in borrowing in 2017, 2018, and 2019, and Thurrock had benefitted from an 11.5% return on investment, which had improved the lives of residents. He mentioned that pre-COVID the administration had balanced budgets and a surplus, whilst increasing reserves by 300%, which had helped pay for services for residents.

Councillor Hebb explained that Thurrock's budget was approximately £150mn, of which £70mn came from council tax, £40mn came from business rates, £10mn from grant funding, and £30mn came from the investment approach, which meant that there would now be a funding gap of approximately £30mn due to the winding down of the investment approach. He added that the Council had invested in green power which improved the environment and ensured that officers could remain focussed on work within Thurrock, rather than maintaining investments. He stated that Thurrock had been investing for decades before the investment approach had been agreed, and peer reviews had been undertaken which had supported the investment approach. He summarised and stated that due to the loss of income from the investment approach, decisions had to be made to ensure the funding gap was closed. He stated that the gap had been £34mn, but the finance team and directorates across the Council had worked hard to close this gap to £4mn.

Councillor Johnson stated that Children's Social Care had statutory duties to fulfil to protect vulnerable children and young people within the borough. He

stated that 50% of the £70mn collected from council tax was used to pay for Children's Social Care, and the Council's first duty was to protect vulnerable children. He explained that in recent months Thurrock had seen an increase in high needs and high complexity cases, which had increased the spend by Children's Social Care. He added that the average cost of weekly placements had also increased, as well as the costs of unregulated placements. He stated that the team were currently trying to convert the three unregulated placements in Children's Social Care to alternative residential provision, as the cost of an unregulated placement was £20,000 per week. He stated that the team had also seen an increase in referrals to Children's Social Care throughout COVID-19, many of which had been affected by delays within the court system. He stated that the Children's Social Care team were working closely with all partners, including finance, to maintain good practice, whilst also working to increase preventative measures and reduce the number of children entering the care system. He stated that the team were currently working on an idea to have Members as Children's Champions, who would work with each sector and improve preventative care measures.

The Leader thanked both Councillors for their report, and highlighted that the £16mn of interest paid also included interest on the capital programme and LOBO debts. He thanked Councillor Johnson and the Children's Social Care team for their work in trying to convert unregulated placements to in-borough placements as this would reduce costs and improve outcomes for vulnerable young people in Thurrock.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Commented on the forecast outturn financial position for 2021/22.**
- 2. Agreed that Thurrock's 2022/23 Schools funding formula be implemented as stated in section 6. This being consistent with Cabinet's decision made for 2020/21 and 2021/22 schools funding formula.**
- 3. Agreed to accept Highways England designated funding of £0.750m and add the first phase of the SEE Park project to the capital programme.**

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

66. Adult Social Care - Provider Services Transformation (Decision: 110591)

Councillor Huelin introduced the report and stated that it set out the plans for transformation within Adult Social Care and would provide more modern and improved care for service users. She explained that Thurrock would now be following a wellbeing team model, as well as rationalising day care and changing the meals on wheels service. She stated that the Council would not be removing these services but would be becoming more efficient with taxpayers money and would improve the quality of life for older residents in

Thurrock. She added that the Council had a statutory duty to provide care for residents, both in their homes and in day centres, as well as providing meals, and the team would continue to do this with a personal and caring service. She stated that Thurrock had been working with the main care organisations to support the community and provide the appropriate services for all residents. She added that a wellbeing team pilot had been carried out in Chadwell St Mary and Tilbury, which had found a seven times reduction in the number of older residents needing a GP appointment, and a thirteen times reduction in the number of people being admitted to hospital. She stated that residents had found care had improved with the wellbeing teams as it reduced the number of tick-box assessments that needed to be completed and meant a more personal service could be provided, which could adapt quickly to changing care needs. She stated that as users were the focus for the wellbeing teams, it allowed users to determine the type of care they wanted and needed, as well as improving the job satisfaction and retention of those keyworkers. She explained that whilst reviewing the day care and meals on wheels service, all service users had been spoken too to ensure they had made their input and understood the potential impacts on them.

Councillor Huelin thanked all officers for their hard work on the report and the consultation. She added that the day centre had been closed during the pandemic, but other services had been offered such as respite care in homes, and work to link older residents with their families through FaceTime and social media. She explained that the report proposed the move to Cromwell Road for both Kynoch Court and Bell House day centres, which she felt would improve care and provide a better experience for service users. She added that Cromwell Road would be able to expand their working hours, and offer more access to support groups, as well as offering new landscaped gardens, pamper rooms, arts and crafts activities, and a new expanded kitchen and café culture. She stated that during the consultation all users had been happy to move to Cromwell Road, and she felt the personalised consultation had shown that the move to Cromwell Road would benefit service users.

