

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28 November 2023 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Martin Kerin (Chair), Jack Duffin (Vice-Chair), Robert Gledhill, Valerie Morris-Cook, Lynn Worrall, John Kent, Qaisar Abbas, Alex Anderson, Deborah Arnold, Adam Carter, John Cecil, George Coxshall, Aaron Green, James Halden, Vikki Hartstean, Mark Hooper, Mark Hurrell, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Cathy Kent, Steve Liddiard, Ben Maney, Fraser Massey, Srikanth Panjala, Maureen Pearce, Kairen Raper, Joycelyn Redsell, Elizabeth Rigby, Sue Sammons, Sue Shinnick, Graham Snell, Neil Speight, Luke Spillman and Lee Watson

**Apologies:** Councillors Georgette Polley, Gary Collins, Tony Fish and Sara Muldowney **Error! No document variable supplied.**

**In attendance:**  
Dr Dave Smith, Chief Executive and Managing Director  
Commissioner  
Matthew Boulter, Head of Democratic, Scrutiny and Member Services  
Steven Mair, Interim Chief Financial Officer/Section 151 Officer  
Mark Bradbury, Interim Director of Place  
Sheila Murphy (Corporate Director of Children's Services)  
Ian Wake (Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health)

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

### **18. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **19. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **20. Budget Proposals 2024/25 - Report to follow**

Councillor D Arnold presented the report. The report outlined the revenue budget savings proposals that were put forward for the Committee's consideration as part of the preparation for the 2024/25 Council budget.

Councillor D Arnold noted that this meeting was a sign that the Local Authority is doing things differently and trying out new ways for its members to scrutinise better. Councillor Arnold also noted that they have not known all scrutiny chairs to come together with members so that they can, in a timely manner, fully and openly scrutinise major decision making across multiple services.

Councillor D Arnold outlined a total of £18.2m across 53 proposals which are considered to be deliverable in 2024/25.

Councillor D Arnold assured that this is not a “salami slicing” budget. This budget will be looking at the inner workings of the Local Authority and its operational inefficiencies, not frontline staff or to the detriment of adult social care and children's services. The budget will find ways to stop the duplication of work and reduce costs by eliminating those inefficiencies.

The cost of any investment to improve efficiently will be met by the transformation budget.

Councillor D Arnold defined the word proposal - a plan of ideas of educated suggestions written down and put forward for people to think about and decide.

Councillor Morris-Cook asked if there a reason the proposed savings that have been identified are not showing as if they are one off or if they are a run rate improvement?

- Year on year savings.

Councillor Morris-Cook said she would challenge that as some proposals appeared to only be a one-off saving. Councillor Morris-Cook also noted it was hard to identify hence her question.

- Steven Mair, Finance Office, all of the budget savings are recurrent in nature and that some proposals do not start until part way through the year, the full effect year is 2025/26.

Councillor Morris-Cook asked what confidence could be given to members and residents that these savings are real when realised and are not wooden dollars i.e., where on the Council budget would the actual figures show?

- Councillor D Arnold said she has more confidence with this budget now that they have business cases behind them.

It was Councillor Morris-Cook understanding that the majority are stating a full year effect, bar some proposals from public realm, where it has been noted they would carry over. A lot of the projects do not have a particular start date, as a result it is very difficult to either to see when the projects are meant to start, for instance, the HR proposal is planning to save £238,000, and yet there is no business case and there is no plan at the moment with it. Councillor Morris-Cook also added she found it strange that the council can think that it can achieve savings of £18.2 million.

The Chair asked that the bulk of the answers come from the elected members and that officers answer for more technical advice.

- Steven Mair, Finance Office, all of the budgets will be reduced with effect from the 1st of April 2024 with the exception of the budgets that started in July, those will come out on the 1st of July 2024.
- HR colleagues are going to be working very closely cross cutting.

Councillor Morris-Cook noted some of the business cases are RAG rated amber or red and asked what confidence the Local Authority has that these projects are able to be realised into saving £18.2 million. And what contingency are there and how many millions are in any contingency plan.

- Councillor D Arnold responded the RAG rating is red because they have not started yet as they are proposals.

