

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 9 February 2022 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Monday 21 February 2022 at 5.00pm

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

Apologies: Councillor Mark Coxshall

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Mark Bowen, Interim Head of Legal Services
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.

83. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 12 January 2022 were approved as a correct record.

84. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business. The Leader stated that as a member of the public was in attendance, Item 14 regarding additional pay and display sites in Thurrock would be brought forward as the first substantive item on the agenda.

85. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

86. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by explaining that the focus of the Cabinet meeting would be the budget, which would outline the complexities of the budget and investment strategy. He stated that there were positive changes for fully vaccinated people in regards to COVID-19, as from Friday the UK would no longer require a COVID test upon arrival to the country. He stated that there was also the possibility for further guidance regarding the lifting of additional restrictions expected in the coming weeks. He commented that the best place to find all of the rules regarding COVID restrictions was the gov.uk website, which provided regular updates on the rules in place. The Leader thanked the volunteers and the NHS for delivering the vaccine and booster programmes, but stated that Thurrock currently had one of the lowest vaccine rates in the UK and urged residents to get their vaccines and booster jabs. He

stated that pop-up vaccine centres had been established across Thurrock to make it easier for residents to get their vaccines, and volunteers would be sent out into the community to provide advice and share vaccine news with local residents, in a bid to increase vaccine take up.

The Leader stated that during the meeting Cabinet would be considering proposals for a single use plastics policy, and highlighted that the Council were committed to ensuring sustainability across the borough. He added that the Council were also undertaking more environmentally friendly road surfacing repairs, which reduced the need for heat and mixing and therefore was more environmentally friendly. He stated that the Council were also piloting a programme that would halve the cost of pothole repairs, but would improve the road surface and reduce environmental impact.

The Leader commented that the Prime Minister had recently visited the Port of Tilbury. He stated that the Port of Tilbury would benefit from the recently agreed Thames Freeport, which would lead to approximately £4.5billion of investment. He thanked the hard work of senior officers, who had spent an estimated 1000 hours on the Thames Freeport project. He added that the Prime Minister also listened to the investment plans for Tilbury through the Tilbury Towns Fund, such as investment in the beach, youth centre, and train station.

The Leader then provided an update on Clean It, Cut It, Fill It and stated that 2912 potholes had been filled, 99% within target time; 1419 fly-tips had been cleared; 1975 tonnes of waste had been removed; and 3366 Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued. He summarised and stated that an invite would be sent to all Councillors to attend Operation Abbey that would be held in Grays on Friday 18 February, which would partner businesses, the Council, and local communities for a one-off clean-up action day. He stated that the aim of Operation Abbey was to remove stickers on businesses shutters and would help tackle the blight of flyposting. He explained that the borough's Keep Britain Tidy scores were affected by the issue of flyposting, and felt that the removal of the stickers would make it more difficult for the perpetrators to attach flyers to the shutters. He stated that it would also make it easier for business owners to remove the flyers, and if successful in Grays would be rolled out to other towns in the borough.

87. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

There were no briefings on policy, budget and other issues.

88. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

89. Questions from Non-Executive Members

There were no questions submitted by Non-Executive Members.

90. 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 their consideration by an overview and scrutiny committee.

91. Introduction of Additional Pay and Display Sites within Thurrock (Decision: 110603)

Councillor Maney introduced the report and stated that car parks within Thurrock fell into two categories: pay and display car parks; or free of charge car parks that were unrestricted and had no controls placed on them. He explained that due to the condition of some of the car parks in Thurrock, the Council needed to intervene before the car parks became too dangerous and needed to be closed. He added that in recent years, the number of compensation claims due to the condition of the car parks had increased and approximately £24,000 of damages had been paid to local residents. He stated that he and the team had considered all of the car parks in the borough before submitting the proposals, and sites that did not support local businesses and were mainly for recreational usage were being proposed as additional pay and display sites. He highlighted point 2.6 of the report and emphasised that officers had been discussing the proposals with users, and had determined that sites such as South Ockendon Recreation Ground might be suitable for permit parking areas, or for additional land, not formally part of the car park, being used as parking for the site.

Councillor Maney stated that he was also proposing limited tariffs for South Ockendon Recreation Ground, for example between Monday to Friday from 8am to 4pm. He stated that the team were also considering a season ticket for country park users, such as at Langdon Hills, which would reduce the price they would have to pay to park. He felt that the team were doing what they could to further discussions with service users, and any additional income made from the pay and display sites would be ring-fenced for the maintenance of those car parks. He added that any necessary remedial works on the car parks would be completed before the pay and display tariffs were implemented. He stated that it was difficult for officers to determine how much income would be generated from the additional pay and display sites, as there was currently no data regarding car park usage, but officers were estimating £160,000 could be generated for council car park maintenance. He added that the Council had to pay business rates for the car parks and the additional income from the sites would help to offset this burden placed on the Council. Councillor Maney summarised and stated that Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology was not being proposed at Cabinet, but he would be urging officers to adopt this method of enforcement, as he felt it would increase the income brought to the Council.

