

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 27 September 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Susan Little (Mayor), Qaisar Abbas (Deputy Mayor), John Allen, Alex Anderson, Deborah Arnold, Paul Arnold, Gary Byrne, Adam Carter, John Cecil, Daniel Chukwu, Gary Collins, George Coxshall, Tony Fish, Robert Gledhill, Aaron Green, James Halden (*arrived 7.20pm*), Vikki Hartstean, Mark Hooper, Mark Hurrell, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Ben Maney, Jacqui Maney, Cici Manwa, Fraser Massey, Valerie Morris-Cook, Sara Muldowney, Srikanth Panjala, Maureen Pearce, Terry Piccolo, Georgette Polley, Kairen Raper, Joycelyn Redsell, Sue Sammons, Sue Shinnick, Graham Snell, Neil Speight, Luke Spillman, James Thandi and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillors Jack Duffin, Tom Kelly, Augustine Ononaji and Elizabeth Rigby

In attendance: Dr Dave Smith, Chief Executive
Asmat Hussain, Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Gavin Jones, Commissioner, Essex County Council
Patrick McDermott, Chief of Staff to the Thurrock Commissioners
Matthew Boulter, Head of Democratic, Scrutiny and Member Services
Jayne Middleton-Albooye, Assistant Director Legal
Mark Bradbury, Interim Director of Place
Claire Demmel, Interim Director Public Realm
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
Alix MacFarlane, Communications Advisor - Intervention and Improvement
Steven Mair, Interim Chief Financial Officer/Section 151 Officer
Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Kerry Thomas, Chief Executive Business Manager
Ian Wake, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

51. Minutes

Minutes of Council held on the 26 July 2023 were approved as a correct record.

52. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

53. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Fish declared a non-pecuniary interest in regard to Item 13, Question 5, as he was a director at CVS.

54. Announcements on behalf of the Mayor or the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

- He had been proud to lay a wreath at the Grays Memorial to commemorate the Battle of Britain.
- Attended the Social Care Week event in Civic Offices where he had met some of Thurrock's fantastic foster carers and foster children.
- Encouraged members to book a slot at the Public Realm Directorate Away Day on the 6 October.
- Since April 2023, the council had cleared 1314 fly-tips, 1024 tonnes of litter removed from the streets of Thurrock, 11,500 tonnes of household waste that went to recycle, 2025 potholes filled and during August and September 2577 pot holes had been filled using the velocity jet patching

55. Questions from Members of the Public

The Mayor informed the chamber that 10 questions had been received from members of public.

From	To	Subject
Mr Atkins	Councillor Carter	Recognise the United Nations Convention on the right of a child
Mr Nixon	Councillor B Maney	Commit to support smaller locally led applications
Mr Perrin	Leader	Pecking order of council provided services
Ms Ramdenee	Councillor B Maney	Withdraw of 374 and 11 bus services
Ms Hadley	Councillor B Maney	Saving the 274 bus services
Ms Cuzner	Councillor B Maney	Students getting to and from Palmers College.
Ms Gunn	Councillor B Maney	Save our Bus Service
Ms Franklin	Councillor B Maney	Save our Bus Service
Ms Hattle	Councillor B Maney	How the subsidy for 374, 11 and 265 buses be spent
Mr Hattle	Councillor B Maney	This question fell due to Mr Hattle unable to attend.

At 7.20pm, Councillor Halden arrived in to the chamber.

56. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

The Mayor informed the chamber that three notices of petition had been received this evening:

Ms Kirstie Hattle presented her petition in regard to reinstating the 374 Bus Service for East Tilbury. Councillor B Maney acknowledged the petition.

Councillor Byrne presented his petition in regard to an independent inquiry into the financial collapse of Thurrock Council. The Leader acknowledged the petition.

Councillor Collins presented his petition in regard to anti-social behaviour in Balstonia Park, Homesteads. The Leader acknowledged the petition.

57. Petitions Update Report

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

58. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies, Statutory and Other Panels

The Mayor asked whether there were any changes to be made to the appointments previously made by committees and outside bodies, statutory and other panels.

