

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 21 July 2021 at 7.02 pm

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- Present:** Councillors Sue Shinnick (Mayor), James Halden (Deputy Mayor), Abbie Akinbohun, Alex Anderson, Gary Byrne, Adam Carter, Daniel Chukwu, Gary Collins (*arrived 6.28pm*), Mark Coxshall, Jack Duffin (*arrived 6.28pm*), Tony Fish, Mike Fletcher (*arrived 6.40pm*), Robert Gledhill, Shane Hebb, Victoria Holloway, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Susan Little, Allen Mayes, Sara Muldowney, Bukky Okunade, Augustine Ononaji, Maureen Pearce, Terry Piccolo, Georgette Polley, Jane Potheary, Shane Ralph, Kairen Raper, Joycelyn Redsell, Elizabeth Rigby (*arrived 6.15pm*), Jennifer Smith, Graham Snell, Luke Spillman, James Thandi, David Van Day (*arrived 6.15pm*), Lee Watson (*arrived 6.20pm*) and Lynn Worrall
- Apologies:** Councillors Qaisar Abbas, Chris Baker, Colin Churchman, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Ben Maney, Fraser Massey and Sue Sammons
- In attendance:** Sean Clark, Corporate Director Resources and Place Delivery  
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
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised the meeting was being live streamed to the Council's online webcast channel.

### **31. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no urgent items of business.

### **32. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **33. Announcements on behalf of the Mayor or the Leader of the Council**

The Mayor welcomed Members back to the chamber and stated as she had not provided any refreshments this evening she would be making a donation to Thurrock Carers. Members were informed the Mayor would be providing refreshments before the beginning of September Council in the Mayor's

Parlour. The Mayor would be holding an Afternoon Tea at Stifford Hall on the 15 September in aid of her two charities, Little Havens Thurrock and Thurrock over Fifty's Forum (TOFF).

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Gledhill, made the following announcements:

- COVID Update - The country had seen significant growth in the number of people testing positive for COVID but like the rest of the country that growth had fortunately not been reflected in the number of people being hospitalised or dying. With the lifting of legal restrictions now was not the time to throw caution to the wind and had to remain mindful of both the ongoing risks of COVID and other people's decisions on whether they want to continue distancing from others and wearing face-coverings in indoor public spaces. That it had been clear that the vaccination was an extremely important factor in our journey through the summer and urged residents those ready for their second dose not to delay in getting the extra protection that would offer. Also the Leader urged anyone over the age of 18 who had not taken up the offer of a vaccine to do so without hesitation and reminded residents that double vaccination was not immunity to COVID but it would help stop the spread and for those who did contact the virus double vaccination meant it was less likely to be seriously affected. As of Monday the seven day figures for Thurrock were:
  - 485 people tested positive
  - Rate of 278 per 100,000 people
  - We are 127<sup>th</sup> UTLA in the country
  - 177,555 vaccine doses have been given - 101,723 first doses and 75,832 second doses
- Was pleased to announce that on 7 and 14 August, the Thames Clipper would be running an Uber boat from Tilbury to the City via river taking just 60 minutes to the heart of the capital. The service would leave at 10.00am returning to Tilbury at 6:30pm. There were plans for the service to be accessible from Tilbury and Grays but this was to demonstrate to residents how the service could be used by residents to get to docklands and the city on a regular basis.
- Extended the Council's thanks to the England Football team following their tremendous performance in the Euros with the entire team truly doing us proud and were a credit to the nation.

#### **34. Questions from Members of the Public**

No questions from members of the public were received.

#### **35. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors**

Mr Williams presented a petition on behalf of residents on Save the Thameside Complex.

Councillor Muldowney presented a petition against the proposed sale of the 6.8 acres of green fields opposite Cole Avenue, RM14 4JQ by Thurrock Council.

**36. Petitions Update Report**

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

**37. 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 change to make:

To add Councillor Thandi to the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education Committee.

Councillor Holloway, Deputy Leader of the Labour Group, informed the Chamber she had no changes to make.

Councillor Byrne, Leader of the Thurrock Independent Group, informed the Chamber he had no changes to make.

