

Thurrock - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

Cabinet

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **11 January 2023**

Committee Room 2, CO3, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL

Membership:

Councillors Mark Coxshall (Leader), Deborah Arnold (Deputy Leader), Qaisar Abbas, Jack Duffin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Ben Maney, Graham Snell and Luke Spillman

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

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Agenda published on: **3 January 2023**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- **Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;**
- **Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and**
- **leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon**

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature

You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
 - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
 - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
 - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
 - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
 - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
 - Fewer public buildings with better services

3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
 - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
 - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
 - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 7 December 2022 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Monday 19 December 2022 at 5.00pm

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

Councillor Joycelyn Redsell, Ward Member for Little Thurrock Blackshots

In attendance: Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
John Jones, Director of Legal and 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.

61. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 9 November 2022 were approved as a true and correct record.

62. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

63. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

64. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by explaining that the Council were currently in a financial deficit position of approximately £479m and a Best Value Inspection was currently being undertaken by the Commissioners. He felt determined to put things right and engage with all Councillors regarding this issue to change the culture at Thurrock Council. He thanked officers for their hard work during this difficult time. He added that the Quarter 2 financial update report on the agenda would be deferred until the Cabinet meeting on 14 December, to ensure that Corporate Overview and Scrutiny could make comments and feedback on the report at their next meeting.

65. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Johnson thanked local businesses and residents for the support they had shown to the Give a Gift project. He explained that the project was currently in its seventh year, and this year approximately 1400 gifts had been received which would be distributed to 1000 vulnerable children in the borough. He thanked officers for their hard work organising the Give a Gift campaign.

66. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

67. Questions from Non-Executive Members

No questions had been submitted by non-Executive Members.

68. 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.

69. Financial Update - Quarter 2 2022/23 (Decision: 110628)

Councillor Snell explained that the report would be deferred to the extraordinary meeting on 14 December 2022 to ensure the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee can share their views.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Deferred the report to the extraordinary Cabinet meeting on 14 December 2022, to ensure Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee can feedback and comment.

70. Thames Freeport: Governance Structure (Decision: 110629)

The Leader introduced the report and felt that the Thames Freeport provided a good opportunity for the borough, with closer collaborative working with other local authorities including the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, and the London Borough of Havering. He stated that the Freeport could bring investment and new jobs to the borough.

The Director of Legal and Governance added that a briefing note regarding the report had been received from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Snell highlighted the concern from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee that Thurrock officers could become overstretched with the additional workload from the Freeport, and asked how the Council could ensure this did not happen. The Leader stated that this issue had been raised with the commissioners and central government, and

some income from the Freeport would be ringfenced to allow for increased officer capacity. He felt that the Freeport would be vital to help deliver growth within the borough, and help Thurrock in its recovery. He added that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee had also raised concerns regarding the change from borrowing against future business rates to waiting for business rates to be accrued. He stated that the monies collected through business rates would be deferred rather than lost, as the Council now needed to do things differently.

Councillor Abbas supported the report and felt the Freeport would be beneficial to Thurrock as it could increase the number of jobs in the area. Councillor Johnson sought clarification regarding recommendation 4, and asked if the recommendation would need to be changed in the future if the Acting Chief Executive became permanent. The Director of Legal and Governance explained that the recommendation did not need to be amended as it had to reflect current titles, but would automatically be changed if titles were updated in the future.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Considered and approved the Thames Freeport proposed governance structure (Section 4).**
- 2. Approved the appointment of the Leader of the Council or nominated representative to the Thames Freeport Governance Board (Section 4.4, 4.5 & 5.3).**
- 3. Endorsed that relevant Officers support the Leader of the Council or nominated representative at the TFGB to participate in and represent the Council on the various Thames Freeport Sub-committees as necessary, delegating authority to the Acting Chief Executive to appoint Officers to appropriate sub-committees e.g., Skills, Levelling Up and Regeneration (Section 4.10).**
- 4. Delegated authority to the Acting Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council to enter any Memoranda of Understanding with government and Freeport bodies to deliver the activities of Thames Freeport (Section 4.2, 4.13 & 5.4).**
- 5. Noted the approach to investing retained business rates in regeneration and infrastructure projects as the rates become available to Council (Section 2.4).**

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

71. Digital and Customer Experience Strategy (Decision: 110630)

Councillor Duffin introduced the report and stated that the new strategy would not exclude those who wished to continue using non-digital channels, but

would make systems as easy as possible for all residents and improve the level of support residents received. He explained that the strategy provided a long-term outlook and would help implement ideas such as introducing a portal whereby residents could see the status of their enquiry, which could help improve the Council's efficiency and visibility to residents. Councillor Duffin highlighted the Local Full Fibre Network phase 2, which had been funded through central government and would help improve connectivity within the borough. He also highlighted that 89% of Freedom of Information requests had been processed within 20 days, which was above the Council's target. He stated that although this was above the target set, the team were working to reach 100%. He added that 98,000 Thurrock residents were subscribed to the Council's e-newsletter, with 65% of these opening the newsletter.

Councillor Redsell asked if the contact centre could be given more up-to-date information, particularly regarding housing issues, as some information was out of date and therefore not useful to residents. Councillor Duffin stated that he would take this feedback away and liaise with the contact centre. The Leader felt pleased to see that residents would be able to track their enquiries and looked forward to seeing this project progressing. Councillor Duffin agreed and felt this would help improve transparency and would utilise technology to improve resident's experiences when dealing with the Council. Councillor Maney felt concerned that the increased use of digital portals would mean that residents received procedural responses, rather than detailed responses from officers regarding their enquiry. Councillor Duffin explained that the new strategy would help to streamline processes. He added that a reviewing system could also be added so that when an enquiry was completed the resident could provide a star-rating or qualitative feedback on their experience. He felt that this could provide tangible data that officers could analyse to see which areas needed more work, or which areas were doing well and could provide learning. Councillor Spillman felt that qualitative responses at the end of the enquiry process was a good idea and would allow for more detailed feedback. He felt that this would be useful with vulnerable residents to understand more about their lived experiences. Councillor Duffin explained that every service user could be offered a star-rating review system at the end of their enquiry, and then those services with lower star ratings could be offered qualitative feedback systems.

The Leader felt that this strategy would help improve services at the Council and work towards a culture and behaviour transformation. He stated that the Council had lots of learning to undertake. Councillor Duffin highlighted that the report had gone to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee who had raised concerns regarding the exclusion of people without access to digital channels, but had agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed the Digital and Customer Experience Strategy at Appendix 1.

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

72. Housing Allocations Scheme Update 2022/23 (Decision: 110631)

Councillor Spillman introduced the report and stated that it provided a more modern and human policy, as it allowed officers to make common sense decisions. He felt that it would improve the efficiency and empathy of the Council when allocating council properties, and thanked officers for their hard work on the report. He added that the report had gone to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee who had supported the recommendations, and thanked them for their contributions to the report.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agreed the recommended changes to the Housing Allocations Policy as set out in section 3.2, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, 8.2, 9.2, 10.2, 11.2, 12.2, and 13.2.

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

73. Blackshots Estate: Proposals for the Way Forward

Councillor Spillman introduced the report and stated that it requested resources to ensure the three high rises in Blackshots were knocked down and replaced with something better for the residents. He explained that as the flats were not in a good condition, it would cost approximately the same amount to refurbish them as to knock them down. He stated that the residents had been consulted with and the majority had wanted the tower blocks demolished, and highlighted that new housing regulations were due next year, which would impact the high rises if they remained.

Councillor Redsell spoke as Ward Member for Little Thurrock Blackshots and thanked Councillor Spillman for his work on the report. She stated that she did not want remedial work to take place on the high rises, as the damp and mould in the buildings could not be fixed. She explained that the last major works on the high rises had been undertaken in 1990, and the outside of the buildings did not conform to current regulations. Councillor Redsell requested clarity on what the new homes would look like, as homes would be needed for the current high-rise residents, but they had to be right by design. She expressed concern that the new homes would remove greenbelt land, and felt that residents in the tower blocks did not want to be moved to Horndon-on-the-Hill, which was one of the proposals within the report. She sought reassurance that the Council would work closely with Fields in Trust to ensure greenbelt land was protected. Councillor Redsell added that she had received lots of feedback from residents following the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and felt pleased to see that residents were engaging with the scrutiny process. Councillor Redsell summarised and stated that the towers needed to be demolished due to the damp and mould conditions within the

building. Councillor Spillman stated that the issues within the flats regarding damp and mould were well documented, and felt that the tower blocks were now inadequate places for people to live. He explained that consultants would choose the most viable option for the new buildings. Councillor Maney agreed that the tower blocks were no longer fit for purpose and did not meet the current required standards. He thanked the local MP for her support in demolishing the tower blocks, and felt that it was now the right time to move forward with the proposals and regenerate the area.

Councillor Abbas thanked officers and the Portfolio Holder for the report, and asked how the consultancy fees would be funded. He also felt concerned regarding the use of greenbelt for the new houses. Councillor Spillman explained that the £200,000 consultancy budget would be used for visibility and preliminary works. He stated that he had consulted with Ward Members regarding the greenbelt option, and felt that it was needed as the footprint of the space had to be increased to ensure all residents could remain in the same area. He felt that this would maintain the community in the area where they currently lived, and although using greenbelt was not ideal he felt it was a small parcel and would improve the lives of residents in the flats. Councillor Snell felt cautious regarding the finances of the project, as it still had to be agreed by commissioners. He asked how the residents would be decamped from the tower blocks. Councillor Spillman explained that the team would be putting together a case for the project that would be presented to the commissioners. He added that the team would also be working on detailed proposals for the decampment of residents. The Leader added that the project would be funded through the Housing Revenue Account, rather than the general fund. The Deputy Leader highlighted point 3.15 of the report and asked if the homeowners within the tower blocks would receive the same service as council tenants. Councillor Spillman explained that homeowners would receive a different service as their homes would be compulsory purchased, but they would be integrated and included in all conversations and developments.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Commented and agreed on:

1.1 The proposed approach to developing proposals for the future of the Blackshots estate.

1.2 The requirement to carry out essential remedial works to the Blackshots tower blocks.

1.3 The principal of redeveloping the estate to deal with the issues affecting the existing blocks, to provide good quality housing and to enhance the available stock of housing in Thurrock.

1.4 Note that a consultancy budget of £200,000 has been identified from within the existing Housing Revenue Account feasibility reserve to develop proposals for the future of the estate including appointing

Independent Tenant Advisors.

1.5 The proposal to commence detailed design and planning for a proposed scheme to consult on with residents and the proposed approach to consultation.

74. Annual Public Health Report 2022

The Deputy Leader introduced the report and stated that it sought agreement from Cabinet to publish the report. She explained that the Director of Public Health had a statutory duty to publish an annual report, but it could be on any topic relevant to the borough that could inform service areas and achieve positive outcomes. She explained that the public health team had worked with a variety of health partners on the report, and was linked with other policies such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the Better Together: A Case for Future Change policy. She commented that this year's focus was cardiovascular disease, which linked into health inequalities within the borough such as obesity, diabetes, and smoking. She added that the report would also help to inform the NHS and other partners about the issues within Thurrock and would bring together stakeholders.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Noted the contents of the Annual Public Health Report 2022 and approved its publication.

The meeting finished at 8.00 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**

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Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 14 December 2022 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Thursday 29 December 2022 at 5.00pm

Present:	Councillors Mark Coxshall (Leader), Deborah Arnold (Deputy Leader), Qaisar Abbas, Jack Duffin, Barry Johnson, Ben Maney and Graham Snell
Apologies:	Councillors Andrew Jefferies and Luke Spillman
In attendance:	John Jones, Director of Legal and Governance, and Monitoring Officer Ian Wake, Acting Chief Executive Jonathan Wilson, Interim Director of Finance and S151 Officer Nicole Wood, Essex County Council Commissioner 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.

75. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

76. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

77. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by thanking the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comments and feedback on the Quarter 2 Financial Report. He moved on and stated that on Monday 12 December he had received the resignation of the Chief Executive, Lyn Carpenter, which he had accepted. He explained that the recruitment process for a new substantive Chief Executive would begin in the New Year. The Leader added that he had also recently signed an Executive Decision notice to accelerate the recruitment process of an Interim Director to improve the environmental department, who would ensure every bin in the borough was collected. He looked forward to the new Interim Director starting work for the Council in the New Year.

78. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

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

79. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

80. Questions from Non-Executive Members

No questions had been submitted by non-Executive Members.

81. 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.

82. Financial Update - Quarter 2 2022/23 (Decision: 110632)

Councillor Snell introduced the report and stated that it outlined the Council's latest financial position for 2022/23 and the medium-term outlook. He explained that the report presented a significant deterioration in the Council's finances since the previous financial report presented in October 2022, following the intervention from the Secretary of State. He explained that work had been undertaken to identify the impairment on major investments, due to the deterioration in their valuation. Councillor Snell added that the Council were evaluating revenue impacts of compliance with the Prudential Code, particularly surrounding the Minimum Revenue Position (MRP), as well as refinancing debt and other financial pressures. He stated that as a result of this, there was a projected in-year deficit of £469.581m, which could be reduced through mitigation measures to £452.38m and was outlined in the table on page six of the agenda. He stated that in 2023/24 there would be an approximate deficit of £184m, as outlined on page seven of the agenda. Councillor Snell felt that this was a grave financial position for the Council, which would mean that the Council would need to seek external support from the government in the form of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS). He added that the Council would also need to restrict spend and consider all capital assets. He highlighted the table on page six of the agenda that outlined the general fund outturn position for quarter two, although clarified that this was subject to further change. Councillor Snell explained that the level of potential mitigation was also likely to change, subject to the closure of prior years' audits. He stated that the funding gap for 2022/23 assumed that investments would be kept, although the Council would be working to divest some investments and therefore reduce MRP costs. Councillor Snell summarised and explained that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet would be updated as the financial situation progressed.

The Deputy Leader highlighted that Cabinet had received the draft Corporate Overview and Scrutiny minutes, as well as a summary of questions that the Committee had asked at the meeting. The Leader thanked the Committee for their feedback, and highlighted their point regarding due diligence of auditors. He stated that he had raised this issue with the Acting Chief Executive and

the Commissioners who would be investigating this further. The Interim Director of Finance added that most questions at Corporate Overview and Scrutiny had sought clarification on terms and the impact that the S114 notice could have on the Council. He added that the Committee had also commented on the clarity of the report.

The Leader asked when the Quarter 3 finance report would be presented to Cabinet. The Interim Director of Finance replied that the team were currently following standard timetables for finance reports, and were preparing the Quarter 3 report for February's Cabinet and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny meetings. The Deputy Leader highlighted Corporate Overview and Scrutiny's point regarding the Council's statutory minimum during the S114 period, and felt that some discretionary services within Adult Social Care prevented more acute spend in other areas. She asked if these discretionary services could continue. The Interim Director of Finance replied that the Best Value Inspection (BVI) would help to assess all spend within the Council and ensure good decision-making was undertaken. The Leader queried what it meant that KPMG were leading on the sale of assets. The Interim Director of Finance replied that KPMG had been appointed to sell the Toucan assets, and although it was early in the process, KPMG was experienced at this type of activity. The Leader felt pleased to see that the sale of this asset was progressing and moving forward.

The Deputy Leader highlighted recommendation 5 regarding the Council's need to make additional savings to reduce directorate spend pressures. She sought assurance that Portfolio Holders and Directors would work together to ensure directorate spend was decreased. Councillor Abbas also highlighted recommendation 5 and queried what type of savings could be made within each directorate. The Interim Director of Finance explained that Directors Board and Portfolio Holders would be asked to identify additional savings and consider all options. He added that the Spend Panel would ensure all spend was scrutinised. He commented that the team were also considering how residents accessed the Council to ensure this process was as streamlined as possible, which would improve efficiency and reduce spend. He added that these savings would continue into 2024/25 as the Council continued to deal with inflationary and pay pressures, whilst ensuring the deliverability of savings. Councillor Abbas asked what changes would be made before the S114 notice was submitted. The Interim Director of Finance replied that no changes would be made before the S114 notice was submitted, but the process of finding savings would be iterative. He explained that quarterly finance reports would continue to be presented to Cabinet, alongside other reports such as the tail of investment report and capital savings. He stated that there were significant pressures in areas such as investment. Councillor Abbas queried why the income losses were being considered as part of the Quarter 2 report. The Interim Director of Finance replied that the funding invested in Toucan had been held there whilst the company went into administration, and the Council were no longer sure when this money would be distributed. He explained that the Council were working to rectify this as the 2020/21 audits remained open, and investments could be attached to previous years audits.

Councillor Johnson felt that the financial picture of the Council was grave and hoped that the BVI report would explain how the Council got to this position. He felt that the Council needed to undergo a cultural change, and felt pleased to see that reports were now more transparent. He highlighted the question from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and asked how the Council could ensure these investment issues did not happen again. The Interim Director of Finance replied that an Improvement and Recovery Plan would be introduced to respond to the financial intervention. He explained that the Commissioners oversaw and supported reports, and officers would work to ensure Members were engaged and understood the financial processes being undertaken. He stated that specific investment issues were now being tackled, for example through the new Treasury Strategy, Reserve Strategy and MRP policies. He thanked the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their comments and questions on the report and felt that Members and officers needed to work together to build trust. He explained that the Council were also considering Essex County Council practices and decision-making processes as best practice learning examples. He added that Councillor P Arnold had raised concerns at the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny meeting regarding the technical aspects of the report and stated that officers were taking these comments onboard to ensure reports could be understood, whilst including the necessary technical data. The Leader stated that a cultural change would be undertaken across the Council to build back trust. He thanked Essex County Council and Thurrock Council staff for their help during this difficult time. The Director of Legal and Governance added that if Members did not understand aspects of the report, they could ask officers at any time.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Commented on the 2022/23 forecast funding gap of £469.581m including a request for exceptional financial support from central government.**
- 2. Noted the request for exceptional support will be delegated to the s151 officer.**
- 3. Commented on the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy which has a projected deficit in 2023/24 of £184.381m and which is expected to require a further request for exceptional financial support from central government.**
- 4. Noted that the position is subject to change, as further work is outstanding (as highlighted in the Commissioners commentary) which is likely to lead to changes.**
- 5. Noted additional actions will be required to identify further savings to manage the reported General Fund budget pressures.**
- 6. Noted that use of reserves as set out in appendix 5, subject to the**

finalisation of the audit process relating to financial years 2020/21 and 2021/22 and noted balances are subject to change.

7. Noted the proposed uses of further capital receipts projected to arise in 2022/23 as set out in Table 5 to mitigate the request for exceptional financial support from government.

8. Noted that further consultation with external audit will be required to finalise the technical accounting treatments relating to the investment valuations and the associated Minimum Revenue Position transactions.

9. Noted the position set out in respect of the capital programme and the reported slippage as set out in para 5.4.

10. Noted that Thurrock's 2023/24 Schools funding formula be implemented as stated in Appendix 6. This being consistent with Cabinet's decision made between 2020/21 and 2022/23 schools funding formula as per the report in Appendix 6.

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

The meeting finished at 7.36 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

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11 January 2023		ITEM: 10 Decision: 110633
Cabinet		
Lower Thames Crossing Task Force Update Report		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Chair of the LTC Task Force		
Accountable Assistant Director: Colin Black, Interim Assistant Director – Place		
Accountable Director: Mark Bradbury, Corporate Director of Place		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

In line with the Terms of Reference, the LTC Task Force is required to report to Cabinet on its work.

1. Recommendation(s):

1.1 That Cabinet notes the work of the Task Force.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Lower Thames Crossing Task Force has met on a monthly basis since September 2017. Cabinet received a previous update in October 2022.

2.2 The Council remains opposed in principle to any new crossing in Thurrock and the task force has consistently sought to hold National Highways to account. A new team at National Highways has meant that in recent months there has been a greater level of information sharing and improved collaboration between the parties

2.3 National Highways conducted a statutory consultation on the scheme which ended on 20 December 2018, two subsequent consultations (Supplementary and Design Refinements) in 2020 and then a Community Impacts Consultation in July-September 2021. Details of the Task Force's discussions following the consultations to date are detailed below.

2.4 National Highways submitted its first Development Consent Order (DCO) application in October 2020 and the Council submitted an adequacy of consultation (AoC) response at the request of the Planning Inspectorate and

submitted a joint AoC with Gravesham Borough Council and the London Borough of Havering, which were instrumental in the subsequent actions of the Planning Inspectorate and in National Highways decision. As a consequence of these issues raised with the application and consultation, National Highways took the decision to withdraw its application in November 2020.

- 2.5 Since that time, National Highways has been amending its proposals, adding further mitigation, preparing new documentation, liaising with stakeholders (including Thurrock), involving many technical meetings.

3. Task Force meetings

- 3.1 All Task Force meetings are recorded and available on the Thurrock Council website. Since the impacts of Covid-19 the meetings have been held as either hybrid or virtual meetings on Teams, but recently meetings have been held in-person and via Teams.

- 3.2 Full minutes of the meetings are also available on the website. Below is a summary of the discussions at each meeting:

April – May 2021

- 3.3 No meetings were held just prior to and following local elections.

June 2021

- 3.4 There were nominations and voting for the Chair and Vice Chair. A report on current progress on the Hatch Report measures was discussed and a review of the work programme was undertaken.

July 2021

- 3.5 National Highways officers gave a presentation and answered questions on the forthcoming Community Impacts Consultation. A Technical Paper on progress with the Health Impact Assessment (HEqIA) was presented and technical questions answered, and a review of the work programme was undertaken.

August 2021

- 3.6 National Highways officers gave a presentation and answered questions on progress with the Community Impacts Consultation and progress with the Hatch Report measures and a review of the work programme was undertaken.

September 2021

- 3.7 The draft Community Impact Consultation response from Thurrock Council was presented and discussed, prior to consideration by full Council and all recommendations were approved unanimously.

October and November 2021

- 3.8 Both meetings were postponed and held at the December meeting.