The Leader, Councillor Jefferies, made the following change:

- Replaced Councillor Anderson with Councillor Gledhill on the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Leader of the Labour group, Councillor J Kent, made the following changes:

- Replaced Councillor Liddiard with Councillor Worrall on the Standards & Audit Committee.
- Replaced Councillors J Kent and Worrall with Councillors Liddiard and Hooper on the Investment Advisory Panel.
- Replaced Councillor Shinnick with Councillor Morris-Cook on the Health & Well Being Board.

Independent Councillors Allen, Byrne, Massey, Sammons, and Speight stated they had no changes to make.

59. Revised Annual Pay Policy Statement 2023/24

The Localism Act 2011 required the Council to publish an annual Pay Policy Statement, which must be approved by Council by 31st March each year. The Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24 was approved by Council on 1 March 2023, it applied a 4% pay increase for grades A – I. The report specified that senior manager pay would be reviewed and a further report submitted to Council.

The following points were raised:

- Member disappointed with the current position and had no pleasure or enthusiasm in stating there was no other alternative but to agree the recommendation.
- General Services Committee had originally unanimously agreed a pay freeze.
- Member stated his deep disappointment not to be a position to vote in favour of the paper this evening. The issue was not over the pay itself, it was as he considered more of a dubious process, where an investigation had been undertaken on the historic lack of challenge from members and poor and incorrect advice provided from certain officers. This should have been recognised as a constitutional red flag. Member detailed the path of the report and concluded Members had been given the incorrect advice on several occasions. Members noted the counsel advise had been exempt and could not be disclosed in this public meeting.
- Minutes from the 14 September 2023 extraordinary council would be updated to reflect the points of concern raised by Councillor Halden at that meeting.
- Member requested an apology to all members on the process taken, an outline of how it had happened and reassurance that this would not happen again. Where advise had been provided which was wrong had to be addressed.
- Member stated he could not vote in favour of the recommendation, based on previous advice, as this had been an entirely incorrect process, a process which had been challenged in the past. He was not confident that further errors were present and would abstain from the vote.
- Member questioned how many challenges from officers had been received and questioned what the repercussions could be.
- Member questioned whether senior officers deserved backdated pay.
- Member strongly disagreed with the recommendation, this was an absolute disgrace as it was this chamber and a collective body of senior management that had bankrupted the council.
- It was shocking that body could award itself or accept a 4% pay increase, was a lack of awareness.
- Member had resigned from cabinet as had lost faith in the advice being provided by officers.

- Member summed up by understanding some of the anger in the chamber this evening but stated it was not every officer that had bankrupted the council.
- Thurrock had to be that council that respected the rules of law and risks would not be taken to defend a policy that could not be defended.
- The advice previously provided was wrong and that was being addressed.
- Steps would be taken to ensure this would not happen again.

With 25 votes in favour, 5 votes against and 6 abstentions the recommendation was carried.

Members agreed the technology within the chamber had to be sorted before critical voting would be required.

The Mayor agreed to revert back to paper voting from October council.

60. Progress on Thurrock Council's Improvement and Recovery

This report provided Members with a progress update on the work to date to deliver the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan. This was the first in what would be quarterly reports to allow Members the opportunity to receive updates, scrutinise and provide constructive challenge to the delivery of the plan and Council's recovery overall.

The following points were raised:

- Member welcomed the report and that the report would be presented more regularly and asked for more substance. Noted the speed at which the managing director had set up the senior leadership team, the biggest challenge being faced was finance, the council required a radical change.
- Member touched on governance, scrutiny, and culture, with the best value inspection report referring to a lack of openness and transparency it was evident that this still existed within the council.
- Members referred to the cabinet pink paper reports being discussed in private session with some members not knowing what those parcels of land were and proved the council was not moving on from a culture of secrecy and insularity.
- Member and Officer relationships were improving but there were still member and member relationships which were just not good enough.
- Member referred to "recovery" which had to be more profound, the council needed to be reinvented and to reimagine what the borough meant, this would need a specific plan for growth. Such as businesses coming to Thurrock, developers building new homes for the future, growth of people who want to come to Thurrock to train and learn new skills.
- Thurrock residents sought confidence in the council and it was vital to get the small things right otherwise residents would not believe the council was able to get the big things right.