**38. Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Social Care**

Councillor Johnson presented his portfolio report by placing on record his sincere thanks to all key workers and in context to his report thanked all educators and children service providers for being absolutely amazing in delivering the services during these unprecedented times. That their commitment to duty had done you all proud. Councillor Johnson made thanks to the Conservative Government in agreeing to support the free school meals over the summer and in line with the holiday activities provision over a four week period would ensure that those eligible would continue to receive good quality meals. There had been an amazing partnership working between the local authority and education and it was Councillor Johnson's intention to visit as many schools as possible. Members were referred to the Headstart Housing Project to ensure young school leavers had a safe and secure base, the exemption for foster carers from council tax, Thurrock school pupils despite the many challenges faced this year had shown real resilience and some truly fantastic results, must continue to support children and young people and their families or carers as we begin the recovery phase of COVID, look how to bridge gaps not just in education but in social skills, important that

all services and that of the Council's partners ensure parents and carers were involved as much as possible, work collaboratively with the homelessness team to ensure all investigation work was undertaken to identify any household with children and the threat of homelessness and put measures in place to stop this becoming a reality, look to expand SEND education provision within Thurrock schools, find ways of improving the speed of ECHP assessments, Thurrock saw its fair share of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and to ensure the Council participated fully in the agreement across the East of England and provide good corporate parenting to those and indeed for all our children looked after, for Children Service's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to continue to scrutinise, explore better ways of expanding Thurrock's based foster carers and adopters by building on already exciting ideas for retention and recruitment, the Prevent working group had the remit to include investigations into preventing unaccompanied asylum seeker children being involved in human or gang association, continue to ensure Thurrock had enough school places required and look to improve the placement in first-choice schools.

Councillor Muldowney thanked Councillor Johnson for the report and also added her thanks to all staff working in schools and social services for their extraordinary hard work this year and to Thurrock's children for giving up a lot of keep their parents, grandparents and older members of the community safe. That the care and safety of Thurrock children had enough to eat which had always be a cross party priority and asked Councillor Johnson to join her in addressing child poverty by making it one of his key priorities this year by refreshing Thurrock's child poverty strategy and setting new and ambitious targets to tackle child poverty in our area. Councillor Johnson stated yes, of course, and reiterated that he would be working very closely with the homelessness team to ensure no household that had children would become homeless, we would stop that before it happened and Councillor Johnson agreed with Councillor Muldowney that this would be a priority of his.

Councillor Muldowney stated that the new school expansion of the new academy would be built within 200 metres of the construction zone of the proposed Lower Thames Crossing which would mean children would be going to school next to a building site for the next six years and questioned whether the portfolio holder was aware of this and what action would he be taking to mitigate the health and safety impacts on children. Councillor Johnson stated if the crossing were to go ahead this would be looked at when the plans were put forward to actually see how this would affect the school and what would need to be put in place but agreed those conversations need to start taking place.

Councillor Muldowney made reference to the cost savings to be made from a comprehensive review of the Education Services and asked for clarification on the meaning of a comprehensive review of the education service and how many jobs would be lost as a result of this. Councillor Johnson stated that proposals were still being worked on and would be as much as possible through the transformation work and through working smarter and expect these to be presented to children's services committee by October. Councillor

Johnson assured Members that the Council would never intentionally offer an unsafe service and remained totally committed to vulnerable children.

Councillor Byrne stated that portfolio holders new to their role needed time to deliver on their promises.

Councillor Worrall referred to Headstart Housing and praised Councillor Halden for taking this forward but stated the 26 properties available to these care leavers was clearly not enough and there should be ambitions to expand. Councillor Worrall questioned what work the portfolio holder would be doing with Councillor Spillman to ensure Headstart housing grew with looked after children should be looked after as a key priority. Councillor Johnson agreed that 26 properties had not been enough but the housing delivery paper had gone through cabinet and TRL would deliver these for the Council and it was Councillor Johnson's ambition to continue to work closely with Councillor Spillman.

Councillor Pearce referred to the Free School in Aveley and asked why another school was required in Aveley as Aveley already had several schools or would it be the assumption that housing numbers would be rising in the very near future. Councillor Johnson stated the Council did not have a lot over free schools but would keep conversations going on pupil placement to prove the point whether we get schools that we need or whether we get schools we did not need and it was vital that those conversations remained open.