December 2021

3.9 This involved dealing with all three meetings from October, November and December and involved presentation and discussion of the following key matters:

- Employment and Skills Strategy Paper commenting on their draft 'control' document
- Health Impact Assessment verbal updates
- DCO Submission verbal update
- Transport Action Network (TAN) presentation and discussion
- Hatch Report Update Paper and discussion

January 2022

3.10 There were two verbal updates relating to the Thames Freeport and the Health & Equalities Impact Assessment.

February 2022

3.11 The CBRE Paper on Compensation was presented and discussed and there was a verbal update on the Health & Equalities Impact Assessment.

March 2022

3.12 There were three verbal updates relating to the Orsett Cock/A13 Junction, the forthcoming NH Local Refinement Consultation and the Health & Equalities Impact Assessment.

April – May 2022

3.13 No meetings were held just prior to and following local elections.

June 2022

3.14 The Assistant Director Regeneration & Place Delivery explained that the Council had written to the Treasury about the value for money of the LTC and this was discussed. Also, the Council's draft Local Refinement Consultation response was presented and discussed, and the broad approach was agreed.

July - September 2022

3.15 No meetings were held over the summer period.

October 2022

3.16 This was the reconvened September meeting. A National Highways senior officer gave a presentation on project changes over the last year, current engagement and the DCOv2 programme. He then answered questions on a range of topics, including local road network impacts and monitoring, air quality and noise and health impacts, emergencies/incidents, lack of relief to Dartford Crossing, traffic modelling data, value for money/cost of the project and its Business Case, TLR, smart motorways, decarbonisation and public transport provision and preferred delay to DCOv2 submission.

3.17 Subsequently the Council submitted written questions to National Highways, which were responded to and then the Council submitted follow-up questions to which responses are awaited.

- 3.18 In addition, the Council representatives outlined the DCO process once the DCOv2 had been submitted and how individuals/groups/communities can get involved. There was also a verbal update to the limited progress on the health impacts.

November 2022

- 3.19 Following the DCOv2 submission on 31 October, there was a verbal update on the health impacts included within the DCOv2 submission and subsequently when the meeting was not quorate, there was a verbal update on the DCOv2 submission and the subsequent process.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 In line with the terms of reference the LTC Task Force will update Cabinet.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Lower Thames Crossing Task Force

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 None

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Interim Director - Finance

There are no specific financial implications arising from the report and the work is funded from within existing budgets.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **John Jones**
Director of Legal and Governance, and
Monitoring Officer

This is an update report from the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force and there are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project

Monitoring Officer

There are no diversity implications arising from this report.

- 7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

Doctor Colin Black

Interim Assistant Director – Place

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11 January 2023	ITEM: 11 Decision: 110634
Cabinet	
Cemetery and Burial Strategy	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key
Report of: Councillor Andrew Jefferies – Cabinet Member for Environment	
Accountable Assistant Director: Daren Spring – Assistant Director Street scene and Leisure	
Accountable Director: Julie Rogers – Director Public Realm	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report introduces the proposed Cemetery and Burial Strategy that outlines the aims and aspirations for Thurrock Burial Grounds for the next ten years.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Cabinet formally adopt the Cemetery and Burial Strategy and its associated policies.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Council has not previously had a formalised Cemetery and Burial Strategy. The benefit of the strategy is that it not only outlines the aims and ambitions relating to the maintenance and improvement of burial grounds but, provides an opportunity to look at the broader long-term possibilities including crematoria and natural burials.

2.2 The ethos and aims of the strategy have been based both on research by the Registrar of Burials and an understanding of best practise.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Adoption of the strategy and the associated policies /procedures will address the fact that there is currently no Cemetery strategy in place, cemeteries are important spaces. In developing this strategy Thurrock Council are keen to ensure that we share the aims and ambitions for cemeteries and burials for the next ten years. We also want to ensure that policies relating to burials and

memorials are clear, well communicated, and consistent. Providing a framework which enables the service to effectively manage our cemeteries and provide future focus.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 A strategy that provides a clear direction of travel and guidelines for current management, helps to ensure that burial grounds are maintained and developed well. It also ensures consistency and provides an opportunity for strategic aims to be explored. The aim is to provide cemeteries for Thurrock residents that are beautiful, peaceful and well used. To offer burial spaces that support a diverse range of cultural and individual needs. To ensure that our policies relating to burials and memorials are clear, well communicated, and consistent and to ensure that procedures for the purchase and use of burial sites and memorials are clear, efficient, and compassionate

5. Consultation

5.1 From June to August 2022, a public consultation took place, covering a number of key aspects of burial ground maintenance and facilities, safety and memorial management and strategic developments. During the period of consultation circa 500 individuals accessed the consultation and reviewed the questions. The public consultation was extended by a week and additional communication messages were sent out to try to encourage more participants. 88 respondents completed the survey. All responses have been considered as part of the proposed strategy.

5.2 Key messages and views from respondents were: -

- Strong support for the development of a crematorium and for provision of natural burials.
- Agreement that the level of maintenance of the burial grounds is good with a clear desire to see more trees planted as well as areas of meadow.
- There is understandably concern relating to the enforcement relating to memorial items on graves, with ambiguity amongst respondents if the enforcement should be restricted to new items.
- There is a strong view that when unstable head stones are required to be laid down, notification of the reason or action should be published both at the cemetery entrances as well as adjacent to the memorial itself.
- The potential refurbishment of chapels was strongly advocated.
- There is a strong consensus that memorials in terms of benches and trees should be offered.

5.3 This report was presented at Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 11 October 2022. The committee supported the adoption of the Cemetery and Burial Strategy and its associated policies.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 Maintenance standards in burial grounds should reflect the respect and care due to those resting there, as well as for loved ones visiting. The strategy proposes the ongoing use of an assessment tool from The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Land Audit Management System (LAMS). This is to ensure that maintenance levels are to the standard required.
- 6.2 The strategy also includes a Burial Ground and Memorial Management policy, clearly outlining the permitted memorials in different areas of the cemeteries. This is an up-to-date version of Thurrock Cemetery Regulations, which was originally in place. The policy also details the approach that is required by law to be taken regarding memorial stones identified as unsafe.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Senior Management Accountant

Whilst the strategy outlines plans for the future development of burial facilities in the Borough. All proposed developments will be subject to the approval of full business cases prior to progressing. Financial implications will be fully outlined and addressed in those documents. As such the adoption of the Burials Strategy has no direct financial implications.

- 7.2 Implications verified by: **Mark Bowen**
Acting Head of Legal

The Burials Strategy has been developed with the legislation and guidelines relating to burials and burial sites firmly in mind. A consultation exercise has been undertaken and regard has been given to the feedback. All proposed developments will be subject to the approval of business cases prior to progressing. Legal implications will be fully outlined and addressed in those plans. As such the adoption of the Burials Strategy has no direct Legal implications.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Officer

There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report. The strategy contains information relating to accessibility and diversity of burial options available to all residents. There is also an aim to offer burial spaces that support a diverse range of cultural and individual needs.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e., Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

N/A

8. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Cemetery and Burial Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Potential Future Cemetery Extension
- Appendix 3 – Draft Thurrock Cemetery Regulations
- Appendix 4 – Draft Thurrock Memorial Safety Policy and Procedure

Report Author

Vincent Taylor

Strategic Lead for Clean and Green

Public Realm

Thurrock Council Cemetery and Burial Strategy 2022 to 2032

Introduction

Cemeteries are important spaces. In developing this strategy Thurrock Council are keen to ensure that we share the aims and ambitions for Cemeteries and Burials for the next ten years. We also want to ensure that policies relating to burials and memorials are clear, well communicated, and consistent.

Our vision is to ensure that all cemeteries in the Borough are maintained to a standard that reflects the respect due to those buried there. That the valuable green space created by burial grounds are pleasant quiet environments that can be used for remembrance, relaxation and reflection. It is also important that Thurrock's burial grounds reflect and support the diversity of the Borough, creating spaces for all faiths.

Thurrock Council manages 9 cemeteries and 4 closed church yards. In addition to ensuring the beauty of the sites, burials in Thurrock need to be sustainable. We need to ensure that we have sufficient capacity to accommodate the needs of residents.

Aims and Ambitions

The following are the key aims of the service. These are focused on ensuring clarity of process, quality of environment and inclusivity.

1. To provide cemeteries for Thurrock residents that are beautiful, peaceful and well used
2. To offer burial spaces that support a diverse range of cultural and individual needs
3. To ensure that our policies relating to burials and memorials are clear, well communicated, and consistent
4. To ensure that procedures for the purchase and use of burial sites and memorials are clear, efficient, and compassionate

Future ambitions for Thurrock Burial Services are:

- To improve levels of accessibility for all cemeteries and closed church yards managed by Thurrock
- To undertake a feasibility study to assess the practicality and need for a crematorium in Thurrock
- To open a green burial site in Thurrock, further increasing the diversity of burial options available to residents
- To assess the use and condition of the chapels that are located within some of our burial sites and ensure that they are maintained appropriately.

Consultation

Engagement with and feedback from stakeholders including residents and communities is important in ensuring that the Cemeteries and burials grounds in Thurrock meet the needs of communities. To this end a public consultation was undertaken commencing in June 2022.

There were 88 responses to the consultation and the key messages from respondents were:

- Strong support for the development of a crematorium and for provision of natural burials

- Agreement that the level of maintenance of the burial grounds is good with a clear desire to see more trees planted as well as areas of meadow
- There is understandably concern relating to the enforcement relating to memorial items on graves, with ambiguity amongst respondents if the enforcement should be restricted to new items
- There is a strong view that when unstable head stones are required to be laid down, notification of the reason or action should be published both at the cemetery entrances as well as adjacent to the memorial itself.
- The potential refurbishment of chapels was strongly advocated
- There is a strong consensus that memorials in terms of benches and trees should be offered.

In addition to engagement with residents, we work closely with Undertakers and memorial masons within the Borough. The close communication with those organisations helps to ensure that burials proceed as efficiently and smoothly as possible.

Legislative Framework

Whilst the views and requirements of communities and that those using the burial grounds is very important. The policies and procedures that are in place relating to burials and memorials are required to be compliant with legislation.

There is currently no statutory duty for Local Authorities to provide burial spaces for residents, however, it is a requirement that existing burial grounds are well maintained.

The key legislation that applies to Burials and Burial grounds includes:

- The Local Government Act (1972)
- The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order (1977)
- The Public Health Act (1857)
- Ecclesiastical Laws
- National Planning Policy

Included in the legislation is a requirement that the Council provide Public Health Burials for those deceased who do not have relatives or where relatives have not been able to be traced.

The Planning Policy provides guidance regarding the number of plots that should be made available by Local Authorities. This is linked to population levels and burial patterns, in terms of the proportion of burials and cremations evidenced within that population group.

The legislation also requires that headstones within burials grounds are assessed for safety through routine inspections. Those memorial stones found to be unsafe are required to be laid down to avoid risk of injury or damage.

Policies

To ensure compliance with the legal framework as well as to ensure that Thurrock Cemeteries are maintained to a high standard and accessible for all, Thurrock specific policies relation to Burials and Memorials have been developed. The table below provides a summary of those policies with the full documents included as appendices to this strategy.

Policy	Appendix	Overview
Potential Future Cemetery Extensions	1	Identification for potential sites for the extension of existing cemeteries to ensure sufficient capacity to meet demand.
Thurrock Cemetery Regulations	2	<p>Overview of all aspects of Cemetery and Burial Management including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sites • Opening hours • Plot and Section types • Maintenance regimes • Purchasing of burial plots • Installation of memorials
Memorial safety policies and procedures	3	Guidelines regarding safety testing and permitted memorials within different sections of cemeteries

Appendix 2 Potential Extension options to Current Cemeteries

Natural Burial site

Potential Extension Areas shown bordered in red and highlighted

Chadwell St Mary – This option would be a very simple extension of the current cemetery onto ground that is in good condition and well maintained making it ideal for burials.



West Thurrock – There is a potential option of extending into the memorial ground, however this would eat into an area of much needed recreation space within this area.

Corringham / Fobbing – This would add burial space to this side of the borough. The original site was given to Thurrock Council as a traditional grave space only, which is more expensive than lawn grave therefore puts off some of the local people. Extending onto this field could give the option of lawn graves and a cremated remains section.

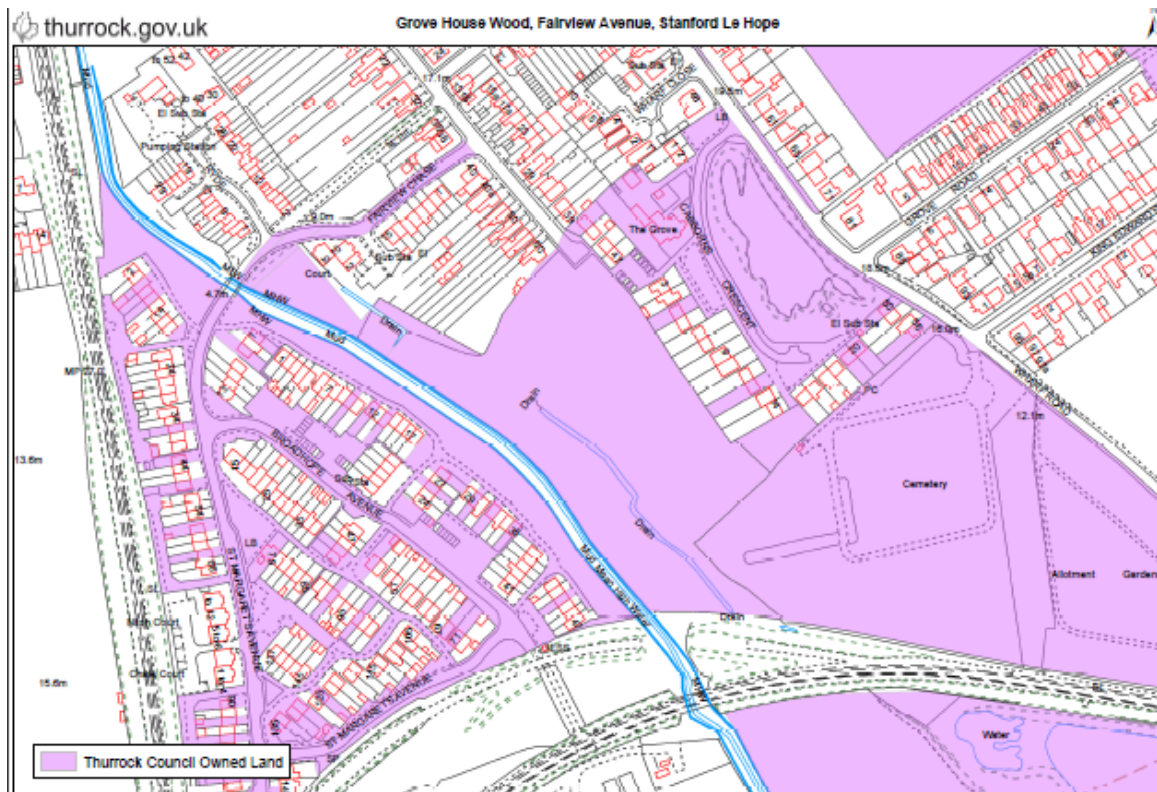
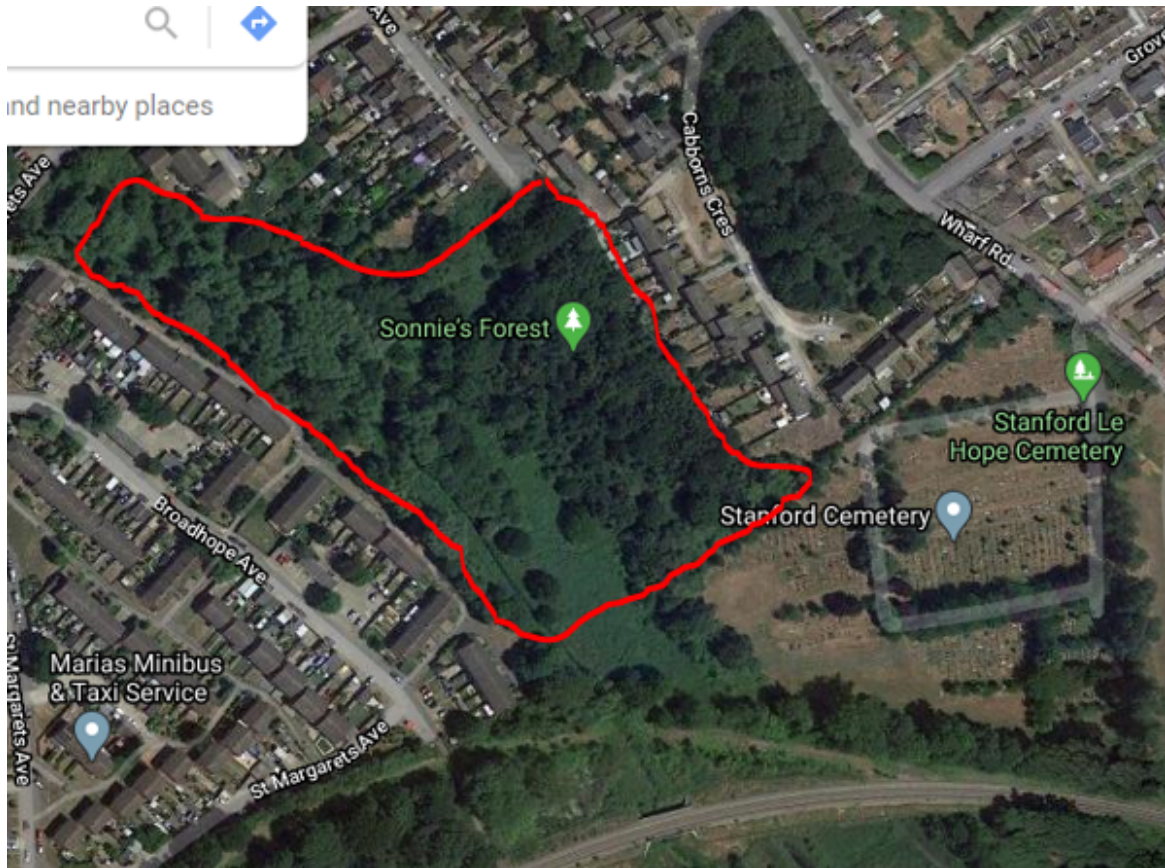


Grays New – Would give a large increase in burial provision in the centre of the borough.



Potential Location for a Natural Burial site

Grove House Wood, adjacent to Stanford Le Hope Cemetery, the ownership has been checked (Map 2) and this is TBC Owned land



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Thurrock Council

Cemetery Regulations

Burials Office or the Registrar of Burials
Thurrock Borough Council
Oliver Close Environment Depot
Oliver Close
West Thurrock
RM20 3ED

Tel: 01375 652304

Email: burial.cremation@thurrock.gov.uk

Website: www.thurrock.gov.uk

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All queries or comments regarding the cemeteries should be sent to:
Burials Office or the Registrar of Burials
Thurrock Borough Council
Oliver Close Environment Depot
Oliver Close
West Thurrock
RM20 3ED

Tel: 01375 652304

Email: burial.cremation@thurrock.gov.uk

For further information on the Services we provide please visit our website www.thurrock.gov.uk

Definition of Terms

Throughout these Regulations:-

“The Council” means Thurrock Borough Council

“Cemetery” means any Cemetery provided and maintained by Thurrock Borough Council

“Purchased Grave” means any grave, where ‘The Deed of Grant for the Exclusive Right of Burial’ (subject to regulations) has been granted by the Council.

“Un-purchased Grave” means any grave, where the Council has not granted ‘The Deed of Grant for the Exclusive Right of Burial’.

“Memorials” means all memorials that are authorised to be permitted within the Cemetery

Foreword

Thurrock Council welcomes all visitors to our cemeteries and asks that visitors respect the peace, dignity and reverence of these facilities as well as other users. We thank you in advance for your consideration.

The Council respects the rights and needs of the individual and these Regulations have been prepared with a balance that will enable us to manage the Cemeteries effectively and maintain the highest possible standards. We aim to continue to improve our systems to develop the Cemeteries and their facilities for the benefit of visitors and maintain an environment where the bereaved can pay their respects and remember their loved ones. We offer advice and guidance on a range of issues relating to graves, funerals and maintenance.

We work closely with national organisations such as the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) to enable us to access a wide range of up-to-date information including the Charter for the Bereaved.

DRAFT

1. Cemeteries Regulations

The rules and regulations for the control and proper management of the Cemetery are made under the provisions of the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 (as amended) and replaces the cemetery and Burials Policy dated April 2006. The council reserves the right to alter add to or amend the Regulations from time to time as necessary for the proper Management of these Cemeteries.

We hope you find the regulations informative, if you cannot find the information you are looking for or would like further explanation please contact the Cemetery Office.

2. Burial Authority

The Burial Authority is Thurrock Borough Council, located at Oliver Close Environment Depot, Oliver Close, West Thurrock RM20 3ED

Burials Office Tel: 01375 652304 or email burial.cremation@thurrock.gov.uk

It must be noted that none of the following can take place without specific permission of the burial authority:

- a) Burials or exhumations
- b) Burials of ashes
- c) Erection or fixing of a memorial, including trees and plants
- d) Inscription on a memorial
- e) Renovation of a memorial
- f) Removal and/or replacement of a memorial
- g) Laying of plinths
- h) Installation of any items including benches
- i) Installation of fencing around a grave

3. Our Cemeteries

- **Chadwell St Mary Cemetery**
Brentwood Road, Chadwell St Mary, Essex RM16 4JH
- **Corringham Cemetery**
Fobbing Road, Corringham, Essex SS17 9BJ
- **Grays New Cemetery**
Chadwell Road, Grays, Essex RM17 6SY
- **Stanford-le-Hope Cemetery**
Wharf Road, Stanford le Hope, Essex SS17 0BA
- **West Thurrock Cemetery**
Sandy Lane, West Thurrock, Essex RM20 4BH

Semi Closed Cemeteries

- **South Ockendon Cemetery,**
South Road, South Ockendon, Essex RM16 5SD
The Cemetery is closed to new graves.
A new memorial garden is planned for the interment of Cremated Remains only.

- **North Stifford Cemetery**
High Road, North Stifford, Essex RM16 5SD

Note:

The section of North Stifford church yard managed by Thurrock Council is full and no new graves will be allowed including within the cremated remains section.

