

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 14 November 2018 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is 28 November 2018 at 5.00pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Chair), Shane Hebb (Deputy Chair), Gary Collins, James Halden, Deborah Huelin, Barry Johnson, Susan Little and Aaron Watkins

Apologies: Councillors Mark Coxshall

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Sean Clark, Director of Finance & IT
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
David Lawson, Assistant Director of Law & Governance
Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Julie Rogers, Director of Environment and Highways
Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

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.

52. Minutes

The minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet held on 10 October 2018 were approved as a correct record.

53. Items of Urgent Business

The Leader began by stating that one urgent item had been received, which was the Monitoring Officer's report on whistleblowing allegations. He apologised for the lateness of the report and explained this was because the necessary information had only been received at the end of last week and officers had then had to check it. He described that two whistleblowing allegations had been received, one in January 2018 which related to recruitment and HR matters, and one in August 2018 which had been received by the CEO in September 2018, and related to an in-depth Children's Services case. The Leader continued by stating that the Monitoring Officer had reviewed and assessed both cases, and then passed on to an independent barrister who was a specialist in child social care and had received unrestricted access to all files relating to the allegations. He continued by mentioning that the files had been locked once the allegations had come to light so information could not be tampered or altered with. He also mentioned that the allegations were reported to Ofsted, who were kept fully apprised of the investigation and were happy with the work completed.

He summarised and stated that the independent barrister had found both whistleblowing allegations unsubstantiated.

Councillor Collins commented that he felt pleased and relieved with the outcome that the allegations were unsubstantiated. Councillor Halden then discussed how six weeks ago Councillor Kent had resigned as Chair of Children's Overview & Scrutiny Committee over this matter, as he had not received the whistleblowing report as fast as he would have liked. Councillor Halden described that he felt the Chair of an O&S Committee had many powers to discuss items such as the whistleblowing allegation, for example going into exempt session or calling an extraordinary meeting. He went onto mention that at the time of Councillor Kent's resignation the information he requested was not available as the investigation was still ongoing. Councillor Halden felt that this tarnished the council's reputation as the top Google search was the resignation, and this could harm retention rates of officers, whom he felt worked hard and should be treated professionally. Councillor Halden then called for Councillor Kent to make a formal apology to officers. The Leader replied that he could not comment on the mind-set of other Councillors, but Members were there to do the best they could for the 160,000 residents of Thurrock. He described how Overview & Scrutiny Committees were designed to hold the Executive to account, and he felt resigning should have been a last resort. He felt that as Chair of an O&S Committee, Members have responsibilities and rules to follow, but there were ways of getting messages out. The Leader continued by stating he did not want officers to feel undermined, and they should take comfort in the fact an independent barrister found the whistleblowing allegations to be unsubstantiated. He felt that officers had acted appropriately, and this had been a learning experience. He then drew Members attention to point 4.3 of the report which highlighted areas the council could do better on and how issues could be improved. The Leader stated that the independent barrister had received a wide brief, not just focusing on the specific allegations which had added value to the report. He finished by congratulating the team and outside bodies that worked on the report which he felt was open and clear.

Councillor Hebb echoed the sentiments made by other Councillors, and added that it was the Chair's role of Overview & Scrutiny Committee's to shape the Work Programme, and officers were helpful which allowed Members to achieve this. He continued by stating that it was appropriate for an outside barrister to investigate the allegations, and felt officers had made the right choice. He also felt this was an opportunity to reflect and improve in some areas, for example record-keeping as mentioned in point 4.3. Councillor Huelin then discussed the very good council run training sessions for Members in areas such as Overview & Scrutiny, and encouraged Members to go to these if they felt they did not understand enough about O&S procedures. She also reiterated that it was good to see the whistleblowing claims were unsubstantiated.

Councillor Halden felt that although officers should be challenged, it was ultimately the Chair's responsibility how an O&S committee was run, for example holding exempt sessions or extraordinary meetings. The Leader

reminded Members that they could not comment on the mind-set of other Members. Councillor Watkins then stated he was glad to see the claims were unsubstantiated and the investigation had been carried out independently. He felt that it was not just senior officers that had received negative outcomes from Councillor Kent's resignation, but the day to day working life of less senior officers too. He commented that staff should see that they are appreciated and move on now the claims were proven to be unsubstantiated. The Leader then stated how the discussion was a matter for a public record and agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet

1. Noted the report that the whistleblowing allegations received in January and September 2018 have been fully and independently investigated by a specialist children's safeguarding barrister with the allegations found to be unsubstantiated and note the learning outcomes and recommendations from the process to continue to improve Children' Services.

54. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared, although the Leader asked Democratic Services if this item could be placed above the item of urgent business in future.

55. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by discussing the Remembrance commemorations held across the borough on Sunday 11 November. He mentioned that specialist cleaning had taken place and new planters installed on memorials in the area, and 834 poppies had been placed in cemeteries and memorials to commemorate every life lost from Thurrock. He went on to discuss the new railings that had been placed around the memorial in Grays, to stop it being a place of anti-social behaviour, and to restore it as a place of quiet reflection. He added that new signs would also be installed asking people to be respectful to the fallen soldiers. The Leader then detailed the £150,000 budget, and only £80,000 of this had been used, with the remainder of the money going into the maintenance of the memorials. He congratulated Thurrock Local Community Groups for their remembrance displays across the borough, in places such as Stifford, and discussed how the council were looking at areas where the displays could become permanent. He thanked the Director of Environment and Highways for all her hard work over the year to make the commemorations happen. He then described how officers had been working at 6am on Sunday morning clearing leaves and ensuring there was disabled access to the memorial at Turps Corner. He again thanked all staff and Member's and felt they should be proud of all the hard work. He added he would be formally writing to officers to thank them again.

The Leader then moved on to discuss the new fibre optic broadband for 1,400

council tenants and commented that this produced the fastest internet speeds. He mentioned the council were working with the private company Hyperoptic to produce the gigabit internet connection, and stated that this agreement had been expanded to include 20 other council run areas. The Leader added that this would benefit both young families and older residents to improve connectivity, and proved that the council was investing in a 'digital first' approach so Thurrock was ready for the future.

The Leader then discussed the Lower Thames Crossing and the Highways England Consultation. He stated that the consultation was open until 20 December 2018, but that consultation documents were very detailed and felt Highways England were showing a lack of effort in making information accessible to people. He felt the consultation documents used highly complex language, and even the non-technical summary contained jargon and acronyms. He added that the easy-reading version was inaccessible as this was available on request, but that as Highways England had a 15 working days response time, residents would have to request these now. He added that the documents would only be translated for a very high fee, which again made them inaccessible. He commented that Highways England plans to build a large motorway through the borough, and that their story kept changing, for example what began as a 'rest area' in Tilbury had become a full service station. The Leader felt this was a terrible scheme which would negatively impact Thurrock and encouraged every resident to take part in consultation, and overcome any obstacles set by Highways England to respond. He stated consultation documents were available in the Tilbury and Grays hubs, as well as online.

The Leader moved on to discuss anti-social behaviour among council tenants and stated that one tenant had received a Closure Planning Order which restricted him from entering his house to prevent him from using it as a drug den. He stated this was the fourth property to receive a Closure Planning order, but 8 more were being legally chased, and 147 warning letters had been sent out. He commented that the council supported their tenants who did not want drugs, gangs and other anti-social behaviour in their area. The Leader then said that the council were investing in more initiatives such as increased CCTV and better front doors for residents, as well as helping the police tackle issues regarding motorbikes and quad-bikes. He stated that Essex police had now reduced anti-social behaviour on motorbikes and quad-bikes by 46%, which was one less worry for Thurrock residents. He finished by stating that the council were working with Essex Police to finalise a new Police Crime Prevention Strategy.

The Leader then congratulated Councillor Hebb on his win of the LGIU Finance and Transformation Award. He mentioned that finance had become innovative and the council had reduced the deficit whilst minimising the effect on local residents. He felt it was good to see Thurrock Councillors with such a strong national presence, as one third of Cabinet members had been nominated for an LGIU award, with every nomination being shortlisted and 2 winners.

The Leader finished his statement by giving the latest figures on the Clean It, Cut It, Fill It Scheme which were: 790 acres of grass cut; 164 tonnes of litter cleared; 908 fly-tips cleared; 2146 fines and penalty notices issued; 52 £400 fly-tipping notices issued; 90 community protection warnings issued; and 35 community protection notices issued. He added that a new education programme regarding fly-tipping would be rolled out in January. He finished by stating that 1783 potholes had been filled in across the borough, 99% of which had been within target time. He commented that the government had awarded an extra £848,000 to fill potholes in before the end of the financial year, which proved central government had confidence in the council to spend money wisely and effectively to fill potholes.

