

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 July 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Graham Snell (Chair), Paul Arnold (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, Colin Churchman, Victoria Holloway and John Kent

In attendance: David Johnson, Interim Assistant Director Property
Gerard McCleave, Assistant Director Economic Growth and Partnerships
Sarah Welton, Strategy Manager
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed, with the recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2022 were approved as a true and correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

4. Asset Review and 3Rs

The Interim Assistant Director Property introduced the report and stated that it was being presented to Committee ahead of Cabinet submission later in the month. He explained that the report followed a Cabinet decision from July 2021, which had declared some assets as surplus and had generated £9.3 million in capital receipts, as well as rationalising the Council's property portfolio. He commented that the report was split into four sections: pieces of land the council held which were considered to have no beneficial use; operational assets such as children's centres; scout huts which were leased to the Scout Association; and village halls. The Interim Assistant Director Property explained that the scout huts and village halls would be given to the relevant committees and trustees for a peppercorn, which would ensure that they could access grants and funding not currently available to them.

The Interim Assistant Director Property highlighted land in Purfleet colloquially known as VOSA on Tank Hill Road, which could be suitable land for housing

and could be looked at by Thurrock Regeneration Limited (TRL) or the housing regeneration team. He explained that if the site was not suitable for housing the team would look to dispose for capital receipts. The Interim Assistant Director Property moved on and outlined the former landfill site at Buckingham Hill which surrounded the civic amenity site. He stated that the site was 52 acres and was currently fallow and could be suitable for leasehold development. He moved on and described the former depot site at Curzon Drive which had had buildings demolished three years ago and was currently sat unused. He explained that the site was relatively valuable and could generate approximately £170,000 in terms of leasehold rental income, and therefore would need a Cabinet decision for disposal. He stated that the report also contained several public houses, some of which were assets of community value or had long leases left, which meant that the council would struggle to develop these in a profitable way. He added that a number of leaseholders had enquired about purchasing the sites as this would make it easier for the owners to develop the sites. He explained that there was one site within the Purfleet regeneration area that had been identified for short term lease, which would not impact upon the development of the Purfleet area, but required delegation due to the amount of revenue that could be created.

The Interim Assistant Director Property moved on and explained that there were also two care home sites, operated by Runwood Homes, which the Council were conflicted on as the Council were the main client and also freeholder, which could make the finances difficult to manage. He added that the sites were currently under rented by approximately £100-125,000, but the Council could dispose of the sites to earn capital receipts whilst also remaining the main client. He stated that the land adjacent to Essex Arena was currently lying fallow, but also required a Cabinet decision due to delegations, and could be used for a future residential scheme. The Interim Assistant Director Property added that the strip of land between Tank Hill Road, as well as the former Whiteacres site on Daiglen Drive, outlined in the report could also be used for future residential development through the Council 's HRA or TRL.

The Interim Assistant Director Property moved on and outlined appendix two of the report. He explained that the appendix highlighted a number of children's centres, for example Aveley and Stanford-Le-Hope, which were former Victorian school buildings and therefore had high rates of capital expenditure. He stated that due to the age of the buildings and their current use as a nursery, the team felt the council were not the best landlord, and these sites could generate capital revenue without affecting their ongoing use. He added that Purfleet children's centre was also in the report as the team had received expressions of interest for the freehold. He moved onto appendix 3 and listed scout huts in the borough, most of which had been developed with community funding and were on land leased to the Scout Association by the council. He explained that most of those leases were now approaching termination date and due to new legislation regarding EPC's, the council were not able to grant new leases, unless the condition of the current buildings were substantially improved or replaced, which the council did not

have the funds to undertake. He added that the Scout Association were able to take over the freehold regardless of the EPC, which would enable them to access additional funding and grants not currently open to them due to the Council's freehold position. The Interim Assistant Director Property summarised and highlighted Appendix 4 of the report, which outlined the village halls. He stated that the village halls were expensive for the Council to run, and the village hall committees could not access community funding as the village hall was not at risk of loss. He added that the village hall leases were also quite restrictive in terms of sub-letting and uses, so disposal of these properties would mean that village halls could have more control over the site and could run them as they see fit, whilst being protected as a community asset.