Councillor Redsell questioned how many children were now home schooled in Thurrock and whether the pandemic had made more children stay at home to be home schooled. Councillor Johnson provided Members with updated data which confirmed there had been an unprecedented increase of home schooling education cases. But stressed this was the reflection of a whole national increase not just here in Thurrock. There were only 19 cases recorded in September 2019, 103 in September 2020 and continued to grow to over 150 new cases recorded in the first term of this academic year 2020-2021. There were approximately 370 cases which would be reduced by about 50 at the end of this academic year due to students finishing their education. That COVID had been the overwhelming reason for such an increase with parents being worried about sending their children back to school when they reopened in September 2020. Some parents had reported that home educating had been rewarding and would continue. That 140 children did return to school education in this academic year which was of course where we would prefer children to be educated.

Councillor Johnson summed up by stating the past year had been an extremely challenging time and had to face a global health crisis but Thurrock had done some very exciting regeneration programmes and committed to having high quality education opportunities across the borough and had asked officers to look at the possibility of sponsoring a part of a fair debt summit in conjunction with our finance portfolio where financial responsibilities and outcomes being explained to young people to help stave off financial problems in adulthood.

### **39. Report of the Cabinet Member for Adults and Communities**

Councillor Huelin presented her portfolio report by stating this past year had seen some very difficult times for staff and residents who had lost loved ones due to the pandemic and her heart went out to all those affected. That COVID had shown the strengths and ability to not just being flexible and reactive to situations but to proactively lead as a borough. There would always be a debt of gratitude to those serving the borough from front line workers across all services to countless charity organisations and volunteers, cabinet, councillors, officers, directors, chief executive and that honesty, openness and trust in each other across all areas had got us through and kept us ahead of that curve. PPE had been provided to services, informal carers and community groups, had led a multi-agency hub to oversee COVID protocols and manage exposures, testing protocols for care home workers months before national arrangements were made, a 24/7 access to public health advice. Council workers formed through the COVID Community Action Group sent to support 5000 vulnerable residents, supported people discharge from hospital who could not go home because of self-isolating. Councillor Huelin thanked Councillor Halden and Roger Harris for their hard work and dedication last year providing us with a solid base to build on this year. There would be successful pilot schemes of health and wellbeing teams in Tilbury and Chadwell, social worker apprenticeships, working with the volunteer sector and health partners to access mental health facilities and support, provide a more flexible care package for residents based on understanding through long term care relationships, the micro enterprises scheme had won an national award giving the flexible support to residents such as offering lunch, clubs, handymen and gardeners. It had been a tough year for libraries with lockdowns and changing guidelines but during the times of closure had facilitated services and outreached supplies by phone, on-line and hand deliveries. Joined a library consortium and installed a new management system. Arts, cultural and museum volunteers had during the year done some amazing work such as rearranging bookings, creating educational packages and interactive online offers for students, teachers and care homes and had organised outdoor museum exhibitions. The Council was particularly supportive of community led projects and continued to support creative people and places in their bid to arts for funding. Councillor Huelin concluded that we were on the road to recovery with some difficult decisions to be made and was proud of our collaborative community approach and would continue to work with partners to deliver community driven arts and heritage across the borough that improved the quality of life, health and wellbeing of all residents.

Councillor Holloway questioned with the strength of the feeling against the closing of Thameside Theatre not just this evening but in the weeks since the closure had been confirmed would the portfolio holder consider reversing the decision. Councillor Huelin stated that no decision had yet been made and this was an opportunity to be open and frank with the community and cross party to make decisions going forward about the Thameside building. As part of her portfolio holder responsibilities was art and culture. That officers and

directors were working on ways of providing that offer in alternative venues such as community halls or maybe a community group would like to come forward and discuss with the Council how they could take the Thameside Theatre in that building or in another building and stressed that they were open to those conversations. A report would need to come from officers before cabinet can make any decisions in September.

Councillor Byrne stated could the portfolio holder stop pretending that she was interested in arts and culture and that Council had no interest in supporting arts or culture in Thurrock. Councillor Huelin stated that as cabinet member for arts she was interested in arts and was fighting for a theatre provision and for an arts and culture offer across the borough.

Councillor Holloway thanked all staff who had been phenomenal throughout the pandemic and continued to be fantastic. Councillor Holloway questioned how much money would need to be cut from the adult social care budget to balance the books in the next two years. Councillor Huelin stated the budget was £43 million and would stay at £43 million. The budget would not be cut but were looking to transform services for efficiencies but the foremost was the health and wellbeing of all adults in this borough.