The Leader drew Cabinet's attention to three letters that had been received from the Director of the Mardyke Pavilion; the Chairman of Brandon Groves

Football Club; and the General Secretary of Belhus Cricket Club. He felt that Cabinet had listened to their views and were therefore proposing that tariffs were limited at South Ockendon Recreation Ground. Councillor Maney stated that the times for the tariffs had not yet been agreed, but felt the limits would benefit users of the site. He added that the Council had received complaints from local residents and members of the public regarding commuters using South Ockendon Recreation Ground car park to park their cars before catching the train to London or working in nearby offices. He felt that the tariff times would ensure that the car park was only utilised by those people using the site, rather than commuters, and would therefore benefit local sports clubs. Councillor Jefferies asked if the Portfolio Holder had considered the wider problem of commuters parking in residential roads surrounding the train station. He asked if residential parking permits had been considered. Councillor Maney agreed that South Ockendon did have problems with commuter parking in residential areas and stated that he would ask officers to look into this issue, and would suggest a parking permit area in roads near to the station.

The Leader proposed an additional recommendation which read: "The tariff proposals, outlined in 2.6 of the report and in regards to the South Ockendon Recreation Ground, will be agreed following further consultation with members of the public and sports ground users." Cabinet unanimously agreed with the additional recommendation. The Leader invited Mr Cansdale, the General Secretary of Belhus Cricket Club, to make a statement regarding the report. Mr Cansdale felt the additional recommendation, which could limit tariff times and days at South Ockendon Recreation Ground could be workable for local sports groups and visitors. He stated that he could not speak on behalf of other sports groups, but thanked Cabinet for their proposed recommendation. Councillor Maney stated that he would be happy to meet with members of the sports clubs at South Ockendon Recreation Ground if necessary, and welcomed any feedback from members of the public.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Considered the proposal, in view of the Medium Term Financial Plan and efficiencies required to meet a balanced budget, and supported the creation of additional pay and display facilities and car parks in Thurrock.

2. The tariff proposals, outlined in 2.6 of the report and in regards to the South Ockendon Recreation Ground, will be agreed following further consultation with members of the public and South Ockendon Recreation Ground users.

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

92. Draft General Fund Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy Update (Decision: 110599)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that it set out the proposed budget for 2022/23, which was focussed on Children's and Adults Social Care following pressures after the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent delayed NHS referrals. He stated that Cabinet were proposing a 1.99% increase in council tax, and a 1% adult social care precept increase, that would increase the Council's budget by approximately £2.2million. He explained that in recent years, there had been a 10% growth in pressures on the social care system, which had been seen across the UK. Councillor Hebb understood that the proposed council tax rise could be difficult for some families, but Thurrock Council had a duty to provide care for children and vulnerable adults, and the system was under national pressure. He explained that the Section 151 Officer was in the process of writing the Section 25 notice, which would be social care centred.

Councillor Hebb added that along with local residents, the Council was also under pressure regarding the recent inflation increase. He commented that the Council would be rolling out the Local Council Tax Scheme, which would provide support to those families in need, in addition to the £150 council tax support being provided to all families from central government. He urged residents to come forward if they were in crisis or were struggling to pay their council tax bill, as he felt the Council would do everything they could to support local residents in need.

Councillor Hebb stated that the approximate budget of the Council in 2021/22 had been £150million, of which £70million had been raised from council tax; £40million from business rates; £30million from investments; and the remainder from other sources. He stated that all Members had agreed to the Investment Strategy in 2017, and the income from investments had helped to fund necessary services such as social care and areas of the Public Realm directorate. He stated that if Members had not agreed to the Investment Strategy, then the Council would have had to increase Council Tax by 42% over the past five years to cover the deficit. He commented that the Investment Strategy was being rolled back due to rule changes on local authority investment, so the Council were now having to roll back their spending and increase efficiency. Councillor Hebb added that the raise in Council Tax was under the level of inflation and emphasised that support would be available for those that needed it.