Councillor Kent queried the recommendations and asked what the purpose of the report was. The Interim Assistant Director Property responded that as the report was being submitted to Cabinet for approval, the report required pre-scrutiny by the Committee to ensure the assets listed were suitable to be declared as surplus. Councillor Kent highlighted recommendation 1.2 and asked what the revenue savings were for 2021/22 from rationalisations. The Interim Assistant Director Property stated that revenue savings had been made through the disposal of sites such as Richmond Road, the former Meals on Wheels site, and the Thameside Theatre, and would provide the exact figures after the meeting. Councillor Kent asked when a full report on the Thameside Theatre would be presented to the Committee as the original date was July. The Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Partnerships explained that the team had been in a process, working with a Community Interest Company as they developed their business case for the Thameside Complex. He commented that as part of that process the team were required to advertise that an asset for community transfer was available, and a second expression of interest had been received. He explained that the second expression of interest should have the same opportunity to develop a detailed proposal or business plan, and therefore a report would be brought to Committee later in the year once these business plans had been received, reviewed and the process had concluded. Councillor Kent highlighted the Buckingham Hill site and felt concerned that the landfill site, which was currently in use, would be declared surplus. He also felt concerned regarding the proposal to dispose of land in Purfleet given the Council's regeneration scheme. Councillor Kent added that some village hall committees would not be able to manage the maintenance and village hall buildings, and sought reassurance that the village hall committees would be offered support and to ensure they could manage running their village halls. The Interim Assistant Director Property stated that the former landfill extended to 52 acres compared to the current civic amenity site which was only two acres in size. He stated the proposal in the report only considered the former landfill site, but could have an impact on the current landfill site and conversations with the environment team would be ongoing. He added that the current site could be moved or improved to ensure an effective and efficient site and increased revenue. He commented that the Corys Wharf site in Purfleet would only be a short-term lease to ensure that PTRL could continue their regeneration proposals in Purfleet. The Interim Assistant Director Property stated that the

Vosa Site in Purfleet was out of the PTRL area, although remained important to Purfleet regeneration and both teams could work together to develop. He stated the assets and communities' teams would undertake lots of work with village hall committees to ensure they were run successfully, and the asset transfer was a benefit to village halls. He explained that not every village hall committee would have the ability or experience to run their village hall, but the team would work with successful committees to share knowledge and best practice with those less able.

Councillor Arnold questioned what would happen if the leaseholder chose not to take up the freehold, and how the team would move forward if this happened. The Interim Assistant Director Property stated that the team would explore the reasons why they would not take up the freehold, but there had been a number of expressions of interest in some of the proposed sites and community asset transfer requests for village halls. He added that if some village halls did not want to take up the freehold, then the Council would grant a 100 or 125 lease to the village hall before seeking to dispose on the open market. He added that covenants would also be added to the freehold to ensure the site remained for community use. Councillor Carter highlighted appendix 4 and asked if village halls generated income. The Interim Assistant Director Property explained that some were let for a peppercorn, and some generated an income of approximately £250 per annum for the leases. He stated that Thurrock Council still had to manage the leases, which could take a lot of officer's time.

Councillor Holloway felt that was their great value in supporting communities through village hall buildings. She questioned if the leaseholders of the sites had been involved in their proposed disposal, and how many had shown interest in taking over the freehold. She also queried what information would be provided to the leaseholders and when they would receive these packs. The Interim Assistant Director Property replied that many village halls and scout huts were already aware of the liabilities and responsibilities that came with the freehold, but the team would help these sites understand their commitments and work with the communities' team to ensure that village halls could be run successfully and could access community funds, such as CEDF. He added that sites would need to prepare a business case to ensure they understood the financial aspects of the asset transfer and their obligations. He understood that some education for village hall committees would need to occur and stated that the team would be able to help assist with this. He summarised and explained that if Cabinet declared the sites as surplus, the team would be contacting the sites and would follow the asset transfer policy to ensure they all understood the process and a collaborative approach would be undertaken. Councillor Holloway asked if an update report could be presented to the Committee later in the year.

The Chair asked if the Scout Association Representative would like to speak. The Scout Association Representative stated that generally the Scouts across the borough were in favour of the asset disposal. He explained that as the Scouts were only leaseholders, they had to spend time and effort renewing leases and agreeing rents with the Council, and the Scouts maintained their

own buildings whilst not owning the land. He stated that the Scouts maintained the buildings to a high standard, which were often used for other community projects, such as full-time nurseries and the Girl Guides. He stated that the asset disposal would open opportunities for the Scouts to access other grants and community funds, and could help village halls to set up committee and trustee boards.