Councillor Morris-Cook clarified it was about the risks associated with each of those projects.

- Councillor D Arnold responded we do not want to raise expectation and optimism until there is some real data behind the savings.

Chair asked if the question could be referred to Councillor Snell under the next item.

Councillor Morris-Cook shared her concern with the need for the Local Authority to achieve savings of £75 million over the next five years, with the minimum £18.2 million for the next two years with the remainder coming over the following three years and asked why the Council has followed the guideline of the minimum amount of savings and said there should be more opportunities for savings over the £18.2 million.

- Councillor D Arnold responded, £18.2 million is a lot of money to find and personally agrees that if there are more efficiencies brought forward, voted on and agreed in the budget then that figure might increase.
- The Local Authority should not set itself up to fail, and that is a balance where we can find £18.2 million of savings and go from that point.

Councillor Morris-Cook asked what are alternative savings that have been put into for the Thameside Theatre and the Libraries?

- All the £18.2 million proposals are published.

Councillor J Kent asked regarding redundancies and depending on decisions when will the statutory consultation be carried out.

Chair said he will bring Councillor J Kent to ask that question to Councillor Snell.

Councillor Redsell raised a point of order that some members in the chamber could not see Councillor D Arnold.

The Chair moved the meeting onto finance oversight and asked Councillor Snell to introduce his part of the report. The Chair also informed that from this item onwards members would be called in the order of committee.

Councillor Snell went through a presentation on finance oversight.

Councillor Duffin asked what if only £15 million of savings is delivered?

- Councillor Snell recognised the point but does not see it as particularly likely issue at this stage. Further it would mean that the local authority would need to work hard to find the savings elsewhere.
- Councillor Snell reported that he is quite confident that the council will hit these targets for this year and the local authority is well on the way to also achieving its targets for the following year.
- If there is a shortfall further saving would need to be made

Councillor Duffin asked with regards to transformation if is it more short-term transformation i.e., sticking plasters or if the Local Authority was investing more in permanent transformation teams and project managers to continue the work.

- A permanent change. The aim is to radically change the Council to be a much more reactive Council.
- A more collaborative way of working and an end to silo working.

Councillor Speight was interested in the reference to sticking plasters with regards to the funding given to PWC.

- The Local Authority has witnessed huge upheaval with regards to its finances and is still in the very early stages of putting that right. Experts have been brought in to help the Local Authority to become stronger and resilient.
- Not a sticking plaster, it is putting the groundwork in early.

Councillor Speight insisted it was a sticking plaster and asked what would happen when PWC runs out of funds? What guarantees has the Local Authority got that it will have people in place? Councillor Speight asked for details of what would happen year by year.

- Figures for year two and year three will be published as and when they are available.
- Agree to disagree with regards to sticking plasters. PWC have a contract to fulfil a task, when the task is done, they will move on.

Councillor Speight informed that members were advised in a pre-brief meeting to scrutinise and to drill down and go deep. Councillor Speight wanted information on the following years.

- The proposed are quite detailed and the focus is on this year's budget. There are details for the subsequent years, but they are not yet detailed enough to bring to committee.
- The proposals are a fair and reasonable assessment of where the council is and where it needs to be.

Councillor Spillman asked how the collaborative spirit will continue up to the budget.

- All good ideas will be considered for the budget.
- This is not the budget for the Conservative Party but for Thurrock Council

Councillor Morris-Cook shared her concerns with how engaged the Local Authority was with PWC, was HR the only directorate to decline PWC.

- PWC has worked across the council, and they are good value for money.

Councillor Worrall recalled that when she previously asked if she could submit alternative proposals, a response was given that there was no time and nor officer time. Some resources have not been given to Labour and probably less resources to the Independents.

Councillor Worrall also noted that some official sensitive documents had restricted permissions meaning the documents could not be printed off by members who need hard copies.

**ACTION:** Chair asked Democratic Services to review how paperwork is presented for members ahead of the next meeting

Councillor Snell responded to Councillor Worrall:

- Was not aware that Labour was not getting quite the same support and
- **ACTION:** will investigate getting better support put in place.