However new graves may be available via the Diocese:-
St Mary's Church
High Road
Grays
Essex, RM16 5UE
Tel: 01375 372733

Closed Churchyards

- St Michaels, Aveley
- St Nicholas, South Ockendon
- St Peters and St Pauls, Grays
- St Mary, North Stifford
- St Mary the Virgin, Little Thurrock
- St Mary, Chadwell St Mary
- St James, West Tilbury

3.1 Opening Hours

The Cemeteries are open to the public every day of the year. Vehicles may only enter the cemeteries at any time to allow their occupants to visit their loved ones

Cemeteries will be open as stated above, however, the Council has the right to close, limit entry or vary the opening times. Please be aware, from time to time, the Cemeteries may be patrolled.

3.2 Management of Cemeteries

Conduct of Visitors

At any Cemetery Visitors are welcome and are requested to treat the Cemetery with respect.

Under the local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977, it is an offence to wilfully:

- Create any disturbance in a cemetery
- Commit any nuisance in a cemetery
- Camping within a cemetery
- Interfere with any burial taking place in a cemetery
- Interfere with any grave or vault, any tombstone or other memorial, or any flowers or plants in any such matter
- Play any game or sport in a cemetery
- Enter or remain in a cemetery when it is closed to the public, unless authorised by the council to do so
- It is prohibited for people to gather in any cemetery other than for the purpose of a funeral service.
- Vehicles (other than maintenance vehicles and grass cutters) shall not be allowed on any grassed area of the cemetery or pedestrian walkway.
- All vehicles entering the cemetery shall abide by the 10mph speed restriction and drive only on approved vehicular routes.

The council reserves the right to refuse access to a cemetery if anyone is intoxicated or showing signs of drug abuse that could lead them to cause a public nuisance or disorder. Alcoholic drinks shall not be consumed in any cemetery.

All visitors should enter and exit the cemeteries using the main entrances and pedestrian gates only

Children under the age of 12 are not authorised to visit our cemeteries unless under the supervision of a responsible adult.

No person is to display any printed paper, notice or sign without the authorisation of the burial authority.

No person may canvass, promote or sell their services to visitors in a cemetery.

No person shall take commercial photographs or film within the Cemetery without the express permission of the Council in writing.

Dogs are only allowed within the cemeteries when kept on the lead.

3.3 Maintenance

The Council reserves the right to prune, cut down or remove any shrub, tree, plant or flowers if, in the opinion of the Cemeteries Officer, they have become unsightly, overgrown or dangerous an any area of the cemetery.

Grass cutting, leaf and litter clearing, upkeep of trees, shrubs, flower beds and hedges will be carried out by the Council or their contractor, at a frequency determined by the Council.

The Council reserves the right to disconnect the water supply when notice has been given that there is a risk of drought, freezing condition or the water supply is abused.

The Council has the right to remove from graves: flowers, wreaths, weeds, rubbish, fencing, border edging, glass objects and other decorations which have either perished and/or are a hazard or encroach on an adjacent grave space and dispose of such items without prior notice to the owner.

Consideration should be given to wildlife in cemeteries and be aware that they can cause damage to tributes on graves such as flowers and plants. The nature of their activity can also cause the ground to be uneven and small holes may appear therefore it is recommended that flat shoes should be worn, and attention should be given for any trip hazards whilst visiting the cemetery.

3.4 Regulations for Cemeteries

Items NOT permitted

- Fences, edging stones, surrounds on a lawn section grave
- Planting of any kind on a lawn section grave
- Glass porcelain, brittle plastics, fragile items
- Noisy items
- Electronic or light emitting items
- Food and drink (not permitted because it can attract vermin)
- Balloons
- Toys or ornaments

(Many for the above items often end up on the surrounding grass and can cause injury or damage to machinery and the operator. Wildlife will often take items away, causing distress to owners.)

Weathered artificial flowers or mementos will be removed at the discretion of the Registrar.

Glass is a major hazard to people, animals, machinery and other memorials and should not be left on or around a grave.

Trees, shrubs or large plants are not permitted and will be removed by the Council without notice.

Thurrock Council will keep all grassed areas tidy, however, the memorials will not be cleaned or maintained by the Council. Memorials are the responsibility of the grave owner.

4. Fees and Payment

Fees and Charges for all Cemetery related matters are set out in the Thurrock Council Website, a copy of which is available upon request or by visiting <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/deaths-burials-and-cremations/fees-and-charges>

5. Arranging a Burial

The majority of burials will be arranged by a Funeral Director of your choice, although you can arrange a funeral yourself.

The council reserves the right to delay or cancel any interment where, in its opinion, ownership of the Exclusive Right of Burial is disputed.

Reservations for burial services must be made to the Cemeteries Office providing a minimum of 4 working days notification.

Reservations are considered “provisional” until the formal document the ‘Notice of Interment’ is received.

No interments will be permitted on Saturday, Sunday, Public Holiday or other council approved holiday.

5.1 Notice of Interment Form

It is important that the ‘Notice of Interment’ is completed clearly and checked by the applicant before signing as the Council will not be responsible for any misunderstandings which may arise as a result of any telephone instructions.

The completed ‘Notice of Interment’ document should be received no later than two full working days before the proposed date of the funeral, this excludes Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays.

Note:

No Interment can take place unless the council has received a “Certificate of Disposal” from the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages or an “Order for Burial” from the coroner. No interment of ashes can take place without a “Certificate of Cremation”. Failure to provide this will result in a delay of the burial until the certificate can be produced. Any additional expense incurred by the Council as a result of incorrect or missing information/paperwork will be charged to the person making the application.

No body may be buried or cremated remains interred unless the grave owner signs the 'Notice of Interment form' except where the deceased is the grave owner. The order of interment will then be signed by the person making the funeral arrangements.

We accept notice of burial as 'confirmed' when we receive all forms and certificates to fulfil both Statutory and the Burial Authority requirements.

5.2 The Interment

To organise a date for an interment, contact the Burials Office.

The owner of the grave or his/her representative or the appointed funeral director should advise the council if the deceased to be buried has died of an infectious disease which may require special arrangements.

- The body of a person who has died from an infectious or contagious disease under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 must be taken directly to the grave in a sealed coffin. Information regarding the circumstances must be given at the time of booking the interment.

A burial can take place with or without a religious service. It is the responsibility of the bereaved family or funeral director to arrange for a recognised Minister or other persons authorised to officiate at the burial.

The time booked for a funeral must be when the procession is to arrive at the cemetery. The time stated for a funeral must be strictly adhered to, to prevent inconvenience to other services. If a funeral arrives late there may be an additional fee to be paid. Services in the Cemetery Chapels are limited to thirty minutes, unless otherwise previously arranged with the Registrar.

We require prior notice for extraordinary funeral processions. For example, the use of a horse drawn hearse, a military funeral, a cortege of vehicles exceeding 10 cars or when a police escort is to be in attendance.

The person arranging the funeral, or the funeral director is responsible for providing sufficient bearers to transfer the coffin from the hearse to the graveside. Cemetery staff are not permitted to assist with bearing.

Interments may only take place between the following hours:

Monday to Thursday	09:00 - 14:00
Friday	09:00 – 13:00

The council may amend these times for recognised religious reasons.

Excavation of all graves shall be carried out by staff employed by or on behalf of the council. No grave shall be excavated beyond such a depth as the council may determine.

The grave will be excavated by the council in accordance with the Cemeteries Act, and all current applicable Health and Safety Legislation. If any health and safety issue is compromised on excavation, the excavation will be discontinued until all issues relating to health and safety are resolved to a satisfactory conclusion. If this results in any delay or postponement of a funeral there will be no compensation for this and on occasion, this may necessitate a new grave being excavated by the council to replace the allocated grave. Where the allocated space was a reserved plot, a new Exclusive Right of Burial Deed will be issued by the council at no cost to the owner but will be for the same lease period as originally issued.

Graves will be of a sufficient size to admit coffins or caskets to the dimensions specified on the "Notice of Interment" form submitted by the funeral director or the person arranging the funeral. If the grave has to be enlarged, the Cemeteries Officer may add an extra charge.

For any oversized grave, the council has the right to charge for two grave spaces.

All coffins/caskets must be made of perishable materials. Coffins/caskets made of or lined with materials such as metal or plastic are not permitted.

Grave digging staff will backfill the grave following the burial, normally once mourners have left the cemetery. If mourners wish to backfill the grave, please notify the cemetery office prior to burial. The cemetery office will arrange for a small quantity of soil to be made available for the symbolic backfill of the grave, in accordance with Health and Safety regulations.

6. Purchasing a Private Grave Space

You can purchase the burial rights to the grave at the time of an interment.

When a grave is purchased, this refers to the purchase of the Exclusive Right of Burial in the grave space and not the purchase of land itself. This means that you do not own the land but have the Exclusive right to say who can be buried in the grave during the lease period.

In accordance with The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 all burial rights are issued for a fixed period, from the date of issue, and you have the option to renew the rights at the end of the period.

Thurrock Council currently issue the lease for the Exclusive Right of Burial for a maximum of 50 years for a grave and 25 years for a cremated remains grave.

The allocation of a new grave space is managed by the Burials office and will normally be in strict rotation. If there is availability and you wish to select a grave, a selection fee may be charged.

Families may purchase one additional adjacent grave at the time of purchasing a grave for burial.

A pre-purchased grave with no interments may be bought back by the Council if it is no longer needed by the owner of the Exclusive Right of Burial. The refund will be 75% of the fee originally paid.

6.1 The Deed of Grant for the Exclusive Right of Burial

Owning The Deed of Grant for the Exclusive Right of Burial does not give ownership of the actual land (grave) but does give the owner the Exclusive Right to:

- Be buried in the grave, if space is available
- Authorise further burials in the grave, if space is available, or the interment of cremated remains in the grave.
- Place a memorial on the grave, subject to a permit application being authorised by the cemeteries office
- Have inscriptions added, maintenance, cleaning or other work to a memorial subject to permit application being authorised by the cemeteries office

The Deed of Grant for the Exclusive Right of Burial, like any other deed, is an important document and should be kept in a safe place. Thurrock Council will not issue duplicate deeds.

Following the death of the owner of the Deed for the Exclusive Right of Burial the grave space must be transferred to a new owner before the grave can be further re-opened or any memorial/headstone erected on the grave or any existing memorial be repaired, altered or removed.

The Deeds of Exclusive Right of Burial cannot be registered in the name of a funeral director, firm of funerals directors or a partner director or employee of such firms: neither will a Deed be registered in the name of a monumental mason.

7. Cemetery Grave Sections

This section covers the various sections of the cemeteries and the rules relating to each section.

7.1 Graves

General rules for all sections of the cemetery:

- Any open grave is a potential danger and should not be entered by anyone other than authorised staff of the council or their contractor.
- Without exception all graves must be dug by employees of the Council
- The removal of a memorial or kerb set including the fee's associated with the removal, to facilitate an interment, shall be the sole responsibility of the funeral director or persons organising the funeral. These items are not to be stored on neighbouring graves.
- Pre-leased grave spaces which may have been purchased for three burials will need to be tested for sufficient depth and then permission may be given for a third interment. The top coffin must be at least three feet below the surface of the ground.
- The Council cannot be held responsible if, due to factors outside their control, the full number of interments in a grave cannot be achieved.
- Grave digging staff will backfill the grave following the burial, normally once mourners have left the cemetery. The cemetery staff will mound the grave and place the floral tributes on the grave. If mourners wish to backfill the grave please notify the cemetery office prior to burial.
- When a grave is reopened it is not always possible to remove surplus soil. Soil boards or a soil box may be placed on neighbouring grave to store the soil until the interment has taken place
- Any containers left on the grave must be of a non-breakable material
- Any items left on a grave are at the owners own risk
- The council cannot be held responsible for any breakages however caused
- The council may remove any articles from any grave that are likely to cause risk, damage or offence or which may interfere with the council's maintenance of the site.
- Memorials cannot be erected on a grave without a memorial permit being in place
- Memorial Benches must not to be installed on a grave.

Note:

(Thurrock Council offers a sponsorship scheme for memorial benches please, if you wish to participate in the scheme, please contact the Cemetery Office.)

The council reserves the right to retain any grave space for its own purposes.

The council and any contractor appointed by the council has the right to place soil on graves when digging an adjacent plot for a burial without any notice. Cemetery staff will remove the soil immediately following a funeral and leave the area tidy.

The authorised officer will determine the method of excavation of a grave taking into account the location, access and health and safety.

7.2 Floral Tributes

On the day of the funeral, flowers and wreaths may be placed upon the grave in which the burial takes place and may remain there for up to fourteen days after which they will generally be removed at the discretion of the cemetery officer.

8. Lawn Grave Sections

A lawn grave is a grave that remains as grass with the exception of the area at the top end of the grave where a headstones may be erected with the council's permission.

A headstone and base will be allowed at the top end of the grave the remaining grave area must be maintained as grass lawn.

- No additional planting is allowed on the grave space
- Artificial grass is not allowed on the grave space.
- Kerbs/fencing or any other memorial/artefact placed on the lawn section of the grave are not permitted and the council has the right to remove any such items without prior notice to the owner.

The following cemeteries have lawn grave sections:

- **Chadwell St Mary Cemetery**
- **Stanford le Hope Cemetery**
- **West Thurrock Cemetery**

Lawn Area – Grave Space for full Interment	<p>The surface of every grave will be grassed and maintained at ground level after settlement in order to achieve the Council's aim to keep the Cemetery in an attractive, tidy and safe condition.</p> <p>The Council provides an area for the erection of an approved memorial.</p> <p>Kerb sets/traditional memorials are not permitted</p> <p>Items NOT permitted on lawn area graves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fences, wooden borders, railings or any type of surround• Edging Stones, loose chippings, pebbles or wood chippings• Breakable items such as glass vases, jars or bottles• Artificial Grass• Ornaments, large garden plant pots• Noisy Items• Electronic or Light emitting items• Food and drink (can attract vermin)• Balloons
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toys • Ornaments • Planting of trees, flowers or any kind of shrub is not permitted <p>The Council has the right to remove any such items without prior notice to the owner.</p>
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8.1 Non Lawn Sections

Non lawn grave (otherwise known as traditional/full kerb graves) are normally in the older sections of the cemeteries and are permitted to have both a headstone and a kerb memorial placed on the grave.

The planting of annual and seasonal bulbs or miniature shrubs to the height of 12” (30cm) are permitted within the kerb area of the grave space but must not be allowed to encroach on any neighbouring grave space.

The following cemetery have non lawn grave sections:

- **Chadwell St Mary Cemetery** – Mixed sections
- **Corringham Cemetery** – Non Lawn Cemetery (covenants on the land state traditional cemetery only, graves are purchased at traditional grave fee)

<p>Traditional/Full kerb graves – Headstone and Kerb memorial</p>	<p>A kerb set memorial differs from lawn memorials because it can cover the full grave. The central area of the kerb set memorial can also be filled with either plants, chippings or a matching natural stone cover slab.</p> <p>Planting of annual and seasonal bulbs or miniature shrubs to the height of 12” are permitted within the central area of the kerb, but must not encroach on any neighbouring grave space.</p> <p>Items NOT permitted on Traditional/Full kerb graves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fences, wooden borders, metal railings • Edging Stones, loose chippings, pebbles other than those within the central area of the kerb • Breakable items such as glass vases, jars or bottles • Artificial Grass • Ornaments, large garden plant pots • Noisy Items • Electronic or Light emitting items • Food and drink (can attract vermin) • Balloons • Toys • Ornaments • Planting of trees, flowers or any kind of shrub is not permitted other than those planted within the central area of the kerb
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8.2 Muslim Burials

The provision of Muslim Burials is currently offered in the dedicated Muslim Section at West Thurrock Cemetery full details for this can be found via the Thurrock Council Website.

8.3 Cremated Remains Graves

Cremated remains grave spaces are smaller than that of full graves, but can hold up to four individual caskets of ashes. The Exclusive Right of Burial for a cremated remains grave is granted for a period of 40 years.

Memorials within the cremated remains sections are smaller and within a designated concrete/ wooden plinth section, memorials must not exceed the plinth section
The following cemeteries have cremated remains sections:

- **Grays New Cemetery**
- **Stanford le Hope Cemetery**
- **West Thurrock Cemetery**

Cremated Remains Graves	<p>A small upright memorial may be permitted in the designated concrete/wooden plinth area.</p> <p>The remaining area will be grassed and maintained to achieve the Council’s aim to keep the Cemetery in an attractive, tidy and safe condition.</p> <p>No items are allowed outside of the designated concrete/wooden plinth area.</p> <p>Items NOT permitted outside the within or outside the plinth area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fences, wooden borders, railings or any type of surround • Edging Stones, loose chippings, pebbles or wood chippings • Breakable items such as glass vases, jars or bottles • Artificial Grass • Ornaments, large garden plant pots • Noisy Items • Electronic or Light emitting items • Food and drink (can attract vermin) • Balloons • Toys • Ornaments • Planting of trees, flowers or any kind of shrub is not permitted
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8.4 Memorial Gardens

Thurrock Council has designated memorial gardens where ashes can be loosely interred. The burial of cremated remains takes place in the grassed area behind the kerb. The plot allows up to two interments of loosely interred cremated remains. Memorial plaques are provided for a fixed term lease of 7 years which can be renewed.

The plaque allows for an inscription of 56 characters, plaques must be purchased through the cemeteries office. We do not allow flower vases, pot plants or other memorialisation on the lawn area.

The following cemeteries have memorial garden sections:

- Chadwell St Mary Cemetery
- Corringham Cemetery
- South Ockendon Cemetery (A new memorial garden is planned for the interment of Cremated Remains only)
- West Thurrock (A new memorial garden is planned for the scattering of Cremated Remains within the Nepalese section)

Note:

The scattering of cremated remains over graves, or in any area of the cemetery is not permitted. The unauthorised disposal of cremated remains within the Council’s cemeteries is deemed a criminal offence and those found to be carrying out this act will be prosecuted.

Memorial Gardens	<p>A memorial plaque will be fixed to the kerb within the grassed area.</p> <p>Items NOT permitted on lawn area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fences, wooden borders, railings • Edging Stones, loose chippings, pebbles or wood chippings • Breakable items such as glass vases, jars or bottles • Artificial Grass • Ornaments, large garden plant pots • Noisy Items • Electronic or Light emitting items • Food and drink (can attract vermin) • Balloons • Toys • Ornaments • Planting of trees, flowers or any kind of shrub is not permitted
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8.5 Vase blocks

Vase blocks are being planned for the interment of Cremated Remains only at South Ockendon Cemetery. These will be of a sloping granite design allowing for a larger inscription than a kerb and will be purchased for a lease period of 10 years.

8.6 Scattering of Ashes within a Scatter Garden at South Ockendon Cemetery (A new memorial garden is planned for the interment of Cremated Remains only)

The scatter garden provides relatives with an alternative to other cremation services currently offered in the cemetery.

A record is kept of where the ashes have been laid to rest but the precise location is not recorded. If you wish to know the exact spot where the ashes have been strewn, you can attend to witness the scattering.

If you wish to purchase a memorial plaque after the ashes have been scattered we cannot guarantee that the plaque will be located near to where the ashes have been strewn.

8.7 Green burial of Ashes within Designated natural burials areas

Burial of Ashes in a Bio-degradable urn in our unmarked woodland area

This is a green choice and is available for those who want to bury Ashes in an urn in an unmarked area. The urn dissolves after a short period of time and the ashes form part of the soil, it is important to note that the Ashes cannot therefore be moved from this area at a later date.

8.8 Burial of Ashes loosely in an unmarked woodland area

This is an option where one of our team bury the Ashes loosely in an unmarked woodland area for you and it is not witnessed by any family or friends. It is important to note that the Ashes cannot therefore be moved from this area at a later date.

8.9 Public Graves

A public grave is an unpurchased grave where no Exclusive Right of Burial exists. There is usually no family connection with those buried in this type of grave.

The Council reserves the right to reuse any Common Grave for future interment

There are no memorial rights on unpurchased graves so no headstone or other memorial can be erected unless an Exclusive Right of burial is purchased.

Thurrock Council do allow a tablet to mark the grave:-

There are no memorial rights on unpurchased graves, any permission would be at the discretion of the Registrar and in accordance with Regulations.

- Where permission is granted, it is subject to the right of the representation of other persons interred in the grave to be commemorated on the memorial.
- Where permission is granted it will allow a memorial tablet to be placed on the unmarked grave not exceeding:
50cm (20") x 45cms (18") x 15cms(6")
- As there is no right to a public grave, any permission given to mark the grave with a memorial does not in itself give any rights to the grave and the grave remains the property of the Council

9. Memorials

Memorials may only be placed on grave in which The Deed of Grant for the Exclusive Right of Burial has been purchased.

All memorial work carried out in any Thurrock Borough Cemetery must conform to the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons (BRAMM) or National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM).

Qualified Memorial Masons erecting a memorial within any of Thurrock Councils cemeteries must have public liability insurance. All lawn/cremation memorials and/or kerb set must conform to the standards sizes as set out in the Councils memorial regulations. The stonemason will be required to supply to the Cemeteries Service a copy of their NAMM/BRAMM certificate along with their current insurance certificates before any permits will be issued.

Every grave that has a current Deed of Grant for the Exclusive Right of Burial with a memorial placed on the grave, must be kept in good repair and condition by the owner and remains at the owner's sole risk. The Council is not responsible for any damage or injury which may occur to the memorial or caused by the memorial to a person visiting or working in the cemetery grounds.

The Council may remove, without notice, any monument, memorial, stone, tree, shrub, plant or item erected or placed in the cemetery in contravention of these regulations or reaches a condition that can be a health and safety risk. This is covered in our Memorial Safety Policy and procedures

Only one memorial is allowed per grave space or cremated remains plot.

The Council may refuse permission for any memorial of any type or inscription of which it does not approve.

All Stonemasons will need to register to Thurrock Councils Memorial Registration Scheme before being allowed to work within Thurrock Cemeteries.

9.1 Erecting a Memorial

An application for permission to carry out any type of work including Erecting a Memorial shall be made to the Council on the Council's "Memorial Application Form" and shall contain full and accurate details of the proposed work. The application must be signed by the registered owner of the grave on which the memorial is to be placed.