Councillor Huelin stated that paragraph 4.7 on page 24 of the report needed to be amended to read "a comprehensive review of the service has led to the identification of a number of targeted efficiencies across the fieldwork and provider services, including the amalgamation of the Older Peoples' Day Care Services and a change in the provision of the meal delivery service." She thanked senior officers in Adult Social Care (ASC) team for their hard work in balancing the budget, and stated that approximately 29% of Thurrock's overall budget was spent on ASC. She explained that Thurrock had one of the lowest spends for ASC in the UK, but had a care system that she felt delivered good quality care whilst also running a successful transformation programme. Councillor Huelin explained that the Council's ASC team worked hard to

ensure continuity of care for service users, by ensuring that care workers had high levels of job satisfaction and were regularly trained and upskilled, so remained in their jobs longer and could get to know regular service users. She stated that COVID had affected ASC around the UK, by increasing demand on services, which was also being compounded by the recent rise in inflation. Councillor Huelin added that Thurrock currently had approximately 800 people on the Vulnerability Register, which had increased since COVID and the necessary stopping of preventative care within the NHS during the peaks of the pandemic. She stated that the proposed rise in the ASC precept would equate to approximately an extra £1000 per service user, per year, which might not be enough to cover care for residents in all cases. She welcomed the proposed rise in the ASC precept, but emphasised that there would be ongoing pressures within the service over the coming years.

Councillor Johnson thanked the finance officers and Councillor Hebb for their hard work on the report. He stated that the priority within Children's Social Care (CSC) was the child and the Council had a statutory duty to look after vulnerable children within their care. He stated that CSC equated for approximately 50% of the Council's overall budget, but there remained challenges regarding unregulated placements for children that could cost between £20,000 and £40,000 per week. He explained that officers were looking to find efficiencies within the budget, such as streamlining administration processes and the ongoing transformation programme, whilst still helping children in need. He mentioned that Ofsted had recently re-visited the SEND team and had found that sufficient progress had been made on all of the recommendations from the 2019 inspection. He thanked officers for their hard work and congratulated them for this achievement. He summarised and stated that Thurrock Council were bucking the trend regarding child poverty levels, due to the hard work of the Brighter Futures team and the Housing Team on issues relating to homelessness.

The Leader stated that all unitary local authorities faced pressures and demands within both Adults and Children's Social Care, and felt that both services were facing a national crisis. He explained that the Council would also be affected by the rise in inflation, due to increased costs of fuel and food, and increased costs from service providers. He stated that the proposed council tax rise was lower than inflation, but urged central government to re-evaluate council tax bands, some of which had not been evaluated since 1991/92.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Considered the comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in section 13 of the report.**
- 2. Supported the additional use of capital receipts and general reserves to meet the 2022/23 budget deficit of £0.190m.**
- 3. Supported the proposed council tax increase of 1.99%.**

- 4. Supported a 1% Adult Social Care precept increase.**
- 5. Recommended to Full Council the capital proposals set out in section 9 of this report and Appendix 5.**
- 6. Endorsed the Early Years Funding formula for 2022/23, as shown in section 10.**
- 7. Noted the proposed updates to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the remaining deficits in future years.**

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

93. Capital Strategy 2022/23 (Decision: 110600)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that it showed both borrowing on capital projects and borrowing on investment activity. He explained that pages 55 and 56 of the report differentiated between the two different types of borrowing. Councillor Hebb stated that Table 1B highlighted that there would be no new investments from 2022/23 onwards, and page 49 outlined the split of borrowing between capital projects and capital investments. He stated that the Investment Strategy had brought £115million into the Council, which had helped the authority fund services and increase reserves 300% to £24million.

The Leader felt that it was good to see a clear picture of where Thurrock's money was going outlined on page 49, including the spend on LOBO debts. He felt that the £115million earned from investments had helped to improve local roads and fund vital services for local residents. He stated that the new format of the report was clearer and easier to understand, and thanked officers for their hard work. He emphasised that Thurrock Council had always paid debts on time and with the required interests, and this money had helped other local authorities fund their own services. He added that the Council had invested in green energy that helped the UK meet its sustainability and climate change agreements. He explained that the electricity generated by Thurrock Council's investments could power the borough's electricity twice over. Councillor Hebb agreed that the investments had helped UK to cut carbon emissions. He added that the recently announced Levelling Up Fund had urged the Local Government Pensions Scheme to pool and invest their funds, which the government would incentivise. The Leader and Councillor Johnson declared interests as they both had an interest in the Local Government Pension Scheme.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

Recommended that Full Council:

- 1. Approve the Capital Strategy for 2022/23 including the approval of the**

Annual Minimum Revenue Position (MRP) statement for 2022/23.

2. Approve the adoption of the prudential indicators as set out in Appendix 1.

3. Notes the revised 2021/22 and 2022/23 Treasury Management projections as set out in Annex 1 paragraph 2.32.

4. Notes the comments from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in section 5.

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report

This decision is subject to call-in

94. Fees and Charges Pricing Strategy 2022/23 (Decision: 110601)

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that this was a cross-departmental report that outlined the fees and charges for discretionary services provided by the Council and fees and charges whose price was set up by the national government. He explained that Thurrock considered the local market when setting fees and charges, including what other nearby local authorities were charging, to ensure that Thurrock remained attractive and competitive, and services could be self-funded where possible. He stated that feedback from all overview and scrutiny committees could be found at Appendix 3.