Councillor Redsell agreed with Councillor Worrall with regards to access to paperwork and noted that members have to be careful with what is being said as the meeting is being livestreamed. Councillor Redsell also noted that more meetings like this need to happen.

Councillor Duffin stated there should be more saving proposals to reach £20 million mark.

Councillor Snell summarises:

- The meeting is early.
- These are proposals.
- Thurrock Council is in financial trouble.

Councillor Anderson expressed his concern at the phrase “reactive council.” Proactive and preventative can be more efficient.

- Councillor Snell meant facilitating, make people more responsible.
- Let the people have more say in what happens.

Councillor Watson noted no Local Authority anytime anywhere that is met their saving target and asked if there were any other proposals that have not brought to the table.

- Contingency proposals exist, but many have been rejected.

Councillor Anderson agreeing with Councillor Watson asked if any of the rejected proposals could be circulated.

- There is a consistency if needed but they will not be put on the table at this point.

Councillor Speight agreeing with Councillor Watson's point stated members need to know every detail and to scrutinize.

- The proposals are acceptable and are workable proposals.

Councillor Raper asked if the contingency is a clear plan.

- There is always a contingency but that does not mean there has to be a plan attached to it.

Chair moved the meeting onto Children's and Housing and asked Councillor Johnson to introduce his part of the report.

Councillor Johnson went through a presentation on Children Services.

Councillor Rigby noted it is good to see that the frontline services will be protected. Councillor Rigby asked with regards to the transport savings for 16 to 18-year-olds will these be individually looked at and have external sources of funding being looked at for Grange Waters so that low economic families are not too detrimentally affected.

- Questions referred to Councillor Carter for later.

Councillor Rigby asked how the Local Authority is going to ensure there isn't any impact when streamlining services.

- Children's health will not be affected.
- Early intervention is key.
- Sheila Murphy, Director Children's Services - There are a number of ways that the Local Authority works with children, young people to identify their needs.

Councillor Hartstean asked if deleted posts were staffed by agency workers.

- The posts were vacant. Work was being picked up by other staff, no social worker posts have been deleted.
- Sheila Murphy, Director Children's Services - very few posts have been deleted.
- Number of children under Children in Need has reduced and moved to early help service which allowed the reduction of one service manager post.

Councillor Panjala noted that there was a huge difference in savings year by year and asked why savings were not split 50/50.

- Local Authority has managed to reduce demand.
- Realistic levels of savings
- Sheila Murphy, Director Children's Services - difference in numbers is full year effect.

Councillor Spillman what is the main non-statutory provision being provided that are being lost.

- Not losing any services
- Sheila Murphy, Director Children's Services - Spans of control have increased.

Councillor Duffin asked are costs for children services still rising, and if there was any change on the national level.

- Yes, but trying to reduce the demand through early help.
- No change in help on national level

Councillor Watson asked what the impact would be there is a secure the level of funding.

- It will be done.
- Sheila Murphy, Director Children's Services - said she was confident about the year ahead for placements.

The Chair moved the meeting on to Housing and asked Councillor Johnson to present to the committee.

Councillor Johnson went through a presentation on Housing.

Councillor Halden asked for clarity on the revenue cost of homelessness.

- Homelessness costs are spiralling but would not say it is out of control.
- The Local Authority is keeping an eye on the homelessness situation.

Councillor Halden shared his concerns regarding the repairs contract and lacked confident in that members would be scrutinised effectively.

- Noted by Councillor Johnson

Councillor Speight agreed with Councillor Halden concern and asked what the financial implications are over the next few years and if there was a schedule of payments in relation to Phi.

- Issue was paused by chair for another occasion.

Councillor Green asked if this is a viable option to reclassify existing housing stock when there are thousands on the waiting list.

- Those properties are needed now. It may be short term solution, but the long-term solution isn't there yet.
- Ian Wake, Director Adults Housing and Health – housing for temporary accommodation is a priority for budget savings.

Councillor Spillman asked whether the Local Authority should be considering purchasing more than 20 homes to increase savings.

- It is HM Treasury decision whether the council can borrow the money.
- We are going to purchase the 20 homes we know of.