The Memorial application must be approved by the Registrar prior to any memorials being erected, repaired, altered or cleaned in any of Thurrock Council's cemeteries.

A memorial application form can be obtained from Thurrock Council website www.thurrock.gov.uk or via the cemetery office. All fees must be paid prior to a memorial being placed on a grave. The application must be signed by the registered owner i.e. the owner of "The Deed of Grant" for the grave on which the memorial is to be placed.

The plot number and cemetery section must be engraved on the reverse of memorials whether in a lawn or traditional section and on the front of a memorial within the cremated remains section.

A memorial must be cut from the best quarried natural stone and must be durable and sound.

No memorials or materials may be taken into a cemetery before 09.00 am on any working day or at any time on Saturdays, Sundays, Good Friday, Christmas Day, or Bank Holidays unless with the prior consent of the Registrar.

The structure must be ground anchored by an approved method and most suitable for the soil condition. Fixings generally shall be in accordance with the current Code of Working Practice of Memorial Mason i.e. NAMM/BRAMM.

The Memorial Masons shall inform the Council of the date when an approved memorial work is complete by completing and returning the appropriate section on the Memorial Application Form.

All surplus materials, rubble and rubbish must be removed from the cemetery grounds immediately following any work undertaken and where a removal of a memorial has been required prior to an interment the area should be cleared in time for the funeral cortege arrival.

9.2 Dimension and Construction of Memorials

9.2.1 Lawn Grave Memorial/Headstone

Only one Memorial/headstone will be allowed on any one grave space

A memorial shall consist of a headstone with base only

The following dimensions apply

- Maximum overall height of 90cm (3ft) which includes the depth of the base
- Maximum width 76cm (2ft 6inches)
- Maximum thickness of 12.5cm (5inches)
- Minimum thickness 7.5cm (3inches)
- The plot number and cemetery section must be engraved on the reverse of memorials whether in a lawn or traditional section.

A space of 12" (30cm) deep is allowed in front of the memorial as a personalisation area.

9.2.2 Traditional/Kerb Memorial/Headstone

The Memorial/Headstone must be contained within the grave space

The following dimensions apply

- Maximum overall height 120cm (4ft)
- Maximum width 76cm (2ft 6inches)
- Maximum base 196cm x 76cm (6ft 6inches length x 2ft 6 inches wide)
- The plot number and cemetery section must be engraved on the reverse of memorials whether in a lawn or traditional section.




9.2.3 Cremated Remains Memorial/Headstone

The Cremated Remains Memorial/Headstone are smaller than a lawn grave memorial, all cremated remains memorials/headstones must stay within plinth area and must not encroach lawn space.

The following dimensions apply

- Maximum overall height 76cm (2ft 6inches)
- Maximum width 61cm (2ft)
- Base: A maximum depth (front to back) of 30cm (12inches)
- The plot number and cemetery section on the front of a memorial

9.3 Memorial Measurements and Type

								
Cemetery	Address	New Lawn Graves	New Traditional/kerb Graves	Cremated Remains Plots	Re-open Existing Graves Only	Chapel available	Lapsed Graves	Memorial Gardens
Chadwell St Mary	Brentwood Rd Chadwell St Mary RM16 4JH	√	√			√	√	√
Corringham	Fobbing Road Corringham SS17 9BJ		√					√
Grays New	Chadwell Road Grays RM17 6SY			√	√		√	
North Stifford	High Road North Stifford RM16 5UE				√			
South Ockendon	South Road South Ockendon RM16 5SD				√			
Stanford le Hope	Wharf Road Stanford le Hope SS17 OBA	√		√				

West Thurrock	Sandy Lane West Thurrock RM20 4BH	√		√		√	√	
Information and Maximum Memorial Size		Headstone: Height 90cm (3ft) Width 76cm (2ft 6 ins) Base 30cm (12 ins) Personalisation area 30cm (12 ins) in front of Headstone	Headstone: 120cm (4ft) high x 76cm (2ft 6ins) wide Base: 196cm (6ft 6ins) length x 76cm	Headstone: 76cm (2ft 6 ins) x 61)cm (2ft) x Base 30cm (1ft)				

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10. Memorial Safety

In line with the Memorial Safety Policy

The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 required all burial authorities to ensure that memorials are safe so the potential for injury to those visiting and working in the cemetery is reduced.

Memorials remain in the ownership of the grave owner i.e. the grantee of the Exclusive Right of Burial who is responsible for all future maintenance.

The council will undertake a programme of inspections rolling over a 5 year period and will categorise headstones as follows:

- A. Category 1 – immediate action is required to make the memorial safe or to stop the public accessing the memorial
- B. Category 2 – the memorial is not an immediate danger but is not fully stable and will, therefore, need to be monitored every 12 months to assess any further deterioration.
- C. Category 3 – The memorial is stable and will need to be re-inspected in 5 years.

If a memorial is identified as a Category 1 this may result in the memorial being laid down or other means of making safe

Notification will be sent to the owner of any headstone/memorial that is identified during the inspection or at any other time that it has been graded as at Category 1 or Category 2 risk and requires remedial works.

If the name and/or address of the owner is not known where records have not been updated, a notice shall be considered properly served if placed upon the grave space, monument or memorial.

It is illegal for anyone to remove, alter or disturb a monument, headstone, tombstone, flat stone, gravestone or memorial inscription which has been erected, placed or made in any cemetery without the council's consent.

If the owner or another person removes any protective banding or barriers without approved repairs being carried out they will be responsible for any injury or death caused by unsafe memorials.

11. Memorial Trees

Trees are a living part of our landscape and enhance the cemeteries.

A New Memorial Tree section has been created at Stanford le Hope Cemetery, and we will look at other areas where appropriate.

11.1 Adopt a Tree

The Council will order the tree on your behalf, trees that fail within the first year of planting will be replaced at the Council's expense and any further replacements will be at the expense of the customer.

11.2 Adopt a planted New Tree

The Council will be planting a number of new trees within section A of Stanford le Hope Cemetery that can be adopted for the lease period.

A tree can be dedicated to the deceased for a lease period of 10 years

(Please contact the Cemeteries Office for an application form).

The Cemeteries where we currently allow a memorial tree is

- Stanford le Hope

All applications for a memorial tree must be agreed by the Council and private installations are not permitted within any of the Council's Cemeteries.

Sponsorship will entitle you to have a memorial plaque placed on a stake at the base of the tree, which can be inscribed with an epitaph of approximately 100 characters.

Thurrock Council requires that you do not surround or attach objects to the memorial tree as this may hinder the growth of the tree.

Note: Under no circumstances are trees allowed to be planted within Council cemeteries that are not purchased through Thurrock Council.

12. Memorial Bench

Thurrock Council offers the opportunity of sponsoring one of our memorial benches for a lease period of 10 years. A quality Memorial Bench dedicated to the deceased and to be placed at a choice of locations within the grounds of a cemetery. The exact location of the bench will generally be agreed in consultation with you but will depend on the availability of an appropriate vacant site.

(Please contact the Cemeteries Office for an application form).

The Cemeteries where we currently allow memorial benches are.

- Chadwell St Mary
- Corringham
- Stanford le Hope
- West Thurrock

Sponsorship will entitle you to have a memorial plaque placed on the top rail of the bench, which can be inscribed with an epitaph of approximately 100 characters.

Thurrock Council requires that you do not surround or attach objects to your memorial as this may hinder grounds maintenance or raise health and safety issues.

All applications for a memorial bench must be agreed by the Council and private installations are not permitted within any of the Council's Cemeteries.

The bench will remain the property of Thurrock Council who will take responsibility for reasonable maintenance for a period of 10 years but cannot unfortunately undertake to replace benches which are vandalised beyond economic repair or stolen.

The sponsor at the expiration of the term of the arrangement will be offered the opportunity to re-sponsor the memorial bench, subject to it being in good condition, for a further term, at an additional cost to be determined at that time.

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Thurrock Council

Memorial Safety Policy

Environment Department
Oliver Close Environment Depot
Oliver Close
West Thurrock
Essex RM20 3ED

Tel: 01375 652304

Email: burialcremations.admin@thurrock.gov.uk

www.thurrock.gov.uk

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Memorial Safety Policy

Over the last 30 years, eight people in the UK have been killed when a memorial has fallen on them and many more significant but less serious injuries.

As a result, guidelines were developed for local authorities to ensure that suitable inspection procedures were put in place to inspect memorials and take appropriate action for the safety of the public. Where applied in a sensitive manner there have been improvements in safety with little concern from members of the public. However, due to more of an emphasis on health and safety and with little consideration to a proportional and sensitive approach to the issue, some authorities were subject to considerable criticism, public concern was also raised about the methodology employed by some authorities. This resulted in a review of the memorial safety guidance carried out by the Ministry of Justice. The review was led by the Health and Safety Executive with a sub-group comprising burial ground operators, memorial masons and cemetery managers as well as the Health and Safety Executive. The insurance industry and the Local Government Association were also consulted.

In January 2009 the Ministry of Justice issued the new memorial safety guidance with emphasis placed on a proportional approach to any actions, based on the level of risk posed. The guidance was supported by most organisations on the subgroup and represents good practice on the standard expected in the risk management of memorials in all types of burial grounds, public or private. It is likely that such good practice will be used by the Health and Safety Executive throughout the UK. This policy is based on the Ministry of Justice guidance* (see link below) but provides details on how this Council will follow the guidance.

The Council has systems in place to control the risks from memorials to their employees, contractors, friends' groups, volunteers and members of the public. We owe a general duty of care to all those who use our cemeteries and closed churchyards

This policy now sets out a risk-based approach to help authorities and other operators develop a proportionate approach to managing the risk associated with memorials, based on good practice, this is now in place within the Council cemeteries and closed churchyards

*https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/326725/safety-burial-grounds.pdf

Risk assessment

The Council will:

- Carry out a documented risk assessment to develop a profile of risks on each burial site - Each cemetery will be assessed using a risk assessment process that will ensure consistent results across all the Council's cemeteries and closed churchyards whilst incorporating memorial safety as part of the Council's overall approach to health and safety on each of their sites. Each section within the burial sites will be assessed to identify areas of high, medium and low risk, which will then be recorded on a site plan for each burial site.
- Identify hazards in relation to memorial safety - Any memorials within the Council's burial grounds that are potentially hazardous to the public will be identified by following the 2009 Memorial Safety Guidance.
- Decide who might be harmed and how - Will carry out all assessments in accord with the HSE's 5 steps to risk management and will properly assess the risks to all users of the Council's burial grounds
- Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions - All risks posed by memorials will be properly evaluated through both the risk assessment and memorial inspection processes. A range of suitable precautions shall be considered and utilised in a way that is proportional to the level of risk posed.

Risks will be evaluated using the following criteria, although the list is not exhaustive:

- Areas with memorials near main paths and drives
 - Well visited areas or memorials
 - Areas that attract anti-social behaviour
 - Areas with memorials on sloping or uneven ground
 - Areas with many large multi-part memorials
 - Areas with monolith memorials
 - Areas with badly weathered memorials
 - Areas with more recent memorials fitted to National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) standards
 - Condition of ground around memorials
- Record findings and implement them - Every memorial within the Council's burial grounds will be inspected and full records maintained. All memorials will continue to receive an inspection of some sort, ranging from only a visual inspection, through to a full visual and hand inspection. Where a memorial fails the inspection, the appropriate actions will be recorded, and a priority allocated.

Review memorial risk assessments and update if necessary – Burial ground risk assessments will initially be reviewed once every 12 months. Memorials will be inspected at least once every five years

Communication

The Council will:

- Ensure notices are displayed within the Cemetery grounds. This is to warn the public of the potential dangers of memorials, advise the public who to contact with any queries or concerns, advise of inspections taking place and, where necessary, fulfil any other obligations under existing health and safety legislation
- Issue press releases - to advise the public and the press of all inspection work and why it is necessary to undertake it in accordance with the 2009 Guidance.
- When memorials are found to be unstable, letters to grave owners will be issued, wherever this is possible – where they can be contacted owners will be informed that the Council are currently carrying out an inspection of memorials, in accordance with the 2009 Memorial Guidance and to meet statutory duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. They will be informed that their memorial has been found to be unstable and will be given the opportunity to have it repaired to NAMM standards current at the time of repair. If a grave owner is unhappy about the authority's decision to identify their memorial as being unstable a meeting can be arranged at the burial ground where they can witness a further inspection of the memorial.

If a memorial poses a serious risk, then, in the interests of public safety, the Council retains the ability to lay the memorial down immediately or take other action to make the memorial safe. A notice will be placed on the memorial informing the grave owner of the action taken and providing a contact number for the Council. Attempts will be made to contact the grave owner as soon as possible if current contact details are available.

Inspection

The Council will:

- Carry out a visual check on all memorials – this will be carried out irrespective of the level of risk on the section, or type of memorial.

Examples – Different types and style of memorials



Lawn Memorial



Ledger - Flat



Ledger - Shaped



Book and Rests



Kerb Set



Headstone and Kerbset



Cross



Table Memorial



Pinnacles / Obelisk



Monolith



Footstone



Foot Plaque

- Carry out a hand test – the test will be used in accordance with the assessed level of risk.
- If required, a mechanical device may be used to measure the force at which a memorial has failed the inspection – occasionally it may also

be used, when absolutely necessary, to check the accuracy of a hand inspection. The mechanical device will also be used as a training tool to ensure the consistency of staff inspections

- Inspections will be proportionate to the level of risk identified in the section on which they stand - Each section of the cemeteries will be identified as high, medium or low risk. The areas will be inspected as follows

Low risk

A visual test will be sufficient, unless an individual memorial is identified to have a defect, obvious during the visual test. In such cases a hand test will then be undertaken in addition to the visual test.

Medium Risk

Where an initial inspection has not been carried out, this first inspection will include a visual and a hand test. In the majority of subsequent inspections, a visual test and hand test will also be undertaken, unless an individual memorial is considered to pose a lesser risk following the visual test. In such cases a visual test may be deemed sufficient.

Some memorials in medium risk areas may need specialist inspection and advice so appropriate procedures are in place to call on such specialist assessors.

High Risk

Where an initial inspection has not been carried out, this first inspection will include a visual and a hand test. In the majority of subsequent inspections, a visual test and hand test will also be undertaken, unless an individual memorial is considered to pose a lesser risk following the visual test. In such cases a visual test may be deemed sufficient.

Some memorials in high-risk areas may need specialist inspection and advice so appropriate procedures are in place to call on such specialist assessors. In a section considered to be a high risk, particular attention should be paid to memorials that could pose a significant risk to members of the public. An early decision should be made on any action needed to make the memorial safe, this should be proportional to the level of risk.

Prioritisation

A simple priority will be given to memorials when inspected, whether in a high, medium or low risk area. The priority indicates the level of risk the inspector considers is posed to the public based on the area in which the memorial lies and the inherent risk of the memorial itself. The priorities to be applied by the inspector are as follows:

- Priority 1 (Red) – Is considered to be an immediate risk of toppling and causing serious injury. Requires immediate attention to protect the public, employees and other visitors to the cemetery. Action: Immediate action will be required to significantly reduce the risk by using the appropriate means of making the memorial safe.
- Priority 2 (Amber) – Is considered to have potential of becoming a danger to the public, employees and other visitors to the cemetery, but

is not in immediate risk of toppling and causing serious injury. Action: Re-inspect in 12 months

- Priority 3 (Green) – Is considered to be of little risk to the public, employees and other visitors to the cemetery. Action: Re-inspect in 5 years

Frequency of Inspection

Inspections of all levels of risk will be carried out on a minimum frequency of once every 5 years. As indicated above, any memorials showing early signs of instability will, in the interests of public safety, be monitored every 12 months, where this is considered necessary. Any memorials considered to be in such a condition where there is an immediate risk of them toppling and causing serious injury to members of the public will be immediately assessed and a decision taken on how the memorial will be made safe or repaired. Decisions on whether to invoke the 12 monthly monitoring or the immediate action to make safe or repair, will be taken in relation to the perceived level of risk of the individual memorial and the level of risk allocated to the section in which it lies, as identified from the site risk assessment.

Memorials over 2.5.m

Due to the diverse nature and complexity of these memorials, a visual check of all joints and any other areas of weakness will be carried out in accordance with training provided. The visual inspection will include a decision on whether further professional advice is needed.

- Priority 1 - will require more professional advice, i.e. a structural engineer. The area will be cordoned off and appropriate safety notices put in place until specialist advice can be obtained.
- Priority 2 – will require more professional advice within the next 12 months but does not pose an immediate danger to the public
- Priority 3 – will not require specialist advice as the structure appears sound.

During the visual assessment the trained inspector will assess whether the memorial is safe enough to warrant him/her doing a hand test.

Temporary Measures

Irrespective of whether a memorial lies within a high, medium or low risk area, if a memorial is considered to pose a significant risk and is likely to topple and cause serious injury to a member of the public, then a warning notice giving details of a contact number for the Council will be placed and an assessment of the need for repair or make safe will be carried out on an individual basis, in accordance with the training provided and in consideration of the following options. All action will be based on the likelihood of injury and will be proportionate to the level of risk.

Temporary measures will generally include consideration of the following:

- Warning Signs will be placed on or near the memorial found to be unstable.

- Mechanical support to the memorial (i.e. either metal or wooden supports). These will be placed discreetly to help support the memorial whilst the Council attempts to contact the grave owner.
- Re-fixing the memorial using an M3 polymer fixing compound
- Setting the memorial into the ground
- Laying down only if absolutely necessary.

Where a memorial has been temporarily supported, supports will remain in place for (a maximum of 12 months after this the memorial will be set in the ground, laid down or refixed using an M3 polymer jointing compound.

Recording

Records will be kept as follows:

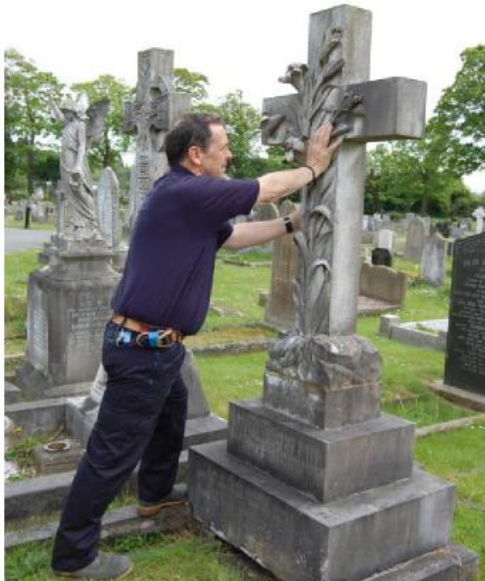
- Record of cemetery risk assessments and plans identifying the profile of risks on each site.
- Record of all visual and hand tests undertaken with detailed information on individual memorials tested.
- Record of any significant risks to be dealt with, taking account of the numbers of people who may be exposed, and the likelihood of the risk.
- Record of any reasonable precautions taken to ensure the remaining risk is acceptable.

Memorial Safety Procedures

1. Memorial safety inspections will generally be carried out by two operatives working as a team although a single operative may carry out inspections in accordance with a suitable risk assessment that takes account of lone working. Only officers trained to the industry best practice standards shall be eligible to carry out safety inspections on headstones/memorials.
2. Personal Protective Equipment (P.P.E.) must be worn at all times, this will include safety footwear and hard hats as required for larger memorials.
3. On entering the burial ground with the intention of carrying out an inspection of Headstones/Memorials it is essential that all operations be carried out in a manner that shall take cognisance of hazards and potential dangers within the whole site. A documented site risk assessment, together with a current 'Memorial Inspectors' risk assessment should be in place prior to inspection. Operatives should also be particularly aware of dangers in the immediate location where they are working or where members of the public may have access.
4. If a documented site risk assessment has not been completed, then one will be carried out prior to starting the memorial inspection as the risk assessment provides focus for the inspection. This should be carried out in accordance with the training given in compliance

with industry best practice standards and using the Council's assessment form attached to these procedures as Appendix 1.

5. All memorial inspections should be recorded on the Council's software database 2. Each memorial should firstly receive a visual check to identify if there is obvious danger and shall also indicate the safest approach to carry out a hand test if required.
6. Operatives must always be aware of Headstones/Memorials that are made-up of more than one section or blocks. Operatives must always examine the top section first and work down the memorial, this will avoid such elements of the memorial falling and potentially causing injury during any inspection. Suitable hard hats will be worn when inspecting memorials that extend above head height.
7. Any ornament on the top of the stone should be inspected with extreme care as these objects may create a great risk to the safety of the memorial inspector and others.
8. The hand test should be carried out standing in front, but to one side, of the headstone where possible and a gentle pressure/force should be gradually increased until a force approximating 25kg (250 Newtons) is applied. This force should be exerted in one direction, away from the body and should be repeated from the back of the memorial. Other hand tests from the sides of the memorial may also be required. On certain designs the force should be applied at the apex of the memorial or a high up the memorial as can comfortably be reached.



Correct testing stance – Larger memorial



Correct testing stance - Smaller memorial

9. A memorial should only fail the safety inspection if it will move and continue to move until it falls to the ground under an initial firm but reasonable force approximating 25 kg. Memorials that do not freely move following the 'initial' force should not be considered unsafe unless in an area of high risk.
10. Should a memorial fail the hand test a mechanical measuring device may be used, simply to confirm the force at which the memorial had failed. When using this device, it should be noted that the memorial will be unstable and great care should be taken. The measuring device should be used in a similar way to the hand test with the force being applied at the apex of the memorial, or just below shoulder height on taller memorials up to 1.5m. The mechanical measuring device is not suitable for memorials taller than 1.5m
11. The routine use of staking to make a memorial permanently safe is not recommended. If a memorial is found to be unsafe following the above inspection process consideration should be given to the following options:
 - A warning notice will be placed on every occasion a memorial is considered unsafe
 - Setting in the ground
 - Refixing using M3 polymer jointing compound
 - Staking
 - Laying flat

The decision on the type of make safe procedure to use will be based on an assessment of the risk based on the site risk assessment and the Council's Memorial Safety Policy.