The Chair agreed that an update report to the Committee would be presented to the Committee later in the year.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Noted the success of the 3Rs programme in generating capital receipts totalling £9.3m in the financial year 2021/22;

2. Noted the success of the previous review of operational properties in delivering revenue savings and identifying potential sites currently being developed by TRL and HRA;

3. Passed the report to Cabinet for the following decisions:

“Declare the operational properties in section 6.2 of the report surplus to requirements and receive a report back, where applicable, on the future of the sites and any alternative delivery consideration;

Declare surplus the properties as shown in Appendix 1, 2, 3 and 4; approve the release or re-use of the properties as outlined; and

Subject to the agreement to release the assets in Appendix 1, 2, 3 and 4; delegated authority of the disposal to the Corporate Director of Resources and Place Delivery, in consultation with the Leader and the completion of a delegated authority decision report.”

5. End of Year (April 2021 to March 2022) Corporate Performance Report 2021/22

The Strategy Manager introduced the report and stated that 67.5% of indicators had met target, which was better than 2020/21, but lower overall than the pre-COVID position. She explained that in 2021/22 some service delivery was still impacted by COVID, and this was outlined in the report. She added that it was anticipated that future report would not include a specific section on COVID impacts, but would be referenced in commentary if it continued to affect specific indicators. She added that commentary had been included for each Key Performance Indicator (KPI) which had missed target, and, because this was the end of year report, qualitative highlights had also been included at 3.4.

Councillor Kent highlighted page 79 and the KPI relating to the percentage of refuse bins collected on the correct day. He thanked the environment team for their hard work collecting bins throughout the year, and asked how the KPI

data was collected. The Strategy Manager explained that due to the strike action that occurred, the KPI did not include data for April and May 2022, but did include all other months. She added that the data was based on collection information from refuse lorries. Councillor Kent moved onto the KPI regarding payment of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) on page 81 and felt concerned about the lack of payment. He queried how many people chose not to pay the FPN and went to court instead. The Strategy Manager stated that she did not have the specific data so would ask the service leads and report back to the Committee. Councillor Kent queried the number of apprenticeships as outlined on page 84 and asked how many of those apprenticeships were completed. He felt concerned that some people were not completing apprenticeships as they became full-time Council employees, which meant people were not receiving the qualifications and Thurrock Adult Community College did not receive their completion funding. The Strategy Manager stated that she did not have the data but would come back to the Committee. She highlighted that the figure also included substantive members of Thurrock Council staff who were undertaking apprenticeships alongside their roles. Councillor Kent asked if the KPI could include numbers for people starting and finishing apprenticeships; and to recommend to Cabinet that apprentices who start at the Council and become full-time employees are encouraged to complete their apprenticeship qualification.

Councillor Carter thanked officers for the report and felt pleased to see that the majority of KPIs had met target. He highlighted page 79 of the report and stated that some KPIs had exceeded their target by a large amount. The Chair echoed Councillor Carter's comments. He felt pleased to see that COVID was not expected to affect as many services in future, and requested that any additional information requested be sent to the Committee as soon as possible. Councillor Hebb, Cabinet Member for Transformation and Performance, highlighted recommendation 1.3 to refresh the borough vision following changes in Thurrock such as Thames Freeport, and proposed central government changes to local authorities. He confirmed that this would also include a review of the related corporate performance framework and suggested a review of officer attendance at the Committee to ensure that additional information could be responded to on the night.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Noted and commented upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators, in particular those areas which did not reach their target and the impact of COVID-19.**
- 2. Identified any areas which require additional consideration in 2022/23 as part of the refresh of the council's corporate performance framework.**
- 3. Noted the commencement of a refresh of the borough forward vision, and underlying key priorities and key performance indicators, reflecting a modern Thurrock (inclusive of major infrastructure investment through the Towns Funds and Thames Freeport).**

6. Work Programme

Councillor Hebb asked if three items could be added to the Work Programme:

1. Analysis of enquiries which come in from residents and elected Members, for example a report on the interactions between the Council and elected Members/residents to identify any emerging themes and propose any necessary recommendations. Including customer service calls and emails; Member's enquiries; complaints and complements.
2. Customer Service, including the feasibility of a new Thurrock app in the medium to long term, to report missed bin collections, potholes, pay fines etc., whilst retaining face-to-face services.
3. Senior officer performance framework report – outlining how Members currently, and could further, contribute to the Chief Executive and senior officer performance appraisals.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer stated that she would liaise with senior officers and the Chair to include these on the Work Programme, where appropriate.

The Chair agreed that an updated Asset Review report would be added to the Work Programme in early 2023.

The meeting finished at 8.04 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**