Councillor Watson looked for clarity on the financial modelling and the rate paid on the loan to purchase the properties.

- It has been considered and the £140,000 is the saving figure.

Councillor Massey sought clarity on the Local Authority's right to buy at the end of the lease scheme and the time period being 40 years.

- There will not be a right to buy within those 40 years.

Councillor Duffin asked for sense of scale; how many houses did the council need?

- If we get 500, the Local Authority would need 501.
- 20 is a start, the local authority is aware of the properties and are on the lookout for new properties.

Councillor Duffin asked if the Local Authority was asking for more support.

- Yes

**ACTION:** Chair asked democratic services that Phi Capital be brought up in a relevant forum with more detail.

- Councillor Worrall informed the committee that Phi Capital is on the work programme for Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Chair moved the meeting onto Education and asked Councillor Carter to introduce his part of the report.

Councillor Carter went through a presentation on Education.

Councillor Rigby expressed her concern with the reduction of employment services and asked how they aim to increase apprenticeships and uptake.

- The Local Authority's aims are to be an enabling council.
- There will still be a youth service but reduced to its statutory minimum.
- Sheila Murphy, Director Children's Services - some of the apprenticeship work is picked up by the adult education college who work with organisational development.

Councillor Rigby asked with regards to transport for children and young adults, will they still have transport if they cannot travel independently.

- Yes, it is a demand led service.
- Looking to charge post 16 a subsidised rate but it will go to consultation.

Councillor Hartstean asked what the minimum statutory duties is for careers.

- Particularly around vulnerable young people and in the proposals the Local Authority has made sure that it meets its statutory requirements.

Councillor Hartstean understood from the report that need figures will rise and asked what would happen if the funding doesn't come.

- Will hope to update the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Councillor Hartstean asked if any funding has been secured.

- Sheila Murphy, Director Children's Services - some work has been undertaken with the freeports with other business organisations. Looking to line up the skills work and the regeneration service together.
- In a good position to pick funding up
- Preliminary conversations are happening now.

The Chair suspended standing orders suspended till 22:30pm

Councillor Hartstean asked where the £182,000 figure for post 16 spend and the taxis and minibus came from to be that specific?

- The Local Authority will be using its own tendering system, money saved by having more competition in the area.
- Sheila Murphy, Director Children's Services – a pilot has been set up where the trust is now transporting the children.

Councillor Hartstean asked if there was any concern about the impact of removing transport potentially post 16 if parents will not or cannot pay? And what are doing to ensure those children do not become neat?

- Most other Local Authorities have a similar system.



- Case by case basis and a demand led service.

Councillor Redsell expressed her concerns that there were children from outside of the borough attending Treetops School and wanted more detail on the review of minibuses and taxis.

- Going out to re-procurement and using our own tendering system we will be open to more people.
- People must apply to the nearest school for their needs for transport.
- The Local Authority does not pay for transport for those who live outside the borough.
- **ACTION:** Chair asked Councillor Carter to come back to Councillor Redsell the breakdowns of whether transport costs are affecting the budget.

Councillor Worrall sought clarity regarding the youth service.

- Thurrock will only have a youth hub provided from an external organisation that is yet to be built.

Councillor Worrall added that the youth hub may not come to Tilbury and asked further if career services will no longer be available for the vast majority of school leavers.

- The Local Authority will have a statutory minimum service only available to SEND, care leavers and youths in the criminal justice system.

Councillor Speight ask for clarity if Local Authority had pledged money to fund Open Zone in an agreement with DP World

- Funding is coming from the Towns Fund but there is no spending obligation to the project.

Councillor Speight reported that many parents are unhappy with the new transport arrangements and asked if there is any humanity left in processes.

- Parents need to apply to the three nearest schools; the Local Authority has previously been generous with the scheme.
- Can only provide a statutory service at this moment.

Councillor Speight asked if the Local Authority has an effective system in place and they are looking after the best interests of the children?

- We look at individual cases for transport.
- Framework will allow more providers.
- Can offer travel training.

Councillor Sammons raised concerns regarding the licensing of academies using their own transport and asked if teachers are licensed properly to drive the vehicles.

