

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 11 January 2023 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Monday 23 January 2023 at 5.00pm

Present: Councillors Mark Coxshall (Leader), Deborah Arnold (Deputy Leader), Jack Duffin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Ben Maney, Graham Snell

Apologies: Councillors Qaisar Abbas and Luke Spillman
Councillor Fraser Massey, Chair of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force

In attendance: John Jones, Director Law & Governance, and Monitoring Officer Ewelina Sorbjan, Interim Director of Housing
Ian Wake, Acting Chief Executive
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

83. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 7 December were approved as a true and correct record. The minutes of the Extraordinary Cabinet meeting held on 14 December were approved as a true and correct record.

84. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

85. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

86. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement and explained the changes to the waste service that were taking place within the Council, to ensure residents bins were collected on time. He explained that a new director for the service had been appointed and changes were taking place to the senior management waste service team. The Leader explained that these changes were being introduced to improve the service for residents.

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

No questions had been 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. Lower Thames Crossing Task Force Update Report (Decision: 110633)

The Leader introduced the report and explained that the Chair of the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) Task Force was unwell and therefore unable to attend the Cabinet meeting. He thanked the LTC Task Force Chair for his diligent attendance at Cabinet to present the Task Force reports over the past few years. Councillor Jefferies requested assurance from National Highways that the planned proposal of one million trees would be planted in South Ockendon and Aveley as mitigation for the scheme. The Leader felt that the Council was in a good position regarding opposition to the scheme, as Thurrock MPs, Members and many residents did not want the route in its current location. He felt that if the route was approved by government, Thurrock needed to push for appropriate mitigation, including junctions into and out of Thurrock to promote local growth.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Noted the work of the Task Force.

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report

This decision is subject to call-in

92. Cemetery and Burial Strategy (Decision: 110634)

Councillor Jefferies introduced the report and stated that Thurrock had never previously had a formal Cemetery and Burial Strategy, and the report presented to Cabinet outlined the Council's aims and ambitions, including a new crematorium in Thurrock and areas for natural burial. He explained that a consultation had taken place between June and August 2022, and approximately five hundred responses had been received, the findings of which were outlined in the report. The Leader felt that it was important for Thurrock to have its own crematorium. He explained that currently residents

had to travel to Pitsea or the London Borough of Havering for a crematorium, and this could be made more difficult due to the expanding ULEZ area. He felt that having a crematorium within Thurrock would make it easier for residents to pay their last respects to their loved ones.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Formally adopt the Cemetery and Burial Strategy and its associated policies.

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report

This decision is subject to call-in

93. Contract Modification to Housing Repairs and Planned Maintenance Contract (Decision: 110635)

The Interim Director of Housing presented the report, as Councillor Spillman was unwell and had sent apologies. She stated that the report set out the recommendations for the contract term and proposed modification to the contract value, as the contract was not due to expire until 2025. She stated that the amount spent on the contract had increased since its agreement in 2015 due to new legislation and regulations following the Grenfell tragedy, inflationary changes, and additional works undertaken by Mears such as energy efficiency works. She added that the contract had been well-performing so far and the proposed contract modification would not affect the service provided to residents. The Interim Director of Housing explained that the team were currently working on re-procurement of the contract to ensure this was in place by contract end in 2025. She summarised and explained that an additional recommendation had been added which outlined the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund process.

Councillor Johnson expressed his support for the recommendations and was pleased to see that the contract modification would provide consistency for residents. The Leader agreed that Mears had provided a reliable service. He queried the match-funding for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and asked if this would come from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and the chances of a successful bid. The Interim Director of Housing explained that the Council were expecting an outcome regarding the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund bid soon. She added that the first successful bid had granted £3.2million for the Fund, and the second bid, if successful, would provide £2.5million, which would be match funded through the HRA. Councillor Duffin queried the inflationary pressures from the contract, and if this would be considered during re-procurement. The Interim Director of Housing clarified that the proposed contract modification was largely due to an increased scope of works, and increased regulations following the Grenfell tragedy. She explained that inflation for the first five years of the contact had been 2%, but this had increased to 6% last year. She added that the team would be renegotiating inflationary costs for this year and hoped to keep it close to 6%. The Interim Director of Housing summarised and explained that the contract provided for an annual uplift to be negotiated of up to 90% of RPI,

but Mears had never claimed such high amounts.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the increase to the contract value for the Term Partnering Agreement for Responsive Repairs, Voids and Related Works awarded to Mears Ltd by £22,828,000.00 for the remaining term of the Contract to 28 February 2025.

2. Noted that any financial commitment from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to match fund works from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund is subject to a separate formal decision and in consultation and approval from the s151 officer and new financial governance procedures.