Should a temporary measure be used to make the memorial safe this should be inspected on a regular basis whilst it remains in place.
12. All headstones should be inspected, categorised and recorded on the Council's inspection sheets in accordance with the training given in compliance with industry best practice, to determine the risk factor for each headstone/memorial.
13. All recorded inspections are to be passed to the Team Manager and thereafter entered into the Council's dedicated computer systems for Burials

Thurrock Council**Memorial Safety Risk Assessment Form**

Cemetery Section/Area				
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	Memorials		Access/Traffic		Environment
1	Monolith memorials	1	Inaccessible/ No visitation,	1	New lawn section, well maintained
2	NAMM Fix Memorials or	2	Away from roads/paths, seldom visited	2	New lawn section, average maintenance
3	Lawn memorials - back to	3	Accessible, reasonable numbers	3	Older lawn section
4	Lawn memorials – not back to back	4	Signs of misuse in area	4	Older section no kerbs
5	Kerbed Memorials under	5	Accessible, well visited	5	Older section with kerbs
6	Memorials from 1m to 1.5m	6	Adjacent to well used roads	6	Old section, kerbs, vaults – reasonable maintenance
7	Old jointed memorials over 1.5m	7	Very well visited ongoing burials in section	7	Old section, kerbs, vaults poor

Activity rating number: (memorial+access/traffic+environment)

Additional comments:

Action required to be taken:

Date of assessment:

Validated by (Print)

Assessors signature:

Signed

Print name

Date

Scoresheet - please see overleaf

Council Memorial Safety Assessment

SCORE SHEET

- Note:** A memorial should only be considered as unsafe if it moves and will continue to move until it falls to the floor under an initial firm but reasonable force (suggest a force approximating 25kg)
- 3 - 10 **Low risk** - Visual inspection only. Place notice only if a memorial is found to be unstable unless the memorial is considered an immediate danger and could cause a serious injury, should this be the case then alternative making safe methods should be considered and implemented. If individual memorials are considered a higher risk, then these should be inspected using a visual followed by a hand test.
- 11 - 16 **Medium Risk** - The area has an initial visual and hand test on every memorial using experienced/trained staff. Some memorials may need specialist inspections.
- A full inspection on a minimum frequency of 5 years is recommended. Any memorials showing early signs of instability should be monitored every 12 months. Memorials that are found to be unstable should have notices placed and should be set in the ground, cordoned off, temporarily supported, repaired, or laid down immediately. All action must be based on the likelihood of injury and should be proportionate to a medium risk area.
- 17+ **High Risk** - Area will need a visual and hand test on every memorial using experienced/trained staff. Some memorials may need specialist inspections.
- Memorials will require full inspection on a minimum frequency of 5 years. Any memorials showing early signs of instability should be monitored every 12 months. Memorials that are found to be unstable should have notices placed and should be cordoned off and should be set in the ground, cordoned off, temporarily supported, repaired, or laid down immediately. All action must be based on the likelihood of injury and should be proportionate to a high-risk area.

11 January 2023	ITEM: 12 Decision: 110635
Cabinet	
Contract Modification to Housing Repairs and Planned Maintenance Contract	
Wards and communities affected: All Wards	Key Decision: Key
Report of: Councillor Luke Spillman, Cabinet Member for Housing	
Accountable Assistant Director: N/A	
Accountable Director: Ewelina Sorbjan, Interim Director of Housing	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report sets out the recommendation for the Contract Modification to the Term Partnering Agreement for Responsive Repairs, Voids and Related Works awarded to Mears Ltd for the remaining term of the Contract to 28 February 2025. The Contract Modification request is to increase the value of the contract spend for the remaining contract term.

The requested increase to the value of contract spend is due to the following factors:

- Increased volumes of work
- Incorporation of new legislative changes (Building and Fire Safe safety)
- Inflationary Price Changes (beyond predicted levels)
- Additional works to Housing assets such as fire safety, voids and temporary accommodation and energy efficiency works.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Cabinet approve 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. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Council entered a Term Partnering Contract with Mears Ltd in 2014 for the delivery of the responsive repairs and planned maintenance works to its housing stock. The contract was awarded for an initial five-year term with an extension period of a further five-year period.

- 2.2 The Contract was extended after the initial five-year period in March 2020, and this will expire in 28 February 2025. This extension in Mar 2020 delivered a commercial benefit to the Council over the next 5-year contract term of approx. £523,677 based on discounted rates on certain scope items, service improvements, and continued social value commitments. No further extensions beyond this period are possible. The process for the delivery of the repairs and planned maintenance works from February 2025 will commence in 2023 and Cabinet will receive a report detailing and seeking approval for this process.
- 2.3 The contract is based on price per property (PPP) which equate to Mears attending on average 3 repairs per council housing property per year. The contract is an inclusion and exclusion contract; all inclusions are set within the price per property model. Exclusions are repairs that are required but are not within the contracted PPP model. These exclusion works are mainly complete renewals of various items within the property, such as new baths, toilets or asbestos removal. All exclusions are listed within the contract and are based on a national schedule of rates. The Contractor is entitled to an annual inflationary uplift to the contract price and this process is detailed in para 2.11 and para 2.12 of this report.
- 2.4 The contract spent for the full ten-year term (initial five years plus five-year extension) was set at £60,000,000. By the end of this current financial year the contract spend will reach £57.4m. For the first 3 years between 2014-2017 the contract was delivered in line with the initial tender values and job volumes. The number of repairs undertaken within the price per property model and the exclusion works prices outside of this model remained consistent.
- 2.5 Following Grenfell in June 2017 additional fire safety measures were added to the scope of works for the Repairs and Maintenance contract that were not part of the tendered price or scope. There was a need to implement enhanced fire detection programmes including upgrades to detection systems in communal areas, accelerated roll out of fire doors programmes and smoke and heat detection systems upgrades. From 2017 to the end of the contract this additional scope would have added an additional £3m to the contract value.
- 2.6 In addition, there have been a number of regulation changes regarding electrical standards in social rented sector (some of the main changes were contained in the 17th and 18th edition wiring regulations). Electrical works is one of the highest volumes in the contract completing on average 1000 jobs per year outside of the Price per Property model. In total the electrical regulations standards which were added to the scope post tender award would have increased the contract value by £4m by the end of the contract.
- 2.7 In addition, the volume of void works and supporting the temporary accommodation program from 2017 has added additional contract spend that was not part of the initial contract award. The works for temporary

accommodation are funded via the General Fund and works to void properties are funded via the HRA.

- 2.8 The forecasted spend for the remaining two years of the contract for 2023/24 is £8,654,000 and for 2024/25 is £9,174,000. In addition, the Council has submitted a bid to the Governments Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund initiative. This forms part of the HRA capital programme which will be considered by Cabinet in February 2023. Therefore, expenditure is forecasted to be £22,828,000 to the end of the term of the contract in February 2025. This is set out in the table below.

2023/24 Contract Value	£8,654,000
2024/25 Inflated Contract Value	£9,174,000
Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund	£5,000,000
Total forecast expenditure	£22,828,000

- 2.9 The SHDF bid was submitted prior to the s114 notice but whilst the Council were in intervention. The works will be implemented under the current Repairs & Planned Maintenance contract and be jointly funded by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Council (HRA) with a 50/50 apportionment. There will be invest to save benefits to the Council which will need to be demonstrated in a full business case submitted to ECC for consideration, as well as a report will be going to the Cabinet asking permission to spend the monies. BEIS have been kept apprised of the Councils current financial position.
- 2.10 The cost is fully funded through the ringfenced Housing Revenue Account (HRA) draft expenditure for 2023/24, and future years funding through to 2025/26 years forms part of the HRA business plan.
- 2.11 The contract makes provision for price increases in line with indexation. For the first few years of the contract indexation remained steadily consistent at around 2%. However, construction industry prices have increased significantly in the past 3-4 years to between 15%-22%. Mears Ltd have managed to absorb some price increases within their business model and therefore contain their inflationary price increases to the Council. An Inflationary uplift to the contract value has been agreed at 6% for the current financial year. This 6% uplift has been applied to the remaining two years of the contract as represented to the table in para 2.5. The 6% that is quoted in this report is an estimation based on current sector indices and will be subject to commercial negotiations with the contractor. Under the Contractual Governance provisions, the Director of Housing is authorised to negotiate and agree the contractual indexation uplift. Please see para 2.1 for detailed explanation of the contractual indexation provision.
- 2.12 The contractual indexation provisions (clause 6.14 Price Adjustments after Year 1) is based on an annual application for an increase on the current year's prices for the subsequent year and will be capped at 90% of the movement in the RPIX index (the Retail Price Index excluding mortgage interest payments published by the Office for National Statistics) for the 12

months of the current year. For example, if the index shows a 2% movement, then any increase in tendered pricing will be capped at 1.8%. As from 1 April 2016 and for subsequent years of the Term, the Service Provider may apply for an increase in their tendered pricing. This application must be made no earlier than the last month of the current year of the Term (1 April to 31 March). It will be for the Service Provider to make application for such increase and will take effect from the date of such application or the commencement of the next year (1 April) whichever is the later.

- 2.13 As of April 2022 the Building Cost Information Service (BCIS) which provides cost and price data for the UK construction industry had construction price indices at 12%. BCIS Private Sector Maintenance Cost Indices – General, which is the cost index used to deal with fluctuations provisions under the Council’s Transforming Homes contract shows a 20.14% increase between November 2019 and November 2022.
- 2.14 As well industry price increases other factors have contributed to the contract spend to date. Regulations around electric and fire safety have been upgraded following Grenfell. Works of this nature have added a spend value of over £6m by the end of the contract term that was not provisioned for at the initial contract award. These works have been funded via the HRA.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Options that have been considered are the re-profiling of the provision of repair works so that only safety compliance and emergency repair works are undertaken. This has been discounted as it will lead to deterioration of living standards for residents as well deterioration of properties. It will also mean the Council will not meet its landlord obligations under the Fitness for Human Habitation Act.
- 3.2 Another option that has been considered is to re-procure the contract ahead of the ending of the current contract term. This has been discounted as it will disrupt service continuity as it will take between 12-18 months to appoint an alternative contractor. There is twenty-five months before the end of the current contract term. If a re-procurement exercise is undertaken there is a risk that the Council will be exposed to significantly higher contract price increases than that from the existing contractor.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The recommendation of this report enables the Council to have price certainty for the delivery of the contract for the remaining term of the contract. Commercial reviews with Mears Ltd continue to ensure the contract delivers value for money under the PPP model.
- 4.2 The increase in Contract Value does not exceed the Public Procurement Regs 2015 contract variation spend limits and therefore is permissible under these regulations.

4.3 The performance of Mears Ltd in delivering the contract has been consistently high surpassing KPI target levels.

4.4 It is not intended to extend the term of the contract beyond the original 10 year term but to increase the value of work under the contract beyond the value that was assigned at procurement stage. The terms and conditions and the scope of the contract shall remain unchanged.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 The Cabinet Member for Housing has been briefed and consulted on this report and its recommendations.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The approval of the report recommendation will enable continuity of the delivery of the of the Council's Housing Asset Management Strategy aims and objectives. The ongoing maintenance and improvement of the Council's housing assets supports the Council's key priorities through the provision of quality housing and estates people are proud to live on.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Strategic Lead – Corporate Finance

The report is recommending an increase in the value of the contract for the remaining duration. All expenditure pertaining to the works will be contained within the ring-fenced housing revenue account.

The additional value of the contract represents expenditure which is included as part of the HRA business plan, and is included as part of the HRA budget report which will be considered by Cabinet in February 2023.

The core expenditure, and an allowance for a 6% uplift in both the 2023/24 and 2024/25 contract values form part of the budget setting strategy. The 2022/23 revenue repair and maintenance budget are detailed below:

Repairs and Maintenance

PPP (Price per Property)	2,985
Contract - Exclusions	1,596
Contract - Voids	1,589
Site Overhead	1,161
Contact Centre	230
Default	190

MSP	159
Contingency	84
Double Glazing	79
Guttering	49
Fencing	32
Street Lighting	10
2022/23 Revised Budget	8,165
Uplift @ 6% 2023/24	490
Total 2023/24 Value	8,654

The reports also highlights additional capital works in order to meet legislative carbon reduction requirements. This is currently estimated with a gross value of £5m, with £2.5m being financed from BEIS grant funding.

The financing of the HRA capital programme is through a combination of revenue contributions to capital, and prudential borrowing. The grant bid allows the authority to commence with the required carbon reduction works and represents value for money if the grant bids is successful, as the authority will have a requirement to meet the legislative obligations in the future.

The HRA capital budget has been drafted on the basis that the grant funding is awarded and makes allowance to finance the match funding element. The formal decision has not yet been received on the assessment of the grant bid, and the HRA 2023/24 base budget will be considered by Cabinet in February 2023.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Kevin Molloy**
Contracts Solicitor

Varying a public contract must be done in accordance with Regulation 72 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, which outlines the ways in which this can be done legally. Under regulation 72(1)(b) a variation will be compliant if it was for necessary additional works by the original contractor and where a change of contractor cannot be made for economic or technical reasons and would also cause significant inconvenience or substantial duplication of costs for the Council. Any increase in cost as a result of the variation must also not exceed 50% of the original contract price. If the above criteria are met, then this will put the Council in a strong position to defend the variation in the event of any challenge.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Leader - Community Development and Equalities

While there are no specific equality and diversity implications arising from the proposal to increase the value of the contract, there is a risk to the delivery of the repairs and maintenance contract if funds are not secured to meet the projected costs for 2023/24 and 2024/25. Should this be the case, there will be a deterioration of living standards for residents as well as the deterioration of properties. It will also mean the Council will not meet its landlord obligations under the Fitness for Human Habitation Act with implications for all protected groups with some, potentially, more disadvantaged than others including as a consequence of age and disability

If the value of the contract is increased in line with the recommendations outlined in this report, council officers will work with the provider to explore opportunities to extend its existing social value offer to support a wider range of projects to benefit the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of local residents.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

Not Applicable

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

N/A

9. **Appendices to the report**

N/A

Report Author

Mohammed Saheed Ullah

Housing Repairs & Planned Maintenance Manager

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11 January 2023		ITEM: 13 Decision: 110636
Cabinet		
Local Council Tax Scheme		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Graham Snell, Cabinet Member for Finance		
Accountable Assistant Director: N/A		
Accountable Director: Jonathan Wilson, Interim Director of Finance		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) helps support council taxpayers who have a low income by providing a reduction in the actual amount in Council Tax payable.

On 1 April 2013, LCTS replaced the national Council Tax Benefit Scheme (CTB). Unlike CTB, which was wholly funded by Central Government and administered by local authorities, for LCTS each Council was required to design and implement its own scheme against a backdrop of 10% reduction in central funding.

The Council is required to consider its scheme annually and consult on any changes before they are introduced. The current LCTS scheme was implemented on the 1 April 2017 following consultation and has been agreed for each subsequent year up to the current financial year with no changes.

For the forthcoming year, it is recognised that the Council needs to identify savings to close the budget gap. However, when considering the level of Local Council Tax Support for the forthcoming year, this needs to be balanced against the comparative cost of the current scheme; the economic climate; and the ability of claimants' to accommodate reduced support.

This report provides details of Thurrock's current scheme and further analysis to support the recommendation that the current scheme remains unchanged for 2023/24.

1. Recommendations

1.1 To note the analysis of the current scheme.

- 1.2 To support the recommendation that the current scheme remains unchanged for 2023/24.**
- 1.3 To support the recommendation that in light of the Councils financial situation a fuller review of the scheme will be carried out in 2023, in advance of 2024/5 budget.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The design of each LCTS scheme must be finalised by the 11th March 2023 ahead of the relevant year to which it relates. Failure to provide a scheme by this date will trigger the implementation of a default government scheme. The default scheme would require the Council to revert back to the level of support that would have been provided under the national Council Tax Benefit arrangements. With regards to the current caseload, reverting to the national scheme would result in an additional cost to Thurrock of circa £1m per annum.
- 2.2 Some components of the LCTS scheme have been directed by Government such as:
- all low income pensioners will be protected under the national framework as defined by DCLG;
 - consideration for protection for vulnerable working age groups will be allowed for; and
 - each authority's scheme will maintain work incentives wherever possible. The Government continues to stress the importance of this principle given the current economic climate and the welfare reform agenda.
- 2.3 From 2014/15, any specific funding for the LCTS scheme was rolled up into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) as provided to local authorities by the Government. It is entirely for local authorities to decide how much they are prepared to spend on their LCTS scheme.
- 2.4 Local authorities take on the risk that liabilities under LCTS exceed the amount projected for at the start of the relevant financial year. This risk is shared between billing and major precepting authorities with circa 15% of the council tax collected by the Council being paid over to the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service and Essex Police.

3. Analysis/review of current scheme

3.1 Overview of existing Scheme

The existing Scheme contains the following elements:

- to ensure work pays, the first £25 per week of earned income is disregarded when calculating levels of council tax support;
- the maximum capital limit is to be set at £6,000. This means anyone who has savings over £6,000 may not receive support with their council tax;

- for working age claimants, the maximum support allowed is set at 75% of their full council tax bill;
- to assist those with families, the Child Benefit and Child Maintenance received is not included as income in the calculation of council tax support;
- the maximum period a claim can be backdated under the scheme is one calendar month. In order to qualify for this, the claimant will need to provide good reason for not claiming earlier;
- there is a full disregard of military compensation payments, including War Disablement Pensions, War Widow's Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments;
- the number of dependants assessed in the calculation of claimants needs is a maximum of two; and
- the maximum period of an award when temporarily absent outside the United Kingdom is four weeks.

3.2 Roll out of Universal Credit

In order to keep the process as simple and efficient as possible, Thurrock Council and the majority of other authorities made the decision to keep the Local Scheme aligned as closely as possible to Housing Benefit Legislation; this was to be reconsidered once Universal Credit had been fully rolled out.

Initially, Universal Credit was to be fully implemented for all new and existing Working Age claimants by 2017. However, this has now been extended nationally and the Government's latest forecast suggests the project will not be complete before 2024. In view of this, new Housing Benefit legislation is now forming part of the Welfare Reform agenda with this benefit continuing until at least 2024.

The numbers of UC claimants claiming LCTS are being monitored. As at the October 2022, there was a total LCTS case load of 9,209 with 3,868 of these claims were related to claimants in receipt of Universal Credit.

At this stage, the introduction of Universal Credit in the Authority has not made any significant change to the amount of LCTS awarded to claimants compared to the legacy benefits.

3.3 Accessibility

The application process for LCTS is linked to other national benefits such as Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. This means that people who claim these benefits are directed to make a claim for LCTS where applicable. Applications for LCTS can be made online (with assistance via customer services), community hubs and various other organisations for those who need help in completing a claim.

3.4 Level of Support and affordability

The current Thurrock scheme operates a means tested approach, with maximum discounts for working age people set at 75%. The current level of discount provides:

- a historic high average annual collection rate of approximately 96%. It should however be noted that within the previous financial year, the collection rate dipped to 92% as a result of the pandemic and decreased collection activities. Whilst collection rates for the current year have recovered and are forecast to achieve 96%, this will need to be closely monitored in line with wider rising cost of living pressures and considered within future schemes.
- The overall cost of Thurrock’s LCTS scheme is below average when benchmarked by CIPFA against other unitary authorities.
- The maximum level of support provided to working age claimants is in line with other Essex authorities along the South Essex Corridor as outlined in the table below:

Authority	Max. Support Level
Basildon	75%
Castle Point	70%
Southend-on-Sea	75%
Thurrock	75%

When considering any changes to the scheme, whilst the maximum level of support afforded to eligible working age claimants is entirely at the Council’s discretion, in order to maintain a fair and effective scheme, the Council needs to consider both the cost of providing support and the ability of claimants to contribute towards services funded by Council Tax.

Based on the current caseload, the cost/saving of reducing/increasing the maximum level of support by 5%, to 70% would generate additional Council tax revenue of approximately £230k per annum.

Careful consideration will be required when considering alternative levels of support in the future, as reducing the maximum level of discount a person could claim may make Council Tax unaffordable for residents on a lower income and therefore could lead to a reduced collection rate, which would have an adverse financial impact. Conversely, increasing the maximum level of discount on the scheme would reduce the overall Council Tax yield, and place a further burden on the Council’s financial position.

Further to this, whilst the Council needs to make savings or identify way to increase overall levels of income, considering any reductions to the discount the scheme offers will need to take into account the wider burdens on peoples’ finances in the current economic climate, and the Council

requirement to increase the overall level of Council Tax within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Therefore, on balance, the recommendation is to maintain the current scheme for the forthcoming year and to undertake a fuller review of the scheme within 2023/24, with any amendments being introduced as part of the 2024/25 financial year.

3.5 Cost and Caseload

The number of people claiming LCTS increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, numbers have now returned to pre pandemic levels although this will continue to be closely monitored.

Within Thurrock for the period October 2021 to October 2022, the number of claims in payment decreased by 795 with a reduced cost of £470k. However, when considering these numbers, we also need to take into account the risk that claimant numbers and associated costs will again increase within the forthcoming year as a result of the current economic climate.

Claimant Type	Number of Claimants		Total Awarded	
	As at Nov 22	Var. Oct 21	As at Nov 22	Var. Oct 21
Working Age – Employed	970	-362	£798,580.12	£40,145.62
Working Age – Not Employed	4794	-331	£3,784,374.80	-£402,221.90
Pension Age	3445	-102	£3,608,265.90	-£108,828.40
Total	9209	-795	£8,191,220.82	-£470,904.68

3.6 Complaints

There have been no specific complaints recorded regarding the Council's scheme in recent years.

3.7 Additional Support

Alongside the LCTS scheme, various other mandatory and discretionary discounts and exemptions are in place to provide assistance and support to specific groups. These include: Care Leavers exemption to the age of 21 (25 in exceptional circumstances); Severe Mental Health Exemption; and Single Persons' Discount. The Council also considers its wider discretionary power in exceptional cases to reduce the council tax owed where appropriate.

4. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 4.1 The Council is required to have an approved LCTS scheme that has been subject to public consultation where changes are proposed. The recommendations and timeframe outlined in this report will ensure we continue to meet this requirement noting the fact that no changes are proposed for the following municipal year.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**

Strategic Lead Corporate Finance

The impact of the LCTS scheme forms part of the determination of the Council tax base for the forthcoming financial year

Based on current estimates, and the use of methodology contained within the report, this equates to 5,215 band D equivalent properties

The options for changing the scheme are detailed within the report, and this explains the relationship between reducing the level of discount offered, and the negative impact of having a lower collection rate, which could subsequently lead to increased bad debts. Therefore, this concludes that there is no financial benefit in reducing the level of discount offered to residents at this time, and without a comprehensive review of the scheme.