Councillor Holloway referred to the “Meals on Wheel” service which had been removed and questioned what other services would be removed and how many job losses would this result in. Councillor Huelin stated that the meal delivery service had not been taken away and that the meals on wheels was a name provided by the Royal Woman’s Voluntary Society who no longer provided that offer. The Council were still providing hot meals just from a different building that was fit for purpose instead of spending £190,000 on a crippled building to support a service that can be taken to another kitchen, have the food cooked and delivered.

Councillor Holloway asked the portfolio holder to promise those currently receiving any services via adult social care would continue to get a high quality service despite financial pressures to which Councillor Huelin stated 100% yes.

Councillor Worrall asked the portfolio holder on behalf of residents and those based at Thameside that the building would not close until a new museum, library and theatre was built in Thurrock and that theatre was appropriate and nothing makeshift. Councillor Huelin reiterated her passion for arts and culture and the Administration were now taking the responsibility of addressing those issues identified in a cross party workshop undertaken six years when Labour were in control which had not been fixed in that time. Councillor Huelin stated that the building would fall under Councillor Coxshall remit but the arts and culture services fell within her remit and was trying to find a better and provide a theatre offer, an arts and culture offer, a museum offer, a library offer and could not necessarily do that in old buildings which were not fit for purpose.

Councillor Piccolo referred to the libraries section of the report and acknowledged that COVID had affected some of the services that residents used and questioned whether some form of library service could now be operated from the Stanford le Hope library. Councillor Huelin agreed these had been hard times and anticipated more issues would arise as we come out of the pandemic restrictions to move into a full recovery and the only way to get services back at Stanford le Hope library was to take staff from other parts of the service. To facilitate this, Corringham library would be temporarily closed one day a week in order to open Stanford le Hope library for the same amount of time. From the Wednesday 4 August, Corringham library would be closed and Stanford le Hope library would be open on that day and throughout the summer holidays. Councillor Huelin did state that there may still need be periods of temporary closure which may not be avoided. For the future offer, officers would bring a paper forward to look at a strategy to recover from COVID and move us forward.

Councillor Kerin asked for assurances that Thameside Complex would remain open and functional until such time as a purpose built theatre, library and museum based in Grays was up and running for the people of Thurrock to use and enjoy. That the complex remained open and something even better would be built to replace it. Councillor Huelin stated the Council was looking to keep the service offer which she was looking at in her remit as portfolio holder for arts and culture, waiting for a paper to come from directors, look at assets, strategic and economic growth directors so that informed decisions can be made in September. Looking for open and honest conversations, including the community and urged them to come and speak with her or Councillor Coxshall.

Councillor Potheary stated her passion for libraries and asked for assurances that Grays central library played an incredible part to resident's life would not be downgraded in terms of space, paid staff, PCs or study spaces and the existing specialist facilities for children, young people and local history would be retained. Councillor Huelin responded by welcoming the question and again reiterated her passion for libraries and had hopefully proved that. The library service was so important to everybody and that Grays library had the largest footfall and would be crazy not to look at a library offer. Councillor Huelin and Ian Wake had visited all the libraries to get a feel for what the libraries offered, looked at the buildings and what provisions each one had. An area that had been highlighted was that not enough room had potentially been allocated for Grays library and that a strategic paper would be brought to cabinet and directors board so that we can really start to look at how we continue an offer and improve an offer.

Councillor Huelin summed up by stating the hard bit had been done, the Administration had stood up and admitted there were problems with the building and we now need to do something about the services and urged members and the community to come and speak to her or Councillor Coxshall as they were open to ideas and options.

#### **40. Questions from Members**

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

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

**41. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies**

No reports were presented.

**42. Minutes of Committees**

The Minutes of Committee as set out in the Agenda were received.

**43. Update on motions resolved at Council during the previous year**

Members received an information report updating the progress in respect of Motions received at Council

**44. Motion submitted by Councillor J Kent**

The Mayor agreed that Councillor J Kent's motion could be deferred to the September Council.

**45. Motion submitted by Councillor Rigby**

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

*Her Majesty the Queen will be celebrating her Platinum Jubilee next June. To commemorate such a momentous occasion, the Council calls on the Cabinet to plant an established tree in each ward, between October and March, with a plaque. This will be in line with The Queen's Green Canopy project and will provide a lasting legacy of Her Majesty's devotion to the Commonwealth.*

Councillor Rigby presented her motion by stating that next year Her Majesty the Queen would be celebrating her 70<sup>th</sup> year reign and as part of the Queen's green canopy project would be seeking to inspire individuals, communities and businesses to plant a tree which would be there for generations to come. That trees would provide an important habitat, shelter and food for many species of birds and help to combat climate change. Ward councillors would work with Officers to choose a suitable tree and location which would be a fitting tribute to the longest serving British monarch.