- Yes, they are licenced, and it is also staff at the academy who drive the students.
- Children are being carried safely.

Councillor Green asked regarding post 16 travel and how parents/guardians would pay for the service.

- It will be part of the consultation.

The Chair paused the meeting for a break at 21:35pm.

At 21:50pm the Chair resumed the meeting.

The Chair asked Councillor Jefferies to introduce his part of the report.

Councillor Jefferies went through a presentation on Environment, Economic Development, and Directional Leadership.

Councillor Morris-Cook noted her appreciation for the Directorate and the effort they put in and has confidence in the delivery of the savings. Councillor Morris-Cook noted that coms were critical and asked if tonnage is the actual the saving?

- The Local Authority is getting more appropriate vehicles in
- New coms strategy is in place.
- Only change is frequency of recycling.
- Biggest savings is the disposal cost.
- Food waste coming in two years earlier than planned.

Councillor Morris-Cook asked for an explanation on biodiversity.

- Synchronising grass cutting and strimming.
- Biodiversity means wilding i.e., Meadow areas.

Councillor Spillman understood the importance of biodiversity but asked that it was maintained properly.

- Areas will be litter picked.

The Chair reads a question from Councillor Collins. What provision and costing has been taken into account to counter the inevitable fly tipping of garden waste in the borough, which will arise from the charging for the collection of garden waste

- Cannot foresee an increase in fly tipping of garden waste.
- Good enforcement team is in place.

Councillor Redsell shared her concerns with the savings for the parks and hoped they will not fall into disrepair and that maintenance of parks and trees will continue. Councillor Redsell also praised the cleaner and greener team.

- There is meant to be an order to cutting trees.
- No parks or open spaces will close but to reposition them.

Councillor Shinnick asked if the charge for the garden waste will be spread over 12 months and will the bins be emptied throughout the year.

- One off annual charge
- 45-week collection

Councillor Shinnick also brought to attention that extra bin collections had not been happening in Chafford Hundred.

- Councillor Jefferies clarified that he meant additional bags not collections.
- **ACTION:** Councillor Jefferies asked Councillor Shinnick to write to him with names of roads where litter and waste collection is an issue

Councillor Spillman added his praise.

Councillor Massey asked in the eventuality that garden waste is not collected what will the Local Authority's policy be, refunding the resident or attempt a recollection.

- Aim to collect that bin within one or to two working days.

Councillor Green sought clarity relating to how the Local Authority would make money from parks and open spaces.

- Concerts and market stalls and memorial benches
- No charge on charity events only commercial events

Councillor Hurrell asked if there were any concessions for elderly and vulnerable residents for garden waste and what would the cost be?

- We will engage with residents to see if there is a need for a subsidy.
- The cost would be £80 a year.

Councillor Morris-Cook sought clarity if it was an annual or one-off charge for garden waste.

- Annual charge £80 per year

Councillor Cecil asked what plans are in place to increase recycling rates and lessening contamination of recycling (blue) bins?

- Educating the public on for what can be recycled and how it can be recycled.
- Cllr Jefferies underlined the importance of increasing recycling rates.

Councillor Cecil expressed his concern that the education going out relating to recycling inadequate.

- Cllr Jefferies agreed the Local Authority needs to educate people which bin rubbish should be going into and added the local authority should try and encourage people to reduce the amount of waste that they are creating.
- Outreach offices will be going around knocking on doors to try and help and educate residents in areas where there is high contamination.

The Chair suspended standing orders another hour to 23:30pm

Councillor Hartstean asked if the rubbish trucks were being disposed of and if it was at a loss, if so, how much was lost and if it was factored into the savings.

- A proportion of the sale will be used to release new vehicles and back to capital receipts.
- Not all vehicles have been disposed of, only one vehicle has been disposed of to test the market which was successful.

**ACTION:** Chair asked Democratic Services that when the vehicles have been disposed of that it is reported to and put on the work programme for the correct overview and scrutiny committee.

Councillor Anderson asked regarding the £80 charge if the council would be making a profit from that charge.

- 20% uptake would result in neutral costs.

Councillor Anderson further asked if 40% of the borough signed up would the cost of the charge be reduced?