Councillor Huelin explained that a consultation had also taken place regarding the meals on wheels service, and all 89 service users had been spoken too. She stated that the majority of the service users already had care packages in place outside of the service, or had become independent enough to make their own meals. She stated that only 24 service users had been left after the consultation, and the team would ensure these were still catered for, either at day centres or having meals delivered to them. She stated that the building to run the meals on wheels service cost £190,000 and she felt this was not the most efficient use of taxpayers money for 24 service users, who could be catered for in other, better ways.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Approved the plans for the service transformation, specifically:**
 - a. roll out of the Well Being Teams across Provider Services**
 - b. Rationalisation of day care to deliver a better offer from a single site**
 - c. New arrangements for meal delivery.**

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

67. Highways Term Maintenance and Street Lighting Contract Procurement (Decision: 110592)

Councillor Maney introduced the report and stated that it ensured highways work could continue to be delivered across the borough, as the current contract expired in March 2023. He explained that this report would not award contracts, but would begin the procurement processes necessary to ensure highways works could be carried out. He stated that the report proposed the removal of in-house street light maintenance, as new street lights were LED and often required specialist maintenance that could be better provided by a specialised provider. He added that the report also looked at other in-house services such as gritting and gully maintenance, and the team would be testing the market for external providers. He clarified that these services would not be put out to private providers at this stage, but market tests would take place to understand the best value for money. He summarised and stated that this report did not make any final decisions on procurement, but set the scene for more detailed investigations.

The Leader agreed with Councillor Maney and felt that the Council should be undertaking a more specialist approach, particularly in regards to street lighting. He stated that a note had been prepared regarding the discussions at Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee the previous night, which included questions regarding street lighting on Seabrooke Rise. The Leader explained that the lighting on Seabrooke Rise was covered as a housing asset, but asked the Portfolio Holder if cross-directorate working could take place to look into this issue.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Delegated authority to the Director of Public Realm, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transportation, to decide the appropriate procurement route for the delivery of the Transport and Highways works for the next eight years commencing 1 April 2023.**
- 2. Approved the process to commence procurement of Transport and Highways works for a seven year period commencing 1 April 2023, which will be compliant with applicable Public Procurement Regulations, the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Councils Contract Procurement Rules.**
- 3. Delegated authority to the Director of Public Realm, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transportation, to award any contracts necessary for the delivery of the Transport and Highways works for an eight year period commencing 1 April 2023.**

4. Delegated authority to the Director of Public Realm, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transportation, to progress TUPE arrangements for any staff members affected by award of Contracts.

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report

This decision is subject to call-in

68. Public Land Maintenance Strategy (Decision: 110593)

Councillor Jefferies introduced the report and stated that when the administration had first been elected a new strategy of 'Clean It, Cut It, Fill It' had been adopted, and this report would provide an extension to that strategy. He stated that the new strategy had been prepared to ensure that open spaces were managed correctly, and although maintenance in some areas would decrease, maintenance would become more targeted. He commented that the team would be working with local communities to ensure open spaces remained areas of recreation, play, and fitness, and hoped civic pride in these spaces would increase, whilst also improving biodiversity and the environment.

The Leader felt pleased to see that the team would be working with local residents and Friends of Parks groups. Councillor Maney added that Friends of Parks groups and community forums were essential, and highlighted the successes that the Friends of Blackshots Park group had achieved. He asked if the Friends of Parks groups could be brought together more often to share best practice and share knowledge.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the adoption of the Public Land Maintenance Strategy and its recommendations as shown within this report.

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report

This decision is subject to call-in

69. Quarter 2 (April to September 2021) Corporate Performance Report 2021/22

Councillor Duffin introduced the report and stated that 71% of all key performance indicators (KPIs) had been achieved, with 59% moving in a positive direction of travel. He highlighted the KPI regarding new apprenticeships, as the target for Quarter 2 had been 30, but 33 new apprenticeships had begun, which he felt was a good achievement. He added that he was also pleased to see the KPI relating to micro-enterprises reaching its target in Quarter 2, and thanked officers for their hard work.

Councillor Hebb left the meeting at 8.12pm.

The Leader highlighted page 110 of the agenda and the KPI relating to Fixed Penalty Notices. He stated that this KPI did not reach target due to COVID-19, but the team would continue to try and collect all monies owed on fixed penalty notices. Councillor Huelin also highlighted the KPI relating to the proportion of people in Adult Social Care receiving direct payments, and stated that this applied to people who had left hospital and entered care who received direct payments for their care, rather than utilising the Council's services. She felt that even though the KPI was not meeting target, this meant that the Council were offering a good service which residents wanted to utilise, rather than receive direct care payments.

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 require additional consideration.

The meeting finished at 8.15 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**