Councillor Gledhill supported the motion by agreeing that this was a way of commemorating the 70 years of Her Majesty's reign by putting a tree into each ward with each ward member having a say on the type and location of the tree. There was a need to ensure the right tree was planted so that they

were not just here for five to ten years but for longer than Her Majesty's reign. Councillor Gledhill stated that if the motion was agreed he would be happy to endorse as soon as was possible.

Councillor Potheary stated her support to this motion and agreed that it would be a fitting tribute but stressed that the Council worked with local communities, community groups and resident associations in terms of where these trees should be sited.

Councillor Redsell stated her full support for the motion and commented that following her Motion to plant more trees in the borough the Council had done really well and that over 1000 trees had been planted with trees that come down being replaced with new ones.

Councillor Rigby summed up by thanking Members for their support.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion.

Members voted unanimously in favour of this Motion to which the Mayor announced the Motion carried.

#### **46. Motion submitted by Councillor Watson**

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

*This Council notes with concern the Government proposals to change planning law. This Council believes planning works best when developers and the local community work together to shape local areas and deliver necessary new homes; and, therefore, the Council resolves to write to our local members of parliament asking them to protect the right of communities to object to individual planning applications legislation.*

A proposed amendment to the Motion had been submitted by Councillor Gledhill. The amended Motion read as follows:

*This Council notes the Government proposals to change planning law. This Council believes planning works best when developers and the local community work together to shape local areas and deliver necessary new homes; and, therefore, the Council resolves to write to our local members of parliament asking them to protect the right of communities to object to individual planning applications in the forthcoming legislation.*

Councillor Watson presented her motion by agreeing to the amendments and stated the Government had published a controversial proposal to reform the planning system and a concern of Councillor Watson and others was the proposal to remove local resident's right to object to individual planning applications in their own neighbourhoods if that area had been zoned for growth or renewal. These reforms would endanger affordable and social housing and would allow developers to build bad quality homes, high density

as well as not enough affordable house for the borough. In the new reform the Council would have some say in the designated areas of growth, renewal or protection for some of the zones but after that residents and members would be almost powerless to influence development in growth areas. That development proposals would be automatically granted for outline planning permission with detailed plans being delegated to planning officers. In regards to new areas there would be an expectation in favour of developments with some types of developments receiving an automatic planning consent. Councillor Watson asked all Members to accept the amended motion.

Councillor Gledhill thanked Councillor Watson for accepting the amendments to the motion and hoped to see a swift unanimous support across the whole chamber. Councillor Gledhill stated that the points made by Councillor Watson were valid and well made. There had been for decades a call for planning reform and this Government had been clear in its intention to deliver that. The current system where residents were allowed at the last minute of an application to have a say needed to be changed. That as part of the local plan it would introduce the engagement with communities long before the application would be put to local residents, their needs taken from this and understood with the standards being set for developers to follow on upcoming developments. That the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government had announced the formation of the new office of place that outlined plans which were being looked at to be introduced through the office. To make beauty and place a strategic theme for the framework, set out the expectation that local authorities produce their own design codes and guides setting out development principles which new developers in that area should reflect, that all new streets are tree lined, improve diversity and access to nature through design, improving design and refusing poor quality schemes. That the voice of residents would not be taken away and still listened to before applications were being considered by developers by ensuring the local plan was robust that took into account residents thoughts and needs within the local community. Councillor Gledhill stated if the motion was fully supported this evening he would write to MPs on behalf of all elected Thurrock members and ask them to carry on ensuring that residents do have the voice on planning as new emerging legislation comes forward.

Councillor Coxshall stated these designs would not take the power away from local residents, they would put the residents before the planning application and it would go through the local planning process. This would bring power to the communities before the planning applications and would bring the plans into the 21<sup>st</sup> century to bring residents involved with these projects.

Councillor Polley stated it was great to hear that we would still be engaging with the community and would be supporting the amended motion and urged every Member to get involved in the local plan as this would be the masterplan being worked to and to encourage their residents to also get involved.

Councillor Watson summed by thanking Members for their support.

Members voted unanimously in favour of this Motion to which the Mayor announced the Motion carried.

**The meeting finished at 8.42 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**