- Member compared Thurrock to Essex County Council where they achieved larger scale accomplishments, as they got the lower tiers right first.
- The council had to move itself from constantly focusing on urgent decisions to move the council to focus on important decisions.
- Member stated that most members and residents wanted to see a recovery plan and to see somebody brought to account.
- Member welcomed the report and a commitment by the chief executive and commissioners to ensure update reports were brought quarterly until the end of the intervention.
- Member suggested a traffic light scheme so members and residents could see what progress was being made and could possibly gain the trust of residents.
- Members agreed there had to be no more secrecy.
- There were lots of challenges ahead for the council, with the budget requiring to be reduced by half over the next five years.
- Member raised concern on the slippage of the budget that was promised to be completed over the summer months to ensure engagement of all 49 members. The pace required to be quickened and an action plan on how that would be rolled out.
- There had been concern raised by the shadow portfolio holder on the failure of the strategic investment advisory panel to meet as promised.
- Member also questioned what the consequences were and what action was currently being taken against the companies or people to recover some of the monies that had been taken illegally from the council. The Leader reassured members that everything possible was being undertaken, it was frustrating that these things took a long time, but officers and commissioners were taking steps to recover as much money as possible. Some money would be coming from the investments and hoped to bring news to full council shortly.
- Member questioned whether as part of the government bailout a small team of specialists would be employed to sell off assets for example parcels of land owned by the council. The Leader confirmed the council did from time to time employ people to provide professional advice to ensure the right decisions were being made. In regard to asset disposal, advice was being sought from those professionals to ensure the best value for Thurrock taxpayers.
- Member referred to the parcels of land that could be identified as substantial plots for social housing and questioned the plans to tackle the social housing needs of Thurrock residents.
- Member referred to the strategy and questioned how the vulnerable would be protected. The Leader stated that residents would get the chance to make decisions about the kind of council they wanted and moving forward going out to communities to identify what council services they would like.
- Member asked whether the secrecy of the parcels of land be dropped and revealed this evening. The Leader stated that in the future any assets that came forward for sale would not be presented on pink paper with all ward members being notified before they were put up for sale.

- Member referred to the Leader's reference to the "road to recovery" and questioned whether there was any measurable evidence of this. The Leader stated the council was working towards a budget, working towards divesting the investments, paying down the debt, restructuring of senior officers and member briefings. The Leader reminded members this could not be achieved overnight but there had been some real positive changes. With staff also seeing some physical changes on how the council was being run.
- Member requested more engagement from commissioners, asking them to attend briefings, discussion groups and to engage with all members.
- Member questioned whether the parcels of land could be lost to London boroughs to which the Leader replied they would only be lost if they actually purchased them from the council.
- Leader summed up by stating members would have the opportunity to contribute to the budget debate. Being more aware of how pink papers were used to ensure openness and transparency. The Leader assured members that himself and the Chief Executive had visited the community, listened to residents and members of staff. The local plan would address developing new homes some of which would be social housing.

RESOLVED

That Full Council:

- 1. Noted the progress made on the Council's improvement and recovery.**
- 2. Agreed to receive quarterly reports on progress.**
- 3. Noted the work to develop an enhanced Improvement and Recovery Plan.**
- 4. Noted the comments from Commissioners found at appendix A.**

Members were informed that an email would be sent the following day that would outline the nine parcels of land. The consultation would also be extended a further five days to ensure all comments could be captured.

The meeting adjourned at 9.15pm.

The meeting reconvened at 9.25pm.

61. Update from Best Value Commissioners on the appointment of Section 151 Officer

This report provided members with the background and details of the decision taken by the Best Value Commissioners to appoint Steven Mair as Section 151 Officer in line with the powers transferred to them by the Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities. As set out in the letter to the Leader of the Council advising of this decision, this report had been brought at the earliest opportunity for Members to note this decision. This appointment was also considered and recommended to Commissioners at the meeting of General Services Committee on 24 August 2023.