- If uptake were at 40%, more vehicles would be need and the charge would be used to cover that cost.
- The Local Authority is not looking to make a profit out of the service.

Councillor Morris-Cook asked where else has been looked for savings and if there was any risk and how it would be mitigated.

- Confident in savings for the department

Councillor Redsell asked how the refuse team will know which properties have and have not paid the charge for garden waste collection.

- Stickers will be provided to put on the bins.
- Refuse teams will use the Bartek system, which will give a list of the houses that have paid for the collection service.

Councillor Redsell asked Councillor Jeffries opinion on whether the scheme would lead to more fly tipping.

- No, enforcement teams do a good job.

Councillor Watson sought clarity and asked if there was an opportunity for those on low income and who are vulnerability to have a direct debit.

- Something that can be looked at consultation.

Councillor Speight expressed he believed the charge was good value and expressed concern that the Local Authority was underestimating the take up of 20% as he believes the uptake will be higher. Councillor Speight asked for a briefing on CTS L321 emergency planning and public protection management.

- 20% is what is expected, but there is additional capacity within the service.
- Chair informed that CTS L321 was an exempt item and could be discussed at the end.

Councillor J Kent asked if saving would start 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

- Apart from food waste, which is a half year saving, the rest of the proposals are a full year saving.

Councillor Speight asked if there would be cuts in enforcement team.

- No proposed savings on enforcement

Councillor Panjala asked if the £80 charge will only be valid for one year.

- Annual charge which will continue every year.

The Chair moved the meeting on to Councillor Snell report on Finance, Payroll, and HR.

Councillor Snell presented the report for savings in Finance, Payroll, and HR departments.

Councillor Duffin asked if there are any contingencies in place if Full Council doesn't vote for the planned increase in council tax.

- Cabinet hasn't had any discussion on council tax rise yet.
- Thurrock has a historically low council tax base and would need to increase to pay for services.

Councillor Duffin further asked what £1.03 million was modelled on if there is no agreement or plan.

- Assumption that the full recommended 4.99% is agreed.

Councillor J Kent was happy to see the business pool come back but expressed concern reviewing pay and asked if it was another word for cutting pay and how much is the target is for cutting pay.

- It is not a pay cut, based on redundancies.

Councillor Watson asked if there had been negotiations or if anything had been agreed with LB Havering and LB Barking & Dagenham for pooling business rates.

- It has all been agreed no formal sign up yet.
- Beneficial to all councils

Councillor Watson suggested that the Local Authority say the other Councils have agreed in principle until they have actually signed up to the scheme.

- Noted

The Chair moved the meeting on to Health, Adult Health, Community, and Public Protection.

Councillor Coxshall presented the report into the savings for Health, Adult Health, Community, and Public Protection.

Councillor Hooper expressed his concerns with how realistic savings would be for people coming out of the hospital and asked why the Local Authority thinks it is realistic?

- Confident on savings
- Built on workstreams that were created last year.

Councillor Hooper asked if health was needed to actually support and if the support was there at the moment.

- Still working with colleagues in EPA

Councillor Hooper expressed his concern on the savings for reviewing care packages and sought reassurance that people were not going to slip through the net.

- There is a review ongoing
- Confident in proposals
- Ian Wake - Adults Housing and Health. Thurrock is overperforming on placement savings.

Councillor Hooper asked how the Local Authority will be responsive to changes in packages and be a responsive service.

- Ian Wake - Adults Housing and Health - any changes to packages will go through a panel.
- System can flag where packages are overdue.

Councillor Hooper asked if people refuse to go on to a direct debit will that mean they do not receive the service.

- No, looking for 40% uptake

Councillor Hooper asked if an impact assessment had taken place for team losses and will staff lose their jobs.

- No job loses, moving staff into wellbeing team.
- Wellbeing team is underutilised.

Councillor Hooper asked how savings would be made by losing one team.

- New model, more efficiencies across the whole service

Councillor Speight asked if the Local Authority has looked at increasing non-statutory charges to raise income.

- Most work the department undertake is statutory under the Care Act 2014
- Focus is on prevention rather than crisis management to lower costs.