Furthermore, consideration has been given to the residents who qualify for the scheme, and their ability to pay an increased level of Council Tax in the current economic climate, and therefore it is proposed that the scheme remains unchanged from the current financial year.

5.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **John Jones**

Director of Law and Governance, and Monitoring Officer

Section 13A(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, requires the Council as billing authority to make a localised Council Tax Reduction Scheme in accordance with Schedule 1A to the Act. Each financial year the Council must consider whether to revise its scheme, or to replace it with another scheme.

Any revision to its scheme, or any replacement scheme, must be made no later than 11 March in the financial year preceding that for which the revision or replacement scheme is to have effect.

This report proposes no revisions to the LCTS currently in place for 2022/23. Therefore, the Council would not be required to conduct the prescribed

consultation process where it is not proposing to make any changes to the LCTS.

Although there are no proposed changes to the Scheme, Full Council is required to agree the adoption of the Scheme to continue as from 01 April 2023 for the Council Tax year 2023/24.

Under Schedule 1A of the Act the Government has the power to make regulations about the prescribed requirements for schemes. Therefore, any scheme that the Council adopts must comply with these regulations.

The Council must ensure that it has due regard to its Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act 2010 when considering whether to revise the LCTS or to retain the existing scheme. Prior to making a decision to adopt the LCTS for 2023/24 Members must take into account and give particular consideration to an assessment, outlining the impact of the proposals for persons that share the characteristics protected under S4 of the Act and the proposals made to reduce or mitigate any negative impact associated with the proposal.

5.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**

Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities

The Council has a duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010 to consider the equality impact of its policies and decisions. The LCTS can be claimed by anyone in the Borough meeting the eligibility criteria.

5.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

N/A

6. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

Working Papers held by Corporate Finance and Revenues and Benefits.

7. **Appendices to the report**

None

Report Author

Andy Brittain

Strategic Lead for Revenues and Benefits

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11 January 2023	ITEM: 14 Decision: 110637
Cabinet	
Public Health Contract – Healthy Families Service	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key
Report of: Councillor Deborah Arnold – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adults and Health	
Accountable Assistant Director: Andrea Clement, Assistant Director, Public Health	
Accountable Director: Dr Jo Broadbent, Director of Public Health	
This report is: Public	

Executive Summary

This report outlines the commissioning intentions of the Council’s Public Health team by seeking to extend the Healthy Families Contract of which value is above the threshold requiring approval by Cabinet. It also seeks to re-tender this contract following this extension.

The Integrated 0-19 Healthy Families Service encompasses Health Visiting, School Nursing, targeted support and a range of health interventions for children and young people as a part of the Brighter Futures Offer. It also includes several mandated elements such as the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) and child health reviews. The service consistently meets its performance targets and is solely funded by the Public Health Grant.

A twelve month extension of the existing contract followed by a re-procurement exercise for subsequent years is considered a prudent option from both a continuity and efficiency standpoint. Due to the need to make a cost saving on this contract, the twelve month extension (September 2023 to August 2024) will be at a 6.5% reduction to the current contract value.

The proposed reduction in service associated with this cost reduction will come from the 5-19 element of the service, specifically some of the health improvement and awareness raising of health issues in schools. It is key to note that the number of school nurses will not reduce under this proposal.

1. Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Approve 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.**
- 1.2 Agree that Officers proceed with the further development of the service specification of the Healthy Families Service ready for September 2024.**
- 1.3 Agree 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.**
- 1.4 Subject to the outcome of the consultation exercise and in consultation with the Portfolio Holders, agree to proceed to tender for the Healthy Families up to a total maximum value of £4.3million per annum for 5 years+1+1.**
- 1.5 Agree 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.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Council’s public health team are seeking to extend a commissioned service contract whose value exceed the threshold for approval by Cabinet.
- 2.2 Public Health services are funded through the Public Health Grant. This is a grant from DHSC which is ring-fenced for public health functions, outlined in the grant conditions. As such the Public Health Grant is separate from the Council’s General Fund and has prescribed usage. The Healthy Families Service is funded solely from the Public Health Grant.
- 2.3 The Integrated 0-19 Healthy Families Service encompasses Health Visiting, School Nursing, targeted support, and a range of health interventions for children and young people as a part of the Brighter Futures Offer.
- 2.4 The current provider is NELFT with whom Public Health entered a contract in September 2017 for an initial 5-year period until August 2022. In 21/22, the contract was extended for an additional year (September 2022 – August 2023) due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacting on capacity to initiate re-procurement activity. As services resume business as usual and continue to catch up following on from the significant disruption resulting from pandemic there is now a need to extend the contract for a further twelve months (to August 2024) and re-tender the service thereafter.
- 2.5 The Public Contract Regulations (2015) are due to change, and the Provider Selection Regime¹ is due to come into effect imminently however these have

¹ The NHS Provider Selection Regime (PSR) will be a new set of rules for arranging healthcare services in England. The aim of the Provider Selection Regime is to give decision makers a more flexible process for deciding who should provide healthcare services, to make it easier to integrate services and enhance collaboration, and to remove the bureaucracy and cost associated with the current rules.

not yet been published and hence the impact of these changes is currently unknown. Extending the contract for an additional year would allow time for the Provider Selection Regime to come into force, be embedded into practice and the impact monitored. However, a competitive tendering process remains a valid procurement option under the Provider Selection Regime, and in most cases procurement would preference a competitive process so the market can be tested, and we can more clearly evidence value for money.

- 2.6 The Healthy Families Service is funded at a total cost of over £20 million during the initial 5-year contract period equating to £4 million per annum. Alongside the contract value, there has been expectation to pay NHS AfC uplift on the staffing establishment associated with this contract. For the entirety of this contract this has been £375,000 for the last 3 years of the contract and for 2021 to 2023 this is a total of £230,000, bringing the AfC uplift paid so far on this contract to a total of £1,355,833. We are currently not aware if this expectation will continue. We will work out a strategy to manage this in the future if so.
- 2.7 Should the contract be extended, there would be a requirement to reduce the contract value by 6.5% to balance the Public Health Grant. The Public Health Grant has been cut on a real terms per person basis over recent years and this trend looks set to continue. Additionally, department for Health and Social Care’s announcement of the pay award for NHS Agenda for Change staff in England included a consolidated flat rate increase of £1400 to all bands, except the top of band 6 and all of band 7 which will get 4%. The overall value of the award will be 4.75% of the total NHS wage bill. The inflationary uplift in the PH Grant was almost sufficient to cover a 3% AfC uplift on Public Health Contracts, but no other inflationary raises, and this is what Public Health have offered to our Providers for 22/23.
- 2.8 Negotiations are currently ongoing with the provider to scope service reduction proposals to meet the proposed cost reduction. It is likely that the service reduction will come from the health promotion elements of the School Nursing part of the Healthy Families Service. It is hoped that elements will be moved to the Family Hub Transformation work.
- 2.9 The value of the Healthy Families Services contract extension for twelve months until August 2024 will be £4,306,454. The below table outlines spend on this contract including the proposed twelve-month extension, NHS uplifts and a one-off mobilisation fund paid at the start of the contract.

Healthy Families Service - Cost	Year	Contract Value
One off start up monies	Sept 2017-Aug 2018	£360,000
Year 1	Sept 2017-Aug 2018	£4,000,000
Year 2	Sept 2018-Aug 2019	£4,000,000
Year 3	Sept 2019-Aug 2020	£4,000,000
Year 4	Sept 2020-Aug 2021	£4,375,000
Year 5	Sept 2021-Aug 2022	£4,375,000
Year 6 - Extension beyond contract period	Sept 2022-Aug 2023	£4,605,832
Year 7 - Extension beyond contract period with 6.5% proposed contract reduction	Sept 2023-Aug 2024	£4,306,454
Total		£30,022,286

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Healthy Families Service comprises of both statutory functions and universal offer for children and young people.
- 3.2 There are several mandated elements of the Healthy Families service, which are:
- National Child Measurement Programme - Measurement of children's height and weight in reception year and Year 6, and provision of feedback of results and general advice/information to parents if requested.
 - Health and development reviews
 - Ante-natal health promoting visit
 - Newborn/14 day review
 - 6-8 weeks check
 - 9-12 month review
 - 2-2.5 year review
 - All pupils receive a comprehensive age-appropriate programme of PSHE
 - Responsibility for vision screening
 - Safeguarding responsibilities
- 3.3 The health visiting part of the service is currently provided to children aged 0 to 5 years and their families. It supports parents to focus on the needs and priorities of their baby and family during pregnancy, the first years of life and beyond. This service is provided to everyone who lives in Thurrock with various levels of support. As well as the five mandated visits, the service also provides several high impact programmes to help infant and families outcomes.
- 3.4 The school nursing part of the service is available for children, young people and their families of school age – usually from age 5-19 years. The service is also offered through various levels of support (similar to the health visiting part of the service). This also includes the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) which is a mandated element. This element has gone through significant changes in the past years following a service transformation in 2016. Additionally, the need to meet the 6.5% service reduction should the contract be extended would leave only a basic age 5-19 offer in place.
- 3.5 Initial and Review Health Assessments for Children Looked After (CLA) are holistic assessments that involve the review of health needs, the analysis and assessment of past medical history, missed health problems and missed screening opportunities. The initial assessments are commissioned by Thurrock CCG (this includes children placed in or out of the Thurrock area). The review assessments are commissioned as part of the Healthy Families service. The assessments of children and young people placed in Thurrock are completed by the service; out of area assessments are completed by the health provider in that local area with a reciprocal arrangement. The health

assessments are especially important as they present an opportunity to influence outcomes and reduce inequalities for CLA.

- 3.6 Furthermore, two posts are commissioned through the Healthy Families Service to supply specialist support to the Multi-Agency safeguarding Hub (MASH). This is working well to support the safeguarding of children and young people.
- 3.7 Thurrock Council's contract with NELFT for the delivery of the Healthy Families Service is due to expire on 31 August 2023. An extension to the contract is currently possible under Public Contracts Regulations.
- 3.8 In order to extend the contract length by twelve months approval would ordinarily be the remit of the Director of Public Health. However, given the high value of the contract extension, the decision for expenditure is a matter for Cabinet. There are currently three options for Cabinet to consider in this matter.
- 3.9 **Option 1: Do nothing – allow the Healthy Families Service contract to expire in August 2023**
- 3.10 The Council could allow the current contract with NELFT to expire, leaving the local authority with no Healthy Families Service provision for 2023/24. This would generate a significant saving in terms of spend on contract. However, the provision of a health visiting, and school nursing is vital in order to tackle the inequalities that exist for CYP in Thurrock. Additionally, the mandated elements of the service would cease to be provided and the Council would therefore be in breach of the law. Alongside the clear legal and reputational damage such a situation would generate, local people would also be denied access to vital public health services, including access to health visitors and school nursing.
- 3.11 **Option 2: Renew the Healthy Families Service contract with reduced contract spend until August 24 and re-commission the service with a revised contract spend and service specification from September 2024 for a period of 5+1+1 years and up to a maximum contract value of £4.3 million per annum.**
- 3.12 In extending the contract for a further twelve months the Council would ensure continuity in service delivery for local people and that the service continued to meet its statutory responsibilities. A reduced contract value for 2023/24 would inevitably lead to a reduction in the scope of the service the provider are able to offer. Negotiations over the service specification are in progress and it is likely that the reduction in service will come from the 5-19 element of the service. It is key to note that the number of school nurses will not reduce under this proposal – the reduction is likely to come from the following areas as outlined below:
 - Awareness sessions delivered by the Healthy Families Service team for health promotion – such as smoking cessation, oral health, sexual health

and healthy relations are proposed to cease with plans for the service to provide advice and signposting only. Alternative ways of delivering these health promotion activities and outcomes is being explored.

- Child sexual exploitation and risky behaviours awareness sessions will cease and advice and signposting to current provider Brooke/Provide will be provided. The service will continue to work in partnership with the Council and raise awareness i.e., LSCB, NSPCC, where appropriate.
- Healthy Lifestyles Missions, which is a child weight management intervention, will cease with advice and signposting provided only. Beezee Bodies will continue to deliver child weight management support.
- Supporting young people with low self-esteem through individual sessions will cease with advice and signposting provided only. School Nurses will continue to provide an emotional wellbeing offer for children and young people via schools and link with School Wellbeing Service
- Health Practitioner attendance to face-to-face drop-in sessions will cease with a digital alternative offered instead. Where digital poverty is identified, the service will offer alternative contact in addition to e-Drop in where required
- PSHE programme delivery will cease with a plan to work with schools, where possible, to identify and signpost to relevant resources.

- 3.13 It is proposed that a 6.5% reduction in contract value would be sufficient to ensure that service quality is maintained in priority aspects of the contract, and the service would continue to perform well against agreed performance metrics whilst balancing the Public Health grant. A deep dive and service review into the service is planned to be completed by the Public Health team in the last quarter of 2022/2023 and combined with the planned family hubs transformation work will lead to an updated service specification for recommissioning the service from 2024/25.
- 3.14 In extending the current contract for twelve months, this will enable time to recruit and bed in additional capacity within the Public Health team to lead a re-procurement process, and subsequently sufficient time to then deliver this commissioning undertaking leading to an optimised offer in the subsequent year. A full and complete re-commissioning process for a contract of this value would usually take at least 12 months including pre-tender service reviews and review by HOSC and COSC and post-award contract handover period. An extension of less than twelve months significantly increases the risk to the delivery of a thorough and robust procurement process should there be difficulty in recruiting additional resource to lead this work. It also increases the risk that meaningful engagement and consultation with relevant stakeholders and partners will be compromised should there be delays. The Public Health team will, as appropriate, draw on the resources available in the procurement and legal teams, Children's Services and other partners to ensure that this re-procurement is mobilised.
- 3.15 In recommissioning, it will allow the service to adapt to the newly updated Healthy Child Programme which describes changes to the delivery model for health visiting and school nursing service. This is specified as 'Universal in reach – Personalised in response' and supersedes the 4, 5, 6 levels of service

delivery. It aims to provide greater emphasis on the assessment of children, young people and family's needs and the skill mix to respond to these needs (PHE Healthy Child Programme guidance update, 2021). The following represent the proposed changes;

- (a) The language of the "4,5,6 model" has been removed and replaced with an increased emphasis on "personalised" care or tailored interventions as well as professional and clinical judgement, which underpins the professional autonomy of the health visitor and in response to individual or family need.
- (b) The inclusion of two additional universal contacts at 3-4 months and 6 months. These will provide important opportunities to address key public health priorities including, perinatal mental health, child development, breastfeeding, childhood obesity prevention, immunisation uptake and accident prevention.
- (c) Increased scope for "Emotional Health and Wellbeing Assessments" – alongside maternal mental health, these will now include fathers and babies. This includes a clear statement that, "Health visitors assess maternal mental health at all health visiting mandated reviews.
- (d) Health reviews for 5 – 19 or 24 if appropriate remains.

3.16 Given the above, the Healthy Families Service (HFS) contract, which utilises a model developed nearly 7 years ago, now requires a refresh particularly considering the Family Hubs Transformation programme and understanding gained through implementation and contract management of the service. Additionally, a benchmarking exercise has also been completed which showed that best value savings could be made.

3.17 The HFS which is the Start for Life element forms the foundation of the Family Hub Transformation programme. As such establishing an effective Family Hub programme will require some changes to the way in which some elements of the HFS interact with other services. Whilst some additional funding is available to undertake this transformation work and specifically to expand services which will form part of the family hub, the service provider will likely be required to make further changes within their current contract envelope (such as the location of some service delivery) which may be challenging within the required procurement time period. A procurement process represents an opportunity to re-design that model in line with this transformation work and available budget moving forwards.

3.18 **Option 3 – Re-commission the Healthy Families Service with a revised contract value and service specification for 2023/24**

3.19 The current contract with NELFT could be allowed to expire with a view to re-commissioning the Healthy Families Service from 1 September 2023. A revised service specification would be created and put out for tenders, with a contract value to be agreed in advance. If this contract value were reduced there is the likelihood that the service specification would also be reduced from that offered presently. However, there is potential for a provider from the open market to demonstrate cost effective ways of delivering a service with an

equivalent or increased specification from that seen now. The difficulty in achieving this outcome however is the limited time available before 1 September 2023. In the absence of an updated service review deep dive and service user engagement, any re-commissioning is unlikely to represent evidence-based commissioning. A full and complete re-commissioning process for a contract of this value would usually take at least 12 months including pre-tender service reviews and review by HOSC and COSC and post-award contract handover period. There is also a lack of resource available at this time for commissioning support within Public Health with no dedicated Public Health CYP resource as of the end of October due to a vacant post which is currently being recruited to.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 **Option 2** is recommended for the HFS Contract as this ensures continuity in the delivery of a service with good outcomes for children, young people and families whilst giving the Public Health, Children's Services and procurement teams the time required to complete the necessary due diligence activities and planning for a renewed offer from 2024/25. The alternative options would lead to either a breach of the Council's statutory requirements for children 0 – 5 and families, or the commissioning of a new service carried out with limited engagement and co-production with local people to understand the needs of local families.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 This report has been considered by Public Health Leadership Team, Adults Housing and Health Directorate Management Team and the Portfolio Holder for Adults and Health

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-26 contains to ensure all children and young people are able to achieve their potential through raising aspirations and reducing the disadvantage gap.
- 6.2 The Brighter Futures Strategy Strategic priority 2 states that children are able to access the services they need and be healthy, focussing on prevention and early intervention and the Healthy Families Contract is key to delivery of this.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Strategic Lead – Corporate Finance

Expenditure for Public health services remains ring-fence with the main grants, or any other specific funding allocation directly.

The three options with regards to the contract are detailed within the report.

The recommended option (2) includes a 6.5% reduction on the contract value in 2023/24, which represents the best options financially.

The alternative options of ending the existing Healthy Families Service contract would generate financial savings in the short term as spend on the service would effectively be reduced to zero. However, the medium to long-term impact of ceasing a statutory or mandated service is likely to outweigh any potential short-term benefit.

Re-commissioning the Healthy Families Service may generate some savings; however, this would depend upon the revised Service Specification and the tender market conditions.

Maintaining spend at present levels would represent the status quo position and will not support the council in achieving commitment to the financial transformation required. The implication of doing so may be lead to a reduction in the financial resources available for other contracts within the Public health grant.

Within the ring-fenced Public Health grant allocation, there is an identified funding allocation of £4.485m in 2022/23 pertaining to these works. The contract value set out in para 1.1 does not create an adverse budget variance to the public health grant and can be contained within the current allocation. The contract value detailed in this report is included as part of the 2023/24 overall draft public health budget distribution and represents a reduction in the amount allocated in the current financial year. This reduction will be reallocated within the wider draft public health grant allocation in 2023/24.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Kevin Molloy**

Contracts Solicitor

On the basis of the information in this report, the proposed strategy for variation and extension should comply with in particular Regulation 72 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's Contract Rules. From the information provided a proposed further extension for the cost outlined should comply with the requirements laid out under regulation 72.1 (c). The Council's own requirements to comply with clause 14 of the Council's Procurement Rules will also need to be met.

The report author and responsible directorate are advised to keep Legal Services fully informed at every stage of the proposed variation and tender exercises. Legal Services are on hand and available to assist and answer any questions that may arise.

Ending the contracts may see the Council breach its statutory responsibilities in terms of ensuring provision of all access to health visiting services, and breach the terms of the Public Health Grant in failing to provide a mandated service.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities

Both services are universal and as such their existence or otherwise could be argued to impact upon all socio-demographic groups equally. However, the nature of the services is that in many cases those individuals at greatest risk of harm and who could be considered society's most vulnerable would be impacted mostly through any potential withdrawal or reduction in scope of the services.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

None

9. **Appendices to the report**

None

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11 January 2023	ITEM: 15
Cabinet	
Corporate Peer Challenge 2022 Update	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Councillor Jack Duffin, Cabinet Member for Central Services	
Accountable Assistant Director: n/a	
Accountable Director: Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Engagement and Growth	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

This report advises members of the findings of the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Team following their visit in January 2022 and highlights the council's initial response to their recommendations.

The full report of the LGA Peer Team is shown at Appendix 1 and the Action Plan at Appendix 2.

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) process provided some useful insight and recommendations to support the council to deliver its vision and priorities for its residents, businesses and other stakeholders.

The council published the CPC report and action plan on its website on 30 June 2022. A motion was supported at the Council meeting on 13 October 2022 requesting the CPC report and action plan were presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. This report was presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2022.

In September 2022, the government appointed commissioners to support the council with the financial challenges it faces. As part of this intervention, the council was required to submit an Improvement and Recovery Plan to government by 3 December 2022. The CPC Action Plan has, therefore, been subsumed into and superseded by intervention and the IRP.

The IRP will be shared with members in the new year after the publication of the government response to the Best Value inspection and commissioner's reports and a further iteration of the plan prepared to address their recommendations and any additional directions.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Note the outcomes of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge in January 2022 and the actions as part of the wider response to the Best Value inspection and intervention process.

1.2 Feedback on any specific areas which Cabinet members feel should be focussed on in future iterations of the Improvement and Recovery Plan.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The council invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in January 2022. Earlier LGA Corporate peer challenges have taken place in 2011, 2016 and 2018.

2.2 The scope and focus of the visit in 2022 were the five core themes for all LGA Corporate Peer Challenges plus an additional focus at the council's request:

- local priorities and outcomes
- organisational and place leadership
- governance and culture
- financial planning and management
- capacity for improvement
- additional focus: delivery ambition

2.3 The council published the CPC report and action plan on its website on 30 June 2022. Councillor John Kent presented a motion at the Council meeting on 13 October 2022 (originally submitted for the meeting scheduled for 21 September 2022) requesting the CPC report and action plan were presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. It was confirmed that they were on the forward plan and the Motion was carried.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Following the receipt of the LGA Peers' report (Appendix 1), an action plan was developed around their recommendations - see Appendix 2

3.2 Since the CPC Action Plan was developed, the government has appointed Essex County Council as commissioners to support the council with the financial challenges it faces. As part of this intervention, the council was required to submit an Improvement and Recovery Plan to government by 3 December 2022. The CPC Action Plan has, therefore, been subsumed into and superseded by the intervention and IRP.