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

94. Local Council Tax Scheme (Decision: 110636)

Councillor Snell introduced the report and stated that it proposed a continuation of the Local Council Tax Scheme (LCTS), which was introduced in 2017, and would be renewed for the 2023/24 financial year. He explained that the LCTS helped to support the most vulnerable in Thurrock, and would be reviewed over the coming year, ahead of the 2024/25 financial year. The Leader felt pleased to see that the scheme was being renewed for another year as it helped vulnerable residents whilst seeing good collection rates. He asked how this would be reviewed going forward. Councillor Snell explained that he had spoken with the finance team, who would be considering changes to the scheme for 2024/25, which were in the early stages of development. The Leader asked if the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny committee could be involved in the design of the scheme. Councillor Maney queried the level of council tax support. He highlighted that Castle Point District Council offered 70% support, and asked what their collection rate was. He felt that as the scheme was developed, officers and Members should undertake a comparative exercise regarding the level of council tax support and collection rates. Councillor Snell confirmed that officers would be undertaking a comparative exercise and the report would be scheduled for the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Noted the analysis of the current scheme.

2. Supported the recommendation that the current scheme remains unchanged for 2023/24.

3. Supported the recommendation that in light of the Council's financial situation a fuller review of the scheme will be carried out in 2023, in advance of the 2024/25 budget.

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

95. Public Health Contract - Healthy Families Service (Decision: 110637)

The Deputy Leader introduced the report and explained that it proposed a second one-year extension to the contract, as it had previously been extended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She stated that the public health team were currently experiencing a backlog regarding data collection due to the pandemic, and this was one of the reasons for the contract extension request. She explained that this was a significant contract as it contributed to many public health programmes for children aged 0-19, and had a total spend of £20million over the five years. She clarified that this money came from public health grants and was separate to Council funding. She added that the contract was a statutory government contract and provided funding for services such as school nurses, child vision screening and antenatal provision. The Deputy Leader stated that contract regulations for this contract were due to change, and due to increased service costs, the report was proposing a 6.5% reduction on service spend. She commented that some services would move online, some non-statutory services would cease, and some services would be run directly through schools. She summarised and stated that if Cabinet chose not to extend the contract, procurement would be rushed and the team would be unable to consult on, redesign and future-proof the service.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Approved a second extension (of twelve months) of the Healthy Families Contract at a 6.5% reduction to the current contract value (£4,306,454) for September 2023-August 2024.**
- 2. Agreed that officers proceed with the further development of the service specification of the Healthy Families Service ready for September 2024.**
- 3. Agreed that officers proceed on a proposed joint consultation by Public Health and Children's Services through the Family Hub Transformation work to secure stakeholder and public approval to the re-design of the service specification of the Healthy Families Service.**
- 4. Subject to the outcome of the consultation exercise and in consultation with the Portfolio Holders, agreed to proceed to tender for the Healthy Families up to a total maximum value of £4.3million per annum for 5 years+1+1.**
- 5. Agreed delegated authority to award the Healthy Families Service Contract to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Education and Health.**

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

96. Corporate Peer Challenge 2022 Update

Councillor Duffin introduced the report and stated that this had been presented to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2022, who had questioned why the report had been delayed. He stated that the report findings and feedback would lead into the work currently being undertaken on the Best Value Inspection (BVI) and Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP). Councillor Snell highlighted feedback from the Local Government Association on page 122, who had undertaken a financial diagnostic in December 2021 and had found the investment programme had helped to raise funds for the Council. He urged Members to wait until the publication of the BVI to ensure all the facts were available. The Leader highlighted that the Commissioners and BVI team had read the Corporate Peer Challenge report. He felt that some of the feedback from the report had already been enacted by the Council. The Leader urged all Members to engage with the IRP and BVI processes, and to challenge Cabinet decisions. He felt that cross-party working was important for the Council and discussions should be had between all Members. The Leader wanted the Council to own their recovery and be involved in every step of the process.

Councillor Maney echoed Councillor Snell's points and felt that the scrutiny process was important to the Council. He thanked Councillor Massey for his hard work as Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and stated that the work undertaken by Cabinet was underpinned by the work of the scrutiny committees. Councillor Duffin explained that Cabinet challenge could also be undertaken by backbench Members, as well as scrutiny committees.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Noted the outcomes of the LGA Peer Challenge in January 2022 and the actions as part of the wider response to the Best Value inspection and intervention process.**
- 2. Feedback on the areas mentioned by Members above and which should be focussed on in future iterations of the Improvement and Recovery Plan.**

The meeting finished at 7.44 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