Councillor Speight noted the Local Authority should have a level playing field when it analyses costs and revenue.

- Ian Wake, Adults Housing and Health – Vast majority of the service is statutory.
- The Local Authority has moved to a point of full cost recovery.
- The government sets the minimum income guarantee, which is the amount that a person can live on, Thurrock is at that minimum.

Point of Order was raised by Councillor Worrall, asking for the next meeting that the order is reversed allowing for more time and fairness. Chair agreed.

**ACTION:** Order to be reversed for next meeting.

Councillor Redsell shared the same concerns as Councillor Hooper and worried if local people would suffer and sought reassurance.

- Some care packages are 6 to 12 months overdue due to other priorities.
- Local Authority will make sure everyone has the right level of care.

Councillor Watson asked regarding assistive technology policy, that by 2025 all technology needs to be digital. The Local Authority currently gives technology free of charge. Councillor Watson asked if it will be a cost to the council and what would be the impact on the saving.

- The Local Authority is aware of the 2025 deadline and has been factored into the savings.

Councillor Gledhill asked if the assisted technology includes older people complexes and notes one resident has already complained that they are being charged for something he will not use.

- Service is optional and opt in

Councillor Shinnick asked if the cost for pendent alarms will be implemented to all users.

- 18% of care users will use it.
- If it is determined a user is able to pay, they will pay the charge. No other user would be expected to pay for a weekly charge.

The Chair moved the meeting onto Regeneration and Highways and asked Councillor Maney to introduce the report.

Councillor Maney presented the savings for Regeneration and Highways Councillor Spillman expressed he was uncomfortable with implementing moving traffic offences at junction 31 and said to would be unfair on drivers in high traffic situations.

The Chair read out a question from Councillor Collins who had a question that ran on similar lines to Councillor Spillman question.

Councillor Collins asked what controls will be put into place to ensure that this power to enforce this box junction or possibly others not abused.

- The Local Authority is not making a new offence it is an existing offence.
- Thurrock can become the enforcing authority.
- A traffic study has been carried out to suggest what income could be generated.
- Police have noted violations at the junction.

Councillor Anderson shared the same concerns Council Spillman and Collins. Councillor Anderson also commented that it is important to keep a grip on larger projects.

Councillor Morris-Cook agreed with implementing traffic offences as it would benefit movement in the area.

Councillor Morris-Cook sought clarity with regards to night-time security and the times they operate

- Night-time security operates 00:00am – 06:00am

Councillor Morris-Cook asked what the impact is on the loss of revenue on the properties that Thurrock is currently set selling on the figures?

- No immediate impact in in the short term, maybe in future years
- The capital receipt outweighs the income.

The Chair suspended standing orders till midnight.

Councillor Watson said she was in favour of the implementing traffic offences for junction 31 and asked regarding daytime security what the impact would be for them on new parking arrangements.

- New car park proposals should allow security to carry out their primary duties as parking will be rationalise. Security will not need to police parking.

Councillor Watson asked if staff would be able to buy packages as not all staff work from the Civic Office 5 days a week and would like EV chargers sorted to make car park fit for purpose.

- Proposal is an annual charge, but details could be reviewed.
- Councillor Maney agreed with Councillor Watson on EV chargers.

Councillor Speight referring to recommendation 1.4 delay the implementation of traffic offenses to next year's budget to increase savings.

The Chair noted it was a question for the committee rather than Councillor Maney

Councillor Green asked where the figures for rent came from if contracts are being renegotiated.

- Figure is based on agreements that have already been reviewed.

Councillor Green welcomed the introduction of moving traffic offences. Councillor Gledhill asked if the introduction of moving traffic offence at junction 31 would be the first of many.

- Could possibly use income from moving traffic offences to set up other areas.

Councillor Gledhill asked if the money would be ringfenced.

- There are restrictions for money raised by moving traffic offences and has to be spent on Highways infrastructure.

Councillor Gledhill asked would there be a policy to recover money from regular offenders that do not originate in the United Kingdom.

- The Local Authority has a good recovery rate and will seek to recover the full amount.