3.3 The themes in the IRP are:

- financial sustainability
- governance and scrutiny
- strategic direction

- place leadership and growth
- leadership and culture

There is a correlation to the focus of LGA Peer Reviews at 2.2. above.

- 3.4 The IRP will be shared with members in the new year after the publication of the government response to the Best Value inspection and commissioner's reports and a further iteration of the plan prepared to address their recommendations and any additional directions.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process provided useful insight and recommendations to support the council delivering for its residents, businesses and other stakeholders. Since the CPC Action Plan was developed, the government has appointed Essex County Council to support us with the financial challenges we face. As part of this intervention, the council was required to submit an Improvement and Recovery Plan to government by 3 December 2022. The CPC Action Plan has, therefore, been subsumed into and superseded by the IRP.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The LGA Peer Team met with many stakeholders and partners, both internally and external to the council, including staff, members, businesses, public sector partners and the voluntary and community sector.
- 5.2 The report and action plan were considered by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny on 8 December 2022. Feedback included on the role of the council within and leading projects where other partners may be better placed for delivery. There are positive examples of partnership working including development of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Backing Thurrock implementation group and Thames Freeport, however, it was recognised that that the council did not always need to be the lead organisation and effective delivery and outcomes were key. This will be further considered in the development of the IRP and Corporate Plan.
- 5.3 It was also recognised that the CPC report was not widely shared when it became available to the council and there was little opportunity for discussion or input into the action plan at that time especially for Members. A commitment was reiterated by the Leader that this would not be the case for the IRP and all Members would have the opportunity to input to it moving forward.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The findings of the LGA Peer Team included recommendations on how the council should be clear about its strategic priorities and involve stakeholders in the co-production of key strategic documents. This was included in

Appendix 2 Action Plan and is reflected as part of the Improvement and Recovery Plan.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Joanne Freeman**
Finance Manager

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge made some recommendations around financial matters. This will now form part of the wider Improvement and Recovery Plan which was required to be submitted to our commissioners and the government by 3 December 2022.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**
Corporate Governance Lawyer and Deputy Monitoring Officer

By virtue of Directions made under the Local Government 1999, the council is now subject to a government intervention package relating to the management of the council's finances and a Best Value Inspection of its governance, audit (internal and external), risk management, overview and scrutiny functions. Essex County Council has been appointed as Commissioner to conduct the intervention and has appointed Best Value inspectors.

The Directions require the council to take certain actions which includes to prepare and agree an Improvement and Recovery Plan to the satisfaction of the Commissioner (which may include or draw upon improvement or action plans prepared before the date of the Directions) within three months, to include at a minimum: a. an action plan to achieve financial sustainability and to close any short and long-term budget gaps identified by the council across the period of its medium-term financial strategy (MTFS), including a robust multiyear savings plan; b. an action plan to ensure the council's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable and affordable; c. a strict debt reduction plan and an updated minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy; d. an action plan to ensure the Authority is complying with all relevant rules and guidelines relating to the financial management of the Authority; and e. a suitable scheme of delegations for financial decision-making. The Commissioner's first report is expected to be handed to the government alongside the Improvement and Recovery Plan in early December.

The legal requirement to prepare and agree an Improvement and Recovery Plan, has now superseded the CPC review and action plan. However, the

Plan may include any appropriate/ relevant actions identified from the CPC review and action plan which members consider relevant for inclusion.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
**Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer**

There are some recommendations put forward from the Peer Team which relate to diversity and equality specifically around involving our communities. These are being considered as part of the wider work around community engagement and involvement in developing plans moving forward. Any such actions will be considered separately as and when they are developed.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

Individual projects arising from the recommendations may have implications on some of the above, in particular in relation to staff, which will be considered separately as and when they are developed.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

n/a

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1: LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report, January 2022
- Appendix 2: Corporate Peer Challenge 2022 Action Plan

Report Author

Sarah Welton

Strategy Manager

Strategy, Engagement and Growth

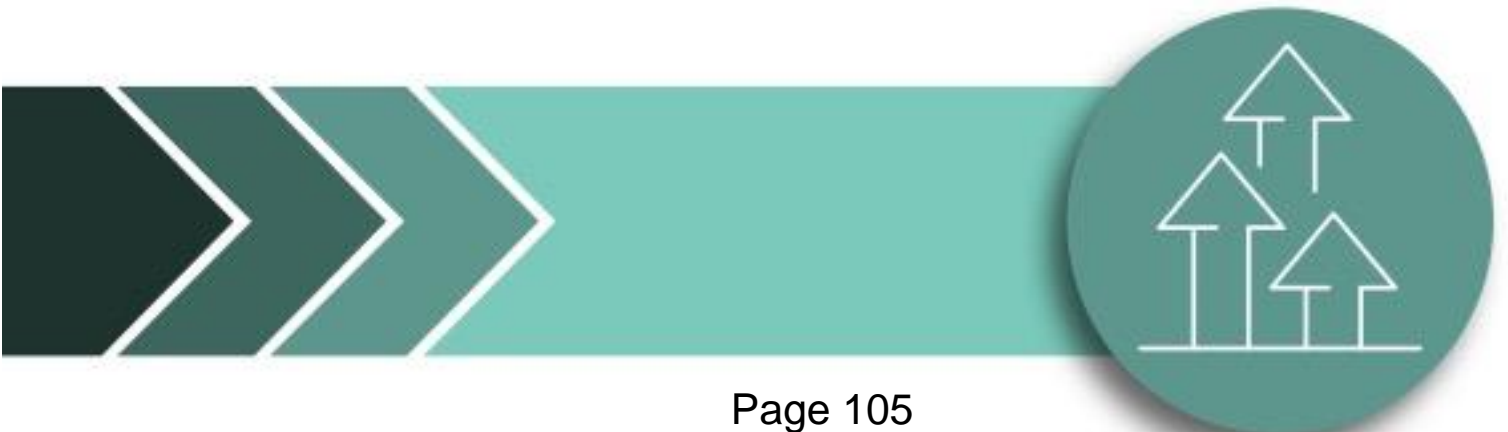
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LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Thurrock Council

10 – 13 January 2022

Feedback report





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1. Executive summary

This is Thurrock Council's third Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) with previous peer challenges taking place in 2011, 2016 and a follow up in 2018. Thurrock is fully committed to sector led improvement with the CPC bringing together a wider programme of reviews of Adult's and Children's Services and the Council's plans for Transformation. This programme of reviews was scheduled specifically to inform decision-making associated with the planning for delivery of a balanced budget for 2023/24 and to ensure the recommendations drive the Council's transformation into a leaner, more efficient and financially sustainable organisation.

The CPC was delivered using a phased hybrid methodology consisting of three phases:

- a first phase of detailed financial diagnostics, comprising of three days of virtual meetings and three days reviewing and summarising key financial documents
- a second phase comprising of two days of virtual meetings and
- a final phase of two days of on-site face-to-face meetings.

There is no denying, Thurrock Council has made significant progress and is extremely ambitious. There is a huge growth and regeneration programme taking shape, which includes delivery of the UK's largest Freeport, the lower Thames crossing, A13 road infrastructure improvements, new civic offices and the regeneration of Tilbury and Grays as part of the Towns Fund. The Council is also embarking on a significant Council wide transformation programme which aims to save £5m in 2022/23. All this is in the context of a severely challenged financial background and a forecasted funding gap of £34m over 22/23 and 23/24.

The drive and ambition demonstrated by Thurrock Council is commendable, but it was clear the Council has not identified its main priorities and all work delivery is considered equal. The Council agreed a refreshed "People, Place and Prosperity" (PPP) vision and priorities in September 2021, however there is far more being delivered or planned for delivery than originally agreed and additional work continues to be added. There simply isn't the capacity or resources to deliver and the Council

needs to stop, review what type of Council it wants to be and prioritise accordingly. Once agreed, nothing should be added to the agreed list, unless there is agreement to pause, stop or remove something else. The Council also needs to urgently discuss and agree a programme of disinvestments to support this priority setting.

Staff at Thurrock are dedicated, committed and loyal. They have gone above and beyond during the pandemic and continued to deliver the Councils priorities at pace, however they are tired and with the prospect of redundancies due to the Councils financial position, they are concerned about their future and are looking to the leadership for clarity and direction. The Leader and Chief Executive need to 'front up' collective communications on the Councils strengths, challenges, priorities and opportunities, both internally with staff and externally with partners and stakeholders to ensure there is a shared understanding of the new priorities, direction and focus of resources.

Partners and stakeholders from the private, public and voluntary sectors are excited about the opportunities in Thurrock and want to be more involved in delivering these. Peers heard from partners that the culture at the Council is to want to lead or be in control of everything, with the phrase "Fortress Thurrock" used. Given the financial and capacity challenges the Council faces, Thurrock needs to embrace help and support from others including from its national and regional partnerships and not see this as a weakness – it can still exert the appropriate influence. Reviewing partnerships and freeing up resources will then allow the Council to concentrate on where relationships need to be strengthened. Partners believe stronger relationships need developing with Government, particularly around the Freeport and consider the Council best placed to achieve this.

The Council finances are severely challenged. The draft position for 2022/23 is projecting a balanced budget, but this is to be achieved by potentially using more reserves than in previous years and having a much larger level of savings. Despite significant work, there are no solid plans in place for 2023/24 and there are likely to be insufficient reserves available to use. The Council is planning to use £3.3m reserves in 2021/22 and to increase that by up to £4.8m in 2022/23. This is not a sustainable position and does not demonstrate good financial management. After factoring in council tax increases, savings and growth the Council still has an £8.9m gap for 2023/24 and a further gap of £5.4m in 2024/25 that will need radical plans to

resolve.

The investment strategy has served the Council well in recent years and largely shielded it from the difficult decisions many other Councils have faced. Whilst beneficial, it means Thurrock doesn't have a track record of delivering savings at scale. In order to ensure the urgent savings and efficiencies are delivered:

- Tight governance and infrastructure needs putting in place to monitor and manage the savings across the council, not just within finance.
- All Councillors need to understand the scale of challenge and be equipped with further financial information and analysis to inform oversight and future decision-making.
- Governance and oversight of the Councils investments, commercial activity and current/future capital programmes also needs strengthening.

The Council has to get on the front foot for 2023/24 and must urgently progress this.

Currently transformation and change programmes are, mainly financially driven, which given the Council's financial situation is to be expected. This has however led to services working individually to draw up savings plans, with insufficient thought to cross council transformation and how public sector reform, commercialisation in partnership or demand management can drive different ways of working. Directors' Board need to make time to collectively problem solve and work across services to ensure all opportunities are being explored and interdependencies are mapped. Many of the building blocks are in place to support staff to feel part of the next phase of transformation, for example, the Digital Academy, Change Leads and Directorate Champions. Make the most of these groups to fully engage all staff in the journey.

Although not universal, peers did identify tensions between officers and Councillors and strongly recommend these relationships are reset, to ensure complete understanding of respective roles and responsibilities. A programme of facilitated conversations individually and together would help support the culture of the organisation moving forward.

2. Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council:

2.1. Recommendation 1

Prioritise the Thurrock Ambition – Agree what type of Council you want to be and use this to drive transformation and culture change. Prioritise what you want to deliver within the budget available and agree on the disinvestments.

2.2. Recommendation 2

Financial Stability/resilience and sustainability – Corporately own and understand the financial information, align the MTFS with the ambition and priorities and effectively deliver the savings.

2.3. Recommendation 3

Agree and deliver a cross council transformation programme – Corporately own and understand the whole transformation programme, ensuring a strong governance framework to drive through the improvements.

2.4. Recommendation 4

Strengthen corporate leadership, organisational culture and member/officer relationships – make time for facilitated conversations, be clear on roles and responsibilities and describe and then demonstrate the culture you want to achieve.

2.5. Recommendation 5

Harness the partnerships offer – from local to regional and national – Define the partner you want to be in different scenarios and accept or secure help from others.

2.6. Recommendation 6

Shape and promote the collective narrative – drive proactive communications which celebrate your success and actively manage the Council's reputation.

3. Summary of the peer challenge approach

3.1. The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Lead Member Peer (Conservative), Cllr William Nunn, East of England Regional peer - Breckland Council
- Lead Member Peer (Labour), Cllr Sir Steve Houghton, Leader, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Lead Officer Peer, Susie Kemp, Chief Executive – Swindon Borough Council
- Senior Officer Peer, Kate Martin, Executive Director of Place – Southampton City Council
- Senior Officer Peer, Kate Waterhouse, Chief Information Officer – Bury Metropolitan Council
- LGA Officer Peer, Voke Oniovo, Programme support officer – Cyber security
- LGA Peer Challenge Manager – Kirsty Human
- LGA Project Support Officer – Simisola Rasheed Name and role/job title

Finance Diagnostic

- LGA Financial Improvement and Sustainability Adviser - Julie Parker
FCPFA

3.2. Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its

- priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
 3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
 4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
 5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to provide feedback on:

6. **Delivery ambition** - How can Thurrock Council continue to deliver high quality services to residents whilst investing in the regeneration of place with significantly less resources and capacity? What options are there for working with the community, business and voluntary sector to deliver services in the future.

3.3. The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. A robust and rigorous financial diagnostic was undertaken over six days in December 2021 to provide the peer team with a focused and detailed analysis of Thurrock Councils financial planning and management. Meetings were held with the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors for Resources, Adults and Children's services, the Deputy

Leader and Finance portfolio holder and consultant reviewing Transformation. A comprehensive suite of documents, plans and financial accounts were also analysed and discussed. The team then spent two days virtually and two days onsite at Thurrock Council, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from 37 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 125 people including a range of council staff together with members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members.

4. Feedback

4.1. Delivery Ambition

There is a phenomenal amount of ambition and growth in Thurrock. Situated on the north side of the River Thames bordering Essex, Kent and East London and with excellent rail and road links, the Council is perfectly positioned as an economic growth hub.

With the largest UK Freeport, two successful Towns Fund allocations (Tilbury £22.8m and Grays £19.9m), the lower Thames crossing, several major infrastructure projects (including the A13 widening and Stanford-le-Hope Interchange) and Corringham Integrated Medical Centre (IMC) (one of four) there is a huge amount of delivery and it was clear the Council is doing its utmost to simultaneously manage this complex portfolio of programmes and project delivery.

Peers heard that the “ambition is a blessing and a curse.” Balancing the delivery of these large projects whilst continuing to provide core services in the face of a challenging budget position and transformation programme is currently untenable. Partners and stakeholders expressed frustration at the lack of strategic vision, prioritisation and join up between such large infrastructure projects. With conversations taking place separately at the operational and strategic level without coordination or leadership.

The Council needs to develop a clear strategic growth plan which sets out the narrative and priorities for growth in Thurrock. Bringing together all the projects under one programme, aligned with economy, culture, community and wellbeing outcomes. The programme needs a timeline with appropriate milestones, governance, stakeholder engagement, resourcing, outcomes and communications strategy.

Governance arrangements for the growth board are at an early stage with the Chief Executive providing corporate leadership and ownership. The board would be strengthened with representation from “people services” to align with education, health and community services – to ensure social and community/wellbeing outcomes are also secured and delivered as well as physical environmental changes. It would also enable one conversation to take place and move forward at pace.

The scale and skills required is beyond the Council’s current capacity and resources. Partners are really excited about this agenda and want to work with the Council and be part of the journey. Thurrock Council needs to stop putting its hands up and saying, “we’ll do that”, empower others to take the lead, secure help and share the workload. Thurrock doesn’t have to lead and drive everything – in fact, the Council risks excluding willing partners by continually doing this. The benefits of shared services to enable resilience, capacity, extra resourcing and knowledge/skills retention should be considered. Peers also encourage Thurrock to do more work on defining the type of strategic partner it wants to be for growth – for example, direct deliverer, enabler, commissioner, client or hybrid. There are many models which support limited capacity and technical expertise and there is no shame in accepting and welcoming help and support – be open to being open.

Taking the Freeport as an example. As the accountable body Peers understood that retained business rates from Thames Freeport will give the Council opportunity to invest £300m in projects to accelerate levelling-up outcomes in the area. However, the Council needs to consider the impact on its budget profile of forward funding £300m for the business rates. This is a high-risk model to pursue and goes against the backdrop of savings and transformation the Council is currently pursuing and more challenging economic conditions. The Freeport project is momentous and partners are keen to support it. Thurrock Council should therefore consider how the private sector and other local authority partners could help to reduce the risk in a way that demonstrates positive partnership working whilst respecting political locus.

The region strategically supports Thurrock. The Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) has brought together seven Councils across South Essex to deliver for the region and provide a platform to engage with national government. Over £11m has so far been provided by government for the five pioneer programmes: superfast digital connectivity, Thames Freeport, SEEPARK (South Essex Estuary Park), Infrastructure and housing and South Essex Technical University. The Thurrock chief executive plays a key role in chairing and leading the partnership, but partners would welcome more senior political engagement to strengthen the partnership.

Partners agreed that ASELA is a strategic partnership that can deliver at scale and pace across South Essex unachievable to each of them singularly – the power is in the collective. It was also clear this model of partnership working could be replicated elsewhere and should be promoted outside of Essex.

Thurrock has great examples of community engagement such as the “Your Place, Your Choice” consultation on the Local Plan and with the Princes Foundation in Aveley. The Councils “Inspire” youth service has also developed a [fantastic video](#) for young people to understand the context of Thurrock and the opportunities there are for them. The peer team suggest the Council replicate these projects and develop a communication and engagement plan to engage communities in the ambition for Thurrock. Communities want to know how regeneration; new businesses and the Freeport benefit them. Communicate the opportunities, jobs, skills and the social return on investment.

4.2. Local priorities and outcomes

There is so much to be proud of in Thurrock and from the Corporate Peer Challenge in 2011 to now, the journey of improvement is evident. The Council works hard to deliver the best services to its residents and this has been recognised and rewarded with many accolades and awards from external bodies.

The Council is delivering high quality services, with Children’s rated good in the 2019 [Ofsted inspection](#) and a recent [focused visit](#) found “Thurrock Council continues to provide effective, responsive services for vulnerable children. Children have remained a key focus for Councillors and they continue to be a corporate priority. Performance in Adults, Planning and Revenues services is also to be applauded as

is the approach to community focussed/based health services. In general performance when compared with CIPFA neighbours is above average in many areas ([LG Inform Report](#)).

The People, Place and Prosperity plan sets out the Councils vision and priorities and is recognised by staff and partners. The Backing Thurrock, Economic Development Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and emerging Local Plan, interconnect to provide further themed strategic direction. What peers felt was missing was an overarching 'place narrative' for Thurrock. The Statement of Intent, due to be published in summer 2022 and continued work to secure the Local Plan could be the missing links, as long as communities, Councillors, partners and stakeholders are collectively engaged. It must not be a document developed in isolation then presented for consultation. There needs to be real co-design on a shared understanding of what Thurrock will look like in the future and how everyone contributes to achieving this. Thurrock has a strong record in this area and should continue to build on this.

Once the Council has agreed its direction, there must be a rigorous prioritisation exercise. As previously mentioned, there is too much to do and not enough resources or capacity to do it. There is an urgent need to prioritise the workplan and agree what has to be delivered, sequentially and use the transformation programme to shape the Council to deliver this in the most efficient way possible. Thurrock Council should have more confidence in itself and each other so that when the priorities are agreed the council can work as one to deliver.

Although major incidents are planned for, it is never expected that so many would hit one Council at once. The Council's response to the pandemic, people trafficking tragedy, power loss to a residential home and a chemical spillage at a Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations (COMAH) site, comprehensively tested the Councils skills and resilience. The blue light services in Thurrock praised the Councils "excellent" response and ability to "get things done."

Partners involved in the pandemic response also commended the Council on its swift call to action, setting up Thurrock Coronavirus Community Action (TCCA) with the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS), supporting schools, care homes, local test and trace, redeploying staff, coordinating briefings and supporting the wider area with

data modelling. The Council really came together and demonstrated how it can work collaboratively, put trust in others and transform at pace.

Thurrock Council has a good reputation for engaging with its communities - "Your Place, Your Choice", Aveley and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy campaign around the Local Plan was well received. Use the Local Area Coordinators and Community Builders to ensure the voice of all residents is heard in strategic planning. Peers also heard that communities want to see the output and outcomes from their engagement, for example from the Local Plan which was some time ago now. It's challenging but keep the momentum and excitement going.

Services want to be more engaged in cross cutting strategies. Consider the added value the growth/economy and inward investment can provide for local communities from involving children's services with the economic development plans. The investment in housing, youth centres and other facilities will help to create a "feel good factor" whilst also meeting the Council's duties under its corporate parent role to help children and families in deprived areas. There was evidence from the Freeport work that opportunities for care leavers and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) learners had already been considered, with apprenticeships and work experience built into the social value offer. This should be celebrated and expanded. However, ensure the demands from the planned economic growth are modelled and fully understood, for example what will be the demands in terms of school places and social care?

Although the Council has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Delivery Plan, this is not fully embedded. There appears to be a focus on delivery targets rather than outcomes. In building the new transformation programme there needs to be a stronger link between activity and how this will reduce inequalities. The staff networks want to be engaged and could add real value to this agenda. This could also be a way of drawing in Children's and Adult's Improvement Plans. Partners felt that some of the reason for this is that the areas of deprivation have improved, but there remain pockets of multi-generation unemployment which need attention, particularly bearing in mind County Lines, Gangs and Anti-Social Behaviour/Youth Violence.

The Council declared a Climate Emergency in October 2019. A positive cross party Climate Change Partnership Group (CCPG) was established to support the

embedding of carbon reduction in all areas of council activity and consider ways to maximise local benefits. The group has solid political support and a small officer team. Despite the pandemic, the group have met and are just a few months away from publishing a delivery plan. Peers encourage the group to continue embedding its work throughout the organisation, tying in engagement with all services and the transformation agenda. It is also worth exploring the strategies of neighbouring local authorities on this agenda to investigate the benefits of joint applications to government for grants and funding.