The Leader felt disappointed that there remained statutory charges that were set by national government, and felt these should be set by the local authority. He urged central government to consider allowing local authorities to set the price for all fees and charges. He added that some of the fees and charges that had been increased this year, for example some parking fees, had not been raised for many years. Councillor Johnson felt pleased to see that most discretionary services could be self-funded through the fees and charges scheme.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

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

2. Approved the delegated authority to allow Fees and Charges to be varied within a financial year, in response to legal, regulatory and commercial requirements, in consultation with the Director of Resources and Place Delivery, the relevant Portfolio Holder, and the Cabinet Member for Finance.

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

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

**95. Housing Revenue Account - Rent Setting and Budgets 2022/23
(Decision: 110602)**

Councillor Spillman introduced the report and stated that it proposed an increase in rents and service charges within Thurrock. He stated that this was partly due to the increase in inflation, which the Bank of England had said could rise to 7%, as well as the ongoing impacts of COVID-19. He stated that the proposed increase in rents and service charges would help the most vulnerable in borough, such as those facing homelessness, whilst helping to regenerate Thurrock and providing necessary services for residents.

The Leader highlighted that rents had not been increased for the past five years, so the rent increase proposed this year would bring rents in line with the level last seen five years ago. Councillor Spillman agreed and stated that Thurrock needed to renew its housing stock and provide suitable housing for residents living in the borough, which could only be achieved through the proposed increase in rents. He added that the proposed increase would also help pay for services such as electricity in communal areas.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Supported the proposed changes in the base budget for 2022/23 (as set out in Table 1).**
- 2. Supported, in line with the 30-year HRA business plan, the proposed increase in domestic rent of 4.1% with effect from 4 April 2022.**
- 3. Supported the proposed increase in service charges to reflect the cost of running each service, in line with the budget estimate from 4 April 2022 (as detailed in Table 4).**
- 4. Supported the proposed increase in garage rents (para 3.9), to be implemented from 4 April 2022.**
- 5. Supported the proposed increase in Travellers sites rent (para 3.10) to be implemented from 4 April 2022.**

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

96. Single Use Plastics Policy (Decision: 110604)

Councillor Jefferies introduced the report and stated that it would start the Council's journey towards sustainability and protecting the environment, by reducing the amount of single use plastics consumed by the Council. He explained that this report would invoke a longer-term shift towards reducing

plastics and would demonstrate the Council's commitment to environmental sustainability.

Councillor Hebb thanked officers for their hard work on the report, and felt that the reduction in plastics usage could only be achieved through partnership working with the private sector and local businesses. The Leader agreed and highlighted that the majority of PPE delivered to the Council came in single-use plastic bags. He felt pleased to see this would be tackled and the Council would be working with businesses to reduce the amount of plastics used. He thanked Councillor Byrne for his hard work on the project, as this was an issue that he had raised some years ago.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the adoption of the Single Use Plastics Policy.

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

97. Thurrock Roadside Memorials and Floral Tribute Policy (Decision: 110605)

Councillor Jefferies introduced the report and stated that it was a sensitive and difficult area to consider for some residents, as friends and family often wished to lay a floral tribute at the scene of an accident where a loved one had tragically died. He explained that officers had worked hard to ensure the policy was handled as sensitively as possible, and those affected, both friends and family of those that had passed and residents living near floral tributes, had been spoken too individually. He stated that this was an issue that had originally been raised by residents living near floral tributes and memorials, and he hoped that those affected by the policy had been able to provide their thoughts and comments to officers.

Councillor Maney added that it was a sensitive area to discuss with friends and family affected by such tragedies, and highlighted that the policy considered all floral tributes and memorials, both along the roadside and on council land within parks and open spaces. He stated that from a highways perspective, it could be dangerous for family members and friends to lay flowers and other tributes along the roadside where an accident had occurred, and it could also be a distraction for other drivers and road users. He stated that under the policy floral tributes could still be laid, but only for a limited time period and in a safe location. Councillor Jefferies added that if family and friends wished for a permanent memorial to be erected, they could speak to the Council who would find a suitable location if appropriate.

The Leader agreed that the policy needed to be handled with sensitivity, but felt it was for the benefit of friends and family as their floral tributes and memorials could now be properly managed and could liaise with the Council. He stated that the Council did not want to see accidents increase due to

memorials by the roadside, but emphasised that the policy only covered council owned land rather than private land. Councillor Maney added that this was not a new policy, but rather a policy refresh and commitment to applying the policy as necessary.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the adoption of the new Thurrock Roadside Memorials and Floral Tribute Policy.

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

The meeting finished at 8.30 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**