Councillor J Kent noted and agreed the recommendation.

RESOLVED

That Full Council noted the decision of the Best Value Commissioners to appoint Steven Mair as Section 151 Officer.

62. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the chamber that eight questions to the Leader and ten questions to cabinet members and committee chairs had been received:

Asked by	Asked to	Subject
Councillor Redsell	Leader	Sport's Strategy
Councillor Panjala	Leader	Restore of basic services
Councillor Panjala	Leader	Protect the green areas across Thurrock
Councillor J Maney	Leader	Number of fines in respect of environment offences
Councillor J Maney	Leader	Findings of the waste review
Councillor Muldowney	Leader	Nuisance motorbikes
Councillor J Kent	Leader	Savings agreed by cabinet
Councillor J Kent	Leader	Presence of RAAC in council building estates
Councillor Halden	Councillor Johnson	Hostel services
Councillor Pearce	Councillor B Maney	Planning application
Councillor Raper	Councillor D Arnold	Support for on-line services
Councillor Byrne	Councillor Snell	SELEP fund
Councillor Byrne	Councillor Coxshall	Question fell due to Councillor Byrne leaving the meeting
Councillor Speight	Councillor B Maney	Relief road from the Stanhope Industrial Estate
Councillor Speight	Councillor Coxshall	Recognition of the work undertaken by adult social services
Councillor Muldowney	Councillor B Maney	Double yellow lines, Godman Road
Councillor Worrall	Councillor Johnson	Impact of intervention on the housing portfolio

At 9.33pm, Councillor Morris-Cook left the meeting.

At 9.52pm, the Mayor extended standing orders by 30 minutes.

At 9.57pm, Councillor Abbas left the meeting.

At 10.16pm, Councillor Byrne left the meeting.

At 10.30pm, the Mayor extended standing orders until the close of business.

63. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

No reports were presented.

64. Minutes of Committees

The minutes of committees as set out in the agenda were received.

65. Update on motions resolved at Council during the previous year

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

66. Motion submitted by Councillor C Kent

The Motion, as printed in the agenda was proposed by Councillor C Kent and seconded by Councillor Worrall. The Motion read as follows:

This Council congratulates the Thameside Theatre, its staff, and volunteers in winning the Best Theatre / Arts Venue in Essex.

Councillor C Kent stated it was pleasing to bring such a positive motion to the chamber this evening which congratulated everyone involved in the running of the Thameside Theatre for all their hard work and commitment. This was a national award called the "Muddy Stilettos Award" achieved for the best theatre and arts venue in Essex. This had demonstrated that those working together as a community had made the Thameside Theatre a success. Councillor C Kent urged all members to support the motion and send their congratulations to the Thameside Theatre on this amazing achievement.

The following points were made:

- Portfolio Holder for Health, Adult Social Care, Community and Public Protection had visited the Thameside Theatre where he had met some of the staff, undertook a tour and had been impressed by the young producer programme and the amazing fund-raising events being undertaken.
- It was noted the confidence that young people get from performing on stage as part of the young producer programme.
- Member stated it was an honour to second the motion as Thameside Theatre had shown it was one of Thurrock's treasures and won the award due to the fantastic work undertaken by the staff, security guards, paid staff alongside volunteers. With some of Thurrock's young people finding fame and fortune where they had started on the stage at Thameside Theatre.

- It was proposed that every elected member purchased a pantomime theatre ticket for a child in Thurrock and questioned whether this could be organised through the Mayor's Office.

Councillor C Kent summed up by asking all members to support the motion this evening and to thank all the staff and volunteers at the Thameside Theatre and also that they may be recognised as part of the Mayoral Roll of Honour.

The Mayor called a vote on the motion, to which members voted unanimously in favour. The Mayor announced the motion carried.

67. Motion submitted by Councillor Redsell

Councillor Redsell withdrew her motion this evening and would resubmit for October Council.

The full recording of this meeting can be viewed from the following link:

[Council - Wednesday 27 September 2023, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

The meeting finished at 10.59 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**