4.3. Organisational and place leadership

Thurrock Council has come a long way since 2011 and is now very much outward looking, seizing opportunities (Towns Fund) and expanding partnership arrangements (ASELA, Thames Estuary Growth Board, Thames Freeport and Stronger Together Partnership). The Council has led bids bringing millions of pounds of investment into the borough.

Thurrock is growing at rapid pace and the Council needs to be involved in the many partnership boards to influence the direction of this. Peers heard from partners and stakeholders that whilst the Council is represented at officer level, they want to see more political leadership involved in driving the agenda locally, regionally and nationally.

Thurrock is critical to UK plc, but at present there is no government delivery package. Multiple conversations are taking place with Government departments at many levels, but there isn't a single voice sharing the political vision, opportunities of collective growth programmes and harnessing cross department support and technical/project/strategic resourcing. The scale of what is needed, needs to be underpinned through collaboration and leadership with partners and Government who are willing to offer support.

The retirement of the Director of Place allowed savings to be made by reallocating the functions of the Directorate across other members of Directors Board with the intention of "Place Delivery" becoming a cross-cutting agenda across all areas of the Council. However, with such a huge growth agenda, peers believe this weakens governance and is a risk that has impacted strategically and operationally on the leadership and strategic coordination for growth, including capacity, enabling and

joint conversations locally, regionally and nationally.

Peers recommend a figurehead is identified to lead this agenda with the separation and immediate realignment of strategic place functions (enabling sustainable growth) and place and neighbourhood management functions (front-line place management /operations/ customer services). By grouping these functions in various ways across the organisation currently, it creates confusion for strategic partners, potential missed opportunities for financial and efficiency of front-line services for residents, resilience, capacity and customer focus. Having the right people at the right fora will support the collective empowered leadership sought from the Council.

There is a strong network of CVS in Thurrock however they struggle to understand the vision for the place and are looking to the Council to facilitate the creation of a clear sense of purpose which will drive commissioning decisions - allowing the partners to add maximum value. Ensure this is captured as part of the new Statement of Intent and bring Thurrock together in one place.

Historical relationships between the voluntary sector and the Council have been weakened by Covid. Although the emergency response has been excellent, restrictions on mixing and the impact on officer capacity has meant that some of the business-as-usual work has stalled. This needs reinvigorating with clear organisational leadership which puts the community and voluntary sector at the heart of demand management.

There was a sense from the CVS that there was a reticence to engage with them on the budget position in an open and constructive way. However, they felt that by taking time to celebrate successes they could identify innovative ways of working together to create sustainable models for the future. This should be at the heart of the Public Sector Reform work which is currently at an early stage. The strengths based, community first offer in adults services was quoted as a good example which with further scoping and programme management as part of the Councils “Think Family – Whole System Approach” could be implemented across other services.

Both of these points came down to the time available for officers and Councillors to genuinely engage with the CVS and with residents. Although there are good examples of past community engagement, partners spoke of residents feeling “done to” in terms of decision making but recognised this was due to volume of work and

the fact there is rarely time for collaborative co-design with residents given the pace at which the Council has to work. Partners spoke of working together to build a bridge from successful operational delivery to shared medium/long term planning. Using the new Collaborative Communities Framework, make time to redefine these connections and build up the trust and productive relationships required.

4.4. Governance and culture

Peers spoke with many officers and Councillors across the Council to understand relationships and behaviours. Views were mixed, “toxic politics” was referenced, but there were also signs of good cross party working, a good example is the climate change partnership group. Overall, there was resounding agreement that relationships needed to continue to be built on to improve the culture of the organisation and Councillors needed to take responsibility for their own learning and development.

Councillors want to receive more information, for example, through briefings such as those provided during the pandemic, which were welcomed. They want to come together more with officers, informally to discuss projects and casework. And they would like to be cited on the outcome of issues fed into the member enquiries portal.

Officers would like to see more medium to long-term strategic planning and annual prioritisation – an issue exacerbated by the cycle of elections in thirds. They need a narrative for the borough – to know what the Council doing and how are they doing it. And to have a collaborative discussion around disinvestments.

In order to achieve these requests, peers recommend the Council makes time for some facilitated political and officer top team development. With separate sessions to understand each other’s roles and responsibilities followed by joint sessions to recognise and acknowledge differences and to build richer trusted relationships. Thought should be given to how to build and develop more informal relationships which will be essential as the Council moves forward with tough decisions. Consideration should also be given to the benefits of all out elections given the direction of travel and need to plan longer term.

The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet form of governance with six overview and scrutiny committees in addition to the usual committees and task and finish

groups. Whilst there was general consensus that this works, there were concerns the number of meetings overall, did not allow enough time for the agendas of each to be fully discussed – there are only two days per month with no meetings. This was specifically raised in relation to the overview and scrutiny committees, with a view fewer committees would allow more time for the remaining ones to meet and consider more items. A review of these arrangements would ensure the Council's political governance is congruent with the Council's delivery vision and ambitions.

Thurrock Council takes a pre-decision scrutiny approach with reports for Cabinet decision going first via scrutiny. Reviewing decisions before they are made provides an important means to influence those decisions and to improve them. However, it appears the original purpose for this process has become confused with the quality of scrutiny variable between committees and many Councillors now see it as a pre-cabinet meeting. The Council would benefit from a review of its governance arrangements to consider:

- the role, relationship and interplay between each element
- more cross cutting portfolios to ensure economic, community, wellbeing, partnerships financial linkages and opportunities are fully realised to support and underpin the sustainable growth and corporate plan ambitions
- clearer and more robust governance and a culture of challenge and scrutiny.

The governance review would also help address concerns the roles of backbench Councillors were being overlooked, with fewer reports to Council for them to participate in and debate. Non exec Councillors also wished to see more detail in public reports to help support their understanding of the challenges facing the Council. Peers recommend the relationships between Cabinet, Scrutiny and Council are clarified, along with the roles and responsibilities of each. Consideration should be given to the role of all Councillors in setting policy, engaging on key decisions such as the budget and ensuring they are on board with the Councils strategic direction – with Councillors accountable for their own actions and behaviours in response to this.

Partners described the Council as “straightforward, candid and focused on delivery”. Peers also heard the phrase “we are doers, at Thurrock we get things done”. This is a good reflection of the Councils culture. However, staff are understandably

exhausted following the demands of the past two years and are now saying, “the doers have too much to do” confirming the point that prioritisation is key to future delivery.

The Council has some great ambassadors within the Corporate Workforce Group and Directorate Workforce Groups (DWG). Peers heard how the groups enable two-way conversation up and down the organisation and effect change. They are also involved in shortlisting the nominations for annual staff awards. Peers encourage the council to keep supporting and developing these groups and complete the roll out of DWG to all directorates/services.

Feedback from the Staff Networks confirmed the Council is engaging with all seven (soon to be eight) groups in terms of shaping key equality, diversity and inclusivity-related work and policies and marking local and national/international events throughout the year. They are keen to build on this by making more significant contributions to Equality Impact Assessments to achieve genuine inclusive growth. Their involvement to date has been sporadic and they would appreciate feedback on their input.

Staff welcomed the Chief Executive’s weekly blog and #TeamThurrock weekly e-newsletter, however, this was seen as top-down communication without a right of reply. It was also mentioned this was not available to staff without IT and that some messages are being heard through the media before corporate communications. There is now a need for staff to hear directly from the Leader and Chief executive, standing side by side, focussing on communicating organisational priorities, the change journey and updates on challenges/next steps with opportunities for staff to engage and ask questions and be part of future problem solving. Exploring ways to deliver such sessions as soon as possible is key to winning hearts and minds.

4.5. Financial planning and management

The Council’s investment strategy has served it well in recent years raising over £115m, it helped to increase historically low reserves (from £8m to £24m) and even during the pandemic it continued to raise funds, given the nature of the investments (renewable energy). Due to the changes in government rules on how councils can invest, this strategy is now paused. This leaves the Council with significant budgetary pressures over the short to medium term and it feels like the Council is now at a

critical point where the ambition far exceeds the reality of the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS).

In recent years, budgets have been managed and balanced using a mix of underspends, carry forwards and reserves. For 2020/21, Children's services were on budget and other services underspent, with £9m of carry forwards the Council was able to create a buffer going into 2021/22. At Q2 in 2021/22 children's services were overspending, mainly offset by others underspending. There is a £3.3m planned use of reserves. With many one-off mitigations and the use of reserves, the challenge for the Council will be to pull the spend down and manage without the one-off mitigations – although concerningly children's and adults' services told peers they are unable to do this (Thurrock is already among the lowest spending per adult for adult social care across the country.)

The projected draft position for 2022/23 is balanced, by potentially using more reserves than previous years and having a much larger level of savings to achieve. For 2023/24 there is no clear way forward and there are likely to be insufficient reserves available to use. The ongoing use of reserves is also not sustainable or good practice, current projections have the potential to reduce the earmarked reserves to £2.4m by 31/3/23. The Council is currently forecasting a £8.9m gap for 2023/24 and a further gap of £5.4m in 2024/25 that will need to be bridged. This is a sizable gap for the council to bridge in 2023/24 with ongoing measures if it is to get to a sustainable financial position.

Areas of particular concern include:

- Transformation – digital/cross cutting projects (approx. £1.8m). How realistic are they and is there enough detail to support the planned savings? There is a risk that they are not owned and if savings are top sliced will they be delivered for the activity described?
- Centrally held savings - there was differing feedback regarding how the £4m savings from vacancies was treated in the budget.
- Cross cutting savings that appear to be from top slicing - accountability and ownership for their delivery needs to be clear as does their cumulative impact.
- The adequacy of the growth levels for children's and adults in 2023/24

onwards – this is significantly below the expected national level but does appear to take on board the ongoing implications of the 2021/22 in year pressures.

- It appears that no provision is being made for any income losses due to the ongoing impact of covid beyond 2021/22.
- The adequacy of the financial position to underpin the profile of borrowing and business rates growth to sustain the Freeport proposition medium-term sustainable growth plans and projections in the current format.

In addition, there are challenges, similar to many other councils that need addressing:

- Impact of the need to provide Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) on investments.
- Impact of the adult social care white paper
- Increasing demands and complexity of cases in children's and adults
- Ongoing impact of covid on income and demand pressures
- The opportunity that the Freeport could bring, will bring challenges as it could potentially require borrowing of up to £300m for investments, funded by business rate income. This will further increase the councils borrowing and the risks that brings, while also appearing to be in conflict with a programme of savings across the council and more limited in scope agreements for joint 'financial pooling' and risk sharing partnerships.
- Residential growth projections and how this may support medium-term income through council tax

The Council recognises that significant further work is needed to identify and deliver additional savings that can be achieved through a wider transformation programme. This has led to a mostly financially driven transformation programme which seeks to reduce costs with a narrative largely focused around reducing posts rather than holistically reviewing the organisation and considering future service design. This narrative needs to change.

The limited savings required for 2021/22 (£5.7m) do not require much proactive

action, so the Council does not have a track record to evidence it can deliver savings at scale. Delivering the savings and bridging the gaps in 2023/24 and 2024/25 will require a level of management, control and focus never experienced before. Peers identified this as the number one priority for the directors' board urging them to make the time and space required to understand the detail and work together. The infrastructure and pace needed to ensure the £14.2m savings in 2022/23 are delivered is not to be underestimated. It needs to be everyone's priority not just the finance team. If the savings are not achieved, it adds further pressure and risk to subsequent years.

The Council has a good relationship with its external auditors. There were no qualifications or VFMs last year. There is a good ecosystem around audit and fraud and it is used to support improvement. The Audit Committee works well and is positively challenging but fair. Peers were pleased to hear there is currently one independent person on the Audit Committee but recommend the Council give consideration to adding another with commercial skills to ensure good governance and due diligence around future business cases.

It became clear that not all Councillors fully understood and respected the magnitude of the financial challenge ahead and the difficult decisions and strategy required to address it. For example, Councillors were celebrating the £20m taken out of the capital programme following a fundamental review of the programme, an inconsequential sum given the substantial size of the overall programme (£200m for 2021/22). It is, therefore, essential that all Councillors are appropriately engaged with financial planning to ensure good governance, informed decision making, agreed narrative and solidarity with the challenges facing the Council. Peers recommend informal briefings, further detail in published reports and improved oversight of commercial/investment activity, Thurrock Regeneration Ltd, treasury management and the capital programme. The capital programme monitoring processes need to be strengthened with convincing business cases, approval gateways, effective reporting and a strong programme management office (PMO) function. Due diligence and alignment of financial and programme management reporting are important and crucial for what the council decides to do next.

Peers acknowledge it is a tough financial environment for local government and Thurrock Council have been fortunate to have skilled and entrepreneurial staff who

seized opportunities to raise income, top up reserves and deliver award winning services during austerity. However, the strategy now has to change and the Council is facing the painful decisions that many others have already confronted. You need to make time to focus on the finances, prioritise, ensure everyone is on the same page and deliver the savings for 2022/23 to get on the front foot for 2023/24.

4.6. Capacity for improvement

The Council refreshed its vision and priorities, People Place and Prosperity in September 2021 to set the direction of the Council. A cross council transformation programme - prospectus for change - is now the key enabler to deliver this strategy and align to the values of PPP.

People are a critical component of this strategy and the Council has developed a range of policies to support its identity and further change over the next three years. Linking to the Customer Services Strategy, Digital Strategy and MTFs, the People strategy details the behaviours, values and skills expected. There is an opportunity following the Peer Challenge to consider how culture, culture change, diversity and inclusion and workforce planning can strengthen the strategy.

Through the Leadership and Management Framework there are the tools to attract and develop talent, succession plan and grow existing staff. The reverse mentoring programme is innovative and has the potential to enhance the Councils equality and diversity programme if fully supported. This along with the Talent Pools will facilitate the Council developing a management culture in line with its new values.

The building blocks are in place to support staff to feel part of the next phase of transformation, for example, the Digital Academy, Change Leads and recognition of the need to have mental health and wellbeing support in place to help staff deal with the change and be part of it. The Council is also taking the results of the Staff Survey seriously and listening to what staff need. The unions reported a positive relationship with the Council although recognising there are challenges ahead for their members.

To date, transformation has been mainly financially driven and led individually by services or through corporate projects. There is now a need to bring together the disparate corporate and service transformation plans into one strategic transformation programme, co-designed with staff and aligned with organisational

priorities. The Directors Board and Cabinet then needs to create the space “Step Back and Look Up” to drive this cross-council transformation plan as one. The delivery of this plan is critical to the realisation of savings the Council needs to achieve. Peers recognise transformation is hard and don't underestimate the challenge Thurrock Council faces in undertaking this.

Councillors and stakeholders need to be engaged throughout the transformation journey and agreeing the process for this upfront will ensure there is the appropriate consultation, buy in, political oversight and governance in place.

Don't be tempted to take out the business intelligence, data strategy and programme management capacity as part of the efficiencies. It may be possible to review this later, but at the moment capacity in these areas is crucial to tracking delivery programmes and the social, economic and community outcomes.

The Council has effective business intelligence functions distributed across the organisation and there are well respected teams in public health, housing, adults and children's services. Whilst recognising the professional specialisms it would be useful to look at the balance of this resource and whether more could be done to strengthen corporate intelligence to hard wire this insight in strategic planning and performance management.

The Council has a strong IT & Digital function however the disparate ownership of IT infrastructure is a limiting factor within the transformation programme. As part of the revised transformation programme there is a need to broaden understanding of the benefits of a digital-first approach in terms of efficiencies from deep integration between key business systems, particularly in terms of data management and improve business intelligence. This needs to be positioned in terms of how these changes could improve outcomes for residents as well as creating efficiencies.

As referenced throughout, Thurrock Council has much to be proud of and is delivering above and beyond what can be usually expected for a single Council. Sadly, the positive communications put out from the Council are often overshadowed by negative local and national media outlets. Consider strengthening corporate capacity around communications (internal/external) to further celebrate success throughout the organisation. Develop a bold proactive communications strategy with a focus on public relations and destination marketing for sustainable growth which

puts Thurrock on the front foot, protects your reputation and reinforces core messages.

5. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a six-month progress review. This will be a facilitated session which creates space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

In the meantime, Rachel Litherland, Principal Adviser for the East of England is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Rachel is available to discuss any further support the council requires.

Rachel.Litherland@local.gov.uk, 07795 076834.

Thurrock Council – Corporate Peer Challenge 2022 action plan

Recommendation	Summary of key points	Actions
<p>Recommendation #1.</p> <p>Prioritise the Thurrock Ambition.</p> <p>Agree what type of council you want to be and use this to drive transformation and culture change.</p> <p>Prioritise what you want to deliver within the budget available and agree on the disinvestments.</p>	<p>The council needs to develop a clear strategic growth plan which sets out the narrative and priorities for growth in Thurrock. Bringing together all the projects under one programme, aligned with economy, culture, community and wellbeing outcomes. The programme needs a timeline with appropriate milestones, governance, stakeholder engagement, resourcing, outcomes and communications strategy.</p> <p>The council needs to stop, review what type of council it wants to be, and prioritise accordingly.</p> <p>The council also needs to urgently discuss and agree a programme of disinvestments to support this priority setting.</p>	<p>The existing vision and priorities – People, Place and Prosperity – still stand with delivery reflected in the council's 3 main strategies (Backing Thurrock, Local Plan and Health and Wellbeing Strategy).</p> <p>An overarching growth narrative will be set out in the Statement of Intent 2030 supported by economic growth modelling.</p> <p>Develop an overarching Strategic Transformation Programme (STP) to also include significant growth projects and alignment to overarching priorities.</p> <p>Delivered through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) – prioritisation and disinvestment is part of the budget setting process for 2023/24.</p>
<p>Recommendation #2.</p> <p>Financial stability/resilience and sustainability</p> <p>Corporately own and understand the financial information, align the MTFS with the ambition and priorities and effectively deliver the savings.</p>	<p>Delivering the savings and bridging the gaps in 2023/24 and 2024/25 will require a level of management, control and focus never experienced before. Peers identified this as the number one priority for the directors' board.</p> <p>All councillors need to understand the scale of challenge and be equipped with further financial information and analysis to inform oversight and future decision-making.</p>	<p>Members will continue to be engaged in terms of decision-making.</p>

Recommendation	Summary of key points	Actions
<p>Recommendation #3.</p> <p>Agree and deliver a cross council transformation programme</p> <p>Corporately own and understand the whole transformation programme, ensuring a strong governance framework to drive through the improvements.</p>	<p>To date, transformation has been mainly financially driven and led individually by services or through corporate projects. There is now a need to bring together the disparate corporate and service transformation plans into one strategic transformation programme, co-designed with staff and aligned with organisational priorities.</p> <p>As part of the revised transformation programme there is a need to broaden understanding of the benefits of a digital-first approach in terms of efficiencies from deep integration between key business systems, particularly in terms of data management and improve business intelligence. This needs to be positioned in terms of how these changes could improve outcomes for residents as well as creating efficiencies.</p>	<p>Reshape the existing transformation work into a new, overarching Strategic Transformation Programme (STP) to also include significant growth projects, alignment to overarching priorities, with appropriate governance arrangements in place including an effective engagement strategy.</p> <p>This will form part of the STP including appropriate new governance structures and link to culture change.</p>
<p>Recommendation #4.</p> <p>Strengthen corporate leadership, organisational culture and member/officer relationships.</p> <p>Make time for facilitated conversations, be clear on roles and responsibilities and describe and then</p>	<p>Councillors want to receive more information – for example, briefings such as those provided during the pandemic. They want to come together more with officers, informally to discuss projects and casework.</p> <p>Officers would like to see more medium to long-term strategic planning and annual prioritisation.</p>	<p>A new regular member briefing to be launched to replace the COVID-19 briefing and cover other strategic updates and information.</p> <p>Support from the LGA has been offered to support ongoing member development.</p> <p>Joint informal sessions of Directors' Board and Cabinet will continue.</p> <p>The Engagement Strategy and its implementation will also support this and organisational culture change.</p>

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Recommendation	Summary of key points	Actions
<p>demonstrate the culture you want to achieve.</p>	<p>A governance review to consider roles and relationships between each committee/meeting, their responsibilities, and so on.</p>	<p>A governance review of the constitution is underway through a cross-party Constitution Working Group. An initial report is due to be considered by General Services Committee at its meeting on 14 June 2022 and then full Council on 29 June 2022.</p>
<p>Recommendation #5.</p> <p>Harness the partnerships offer – from local to regional and national.</p> <p>Define the partner you want to be in different scenarios and accept or secure help from others.</p>	<p>Do more work on defining the type of strategic partner the council wants to be for growth – for example, direct deliverer, enabler, commissioner, client or hybrid.</p>	<p>An overarching growth narrative will be set out in the Statement of Intent 2030.</p> <p>As part of the STP, services continue to consider the key provision questions and options around delivery, this will form part of the service review and cross-cutting work of the council.</p>
<p>Recommendation #6.</p> <p>Shape and promote the collective narrative.</p> <p>Drive proactive communications which celebrate your success and actively manage the Council's reputation.</p>	<p>The council should [...] develop a communication and engagement plan to engage communities in the ambition for Thurrock. Communities want to know how regeneration, new businesses and the Freeport benefit them. Communicate the opportunities, jobs, skills and the social return on investment.</p>	<p>The Statement of Intent 2030 will establish the overall narrative with activity over the summer to engage partners and communities in how it will be achieved. This will be supported by a comprehensive communications plan for growth and placemaking with specific activity also planned across Thames Freeport partners from September 2022.</p> <p>Further Local Plan engagement will also take place in 2022.</p> <p>Further embed the Collaborative Communities Framework</p>

Recommendation	Summary of key points	Actions
	<p>Partners spoke of working together to build a bridge from successful operational delivery to shared medium/long term planning. Using the new Collaborative Communities Framework, make time to redefine these connections and build up the trust and productive relationships required.</p> <p>Consider strengthening corporate capacity around communications – internal and external – to further celebrate success throughout the organisation.</p>	<p>External support has been secured to strengthen the approach to policy analysis and stakeholder engagement more broadly and align to existing communications capacity and more strategic, proactive and positive communication activity linked closely to the council's overall ambition and priorities.</p>