Councillor J Kent asked what kind of charge model was used for the car park to produce the saving figure and additionally asked if the charge would be levied on elected members.

- Three charges based on paygrade form an in-house assessment of what the Local Authority thinks is fair.
- Figure is based on average, middle charge.
- Not proposed for a charge for elected members as members do not take a wage.

Councillor J Kent noted it was a dreadful message to send to staff that low wage employees would pay to park but elected members would not.

- Councillor Maney understood it would not be a popular proposal with staff.
- Elected members carry out a civic duty and receive an allowance for civic duties.

The Chair moved the meeting onto Transformational Change, Communications and Governance and asked Councillor D Arnold to introduce the report.

Councillor D Arnold presented the report on Transformational Change, Communications and Governance

Councillor Duffin noted that agency spend is high on budgets and asked if spend had ever been delivered to the numbers promised.

- Question for cross cutting

Councillor Speight declared a non-pecuniary interest due to profession and working with the Communications Department.

Councillor Speight opinion that the communications department was not fit for purpose.

- Councillor D Arnold responded, the department is under review and changes are ongoing.
- Staff have a lot of work and is a smaller department for the size of the council.



The Chair reminded Councillor Speight the meeting should be robust, but respectful.

Councillor Speight disagreed with Councillor D Arnold. Councillor Speight continued that budgets were being slashed for vulnerable residents, but more should be cut from communications.

- 55% of the Council was budget is spent on children's services and adult social care.
- 85% of the savings proposals are coming from the other 45% of the budget around back-room operations.
- Saving coming from what is realistic now.

Councillor Duffin said the budget saving proposals for communications could be brought to the O&S committee and added to work programme.

**ACTION:** Chair was happy for it to be added to the work programme and invited other members.

Councillor Redsell thought that the reason for the meeting was for ideas to be shared.

- The Chair took onboard Councillor Redsell's comments.

The Chair moved the meeting onto cross cutting, Councillor D Arnold presented the report.

The Chair suspended standing orders till 00:30am

Councillor Duffin asked how close the administration has got to achieving its target for budgets.

- Dr Dave Smith, Managing Director - the figure is very modest against the level of spending on the agencies.
- The figure will be allocated on a cost code basis for mortaring of spend.
- Allocation will be fair and balanced and excludes social workers.

Councillor Duffin asked how it will be tracked and measured.

- Dr Dave Smith, Managing Director – it is measured month by month against actual spend.

Councillor Duffin asked if it is something that come back to committee to scrutinise.

- The corporate performance record needs to change.

Councillor Morris-Cook asked for figures to be double checked but welcomes the new strategy for agency workers.

Councillor Morris-Cook asked what the HR teams are going to do with learning and development.

- Learning and development is important.
- A review is ongoing.

Councillor Halden sought reassurance that agency staff will not arbitrarily be cut across the board.

- Dr Dave Smith, Managing Director agreed, rational decisions would need to be made.
- Plan to remove incentives to do the wrong thing and replace them with incentives to do the right thing.

Councillor Redsell asked if peppercorn rents were being looked at.

- Charities will have peppercorn rents.
- Mark Bradbury, Place – peppercorn rents are usually long leases.
- Reviewing to see if rents are fair.

Councillor J Kent sought assurance that detailed work had been put into figures not just to equal the savings target of £18.2 million.

- PWC have worked on this.
- Confident looked at in detail.

The Chair moved onto the recommendations before moving onto exempt items.

### **RESOLVED**

**Approval was sought for the following:**

- 1. That the committee act as a critical friend in objectively assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals,**
- 2. That the committee ask Members or Directors for any explanation or information needed to better understand the proposals,**
- 3. That the committee consider the Community and Equality Impact assessments,**
- 4. That the committee make recommendations to Officers to improve the proposals,**
- 5. That the committee provide commentary and recommendations (including any alternative options) to Cabinet to consider when making decisions.**

## **21. Review of Council Service: Adults, Health and Housing Directorate - Report to Follow**

Item 5 of the agenda was withdrawn from the meeting.

At Midnight 00:00am on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023 the committee began to discuss exempt items.

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

[Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 28th November 2023 at 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

**The meeting finished at 0.10 am**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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