Councillor Hebb thanked the team, including Cabinet colleagues and Directors Board, particularly the Director of Finance and IT and the Director of Commercial Services. He stated he was happy to see services secured for the next four years and again thanked officers for their hard work. He also discussed the positive comments he had received from Stanford residents regarding commemorations on Remembrance Sunday, and thanked the Stanford War Memorial Group.

56. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Watkins began by echoing sentiments made by other Members on the remembrance services and all the hard work that had been put in prior to the events to make them fantastic. He stated that he had attended the Ockendon Memorial and felt proud of the department and the work they had done. He stated that residents should also feel proud, and hoped those that had lost their lives would have been proud too. He then thanked the Environment and Highways Department, particularly Susan Newton, for all their hard work.

Councillor Watkins then moved onto the discuss how the council were trying to improve recycling rates in the borough, by introducing bin tags which would go onto contaminated bins that could not be collected because they contained the wrong rubbish. He discussed how the tags would include the reasons why bins could not be collected, and ways in which residents could get their bins decontaminated.

Councillor Huelin thanked the WW1 Commemorative Committee for all their hard work on Remembrance Sunday and over the past four years, and pointed out that Remembrance events happened every year. She specifically thanked Natalie and all the volunteers with the WW1 Commemorative Committee, and described how she felt lucky to have been able to open the Memorial Event at the Thameside Theatre in Grays. She then discussed the important work that women and the Suffragettes had done during WW1, such as building a frontline hospital solely staffed by women, including every surgeon, nurse and doctor. She stated that this was one of the reasons why women had been allowed to enter the Royal College of Surgeons. She commented that although 1 in 8 men died during WW1, 1 in 5 women died doing dangerous work in munitions factories and in frontline hospitals. The

Leader then commented that it was important to remember every year, and reminded Members that next year would be the 80th anniversary of the beginning of WW2. Councillor Collins added that he appreciated all the hard work put into the Remembrance events and thanked everyone. Councillor Little echoed these comments and felt pleased so many local residents had turned out for the commemorative events. She also added that officers had turned up to many of the commemorative events, even in rural areas such as Bulphan.

57. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

There were no petitions submitted by members of the public.

58. Questions from Non-Executive Members

No questions had been received from non-Executive Members.

59. Matters Referred to the Cabinet for Consideration by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee

No matters had been referred to the Cabinet for consideration by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

60. Further Transformation to Continue Improving Standards in Primary Care (Decision 110484)

Councillor Halden introduced the report by stating this was good news as this report ensured work could continue on the programme until 2021. He stated that in 2016 only 2 GP's in Thurrock had been rated as 'good', but now 21 out of 29 GP's had achieved a 'good' rating. He commented that the UK and Thurrock had an aging population, as healthcare improved and people lived longer, this meant that care for long-term illnesses had to improve too. Councillor Halden went onto mention how this report improved standards of primary care and reduced variation across GP surgeries in the borough. He stated the council were working with the NHS to implement new scorecards, which 85% of GP's had done, which would help with long-term health problems such as hypertension, but the ambition was for 100% of GPs to use the scorecard. Councillor Halden added that the scorecard was changing as it was no longer benchmarked with other local authorities, but now benchmarked internally. He also described how volunteer aided blood pressure checks were in place, which have been predicted to diagnose an additional 400 people with high blood pressure by the end of the financial year. Councillor Halden then commented that this was predicted to save an additional 20 people from a stroke.

The Leader declared that he was Chair of the Patients Participation Group at a GP surgery, but this would not affect his decision making ability on this item. He felt that the additional 20 lives saved from a stroke was a very good result, as strokes affected not only the patient, but their families too. He commented that this report was not just a financial report, but effected rehabilitation of

patients and proved how the council were working with the NHS to improve public health. Councillor Halden then thanked the public health team as this was above and beyond their statutory obligations and showed how innovative Thurrock was becoming.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved progress, changes and additions to the programme of performance, improvement and support for primary care with linked demand management for hospital and adult social care services, as detailed within the paper.

2. Approved the continuation of funding for this programme throughout the financial years 2019/20 and 2020/21, and then reviews its impact.

61. Short Breaks and Support Services for Disabled Children (Decision: 110485)

Councillor Little explained that this report was coming to Cabinet because it was above the £750,000 spend limit. She described that this report is a statutory duty for the council to improve the outcomes for disabled children and young people aged between 0 and 18. She explained that a procurement exercise needed to be undertaken to replace the current contract which expires in March 2019, and the contract aims to improve the health and wellbeing of disabled children and their carers by offering additional support. Councillor Little clarified that there were currently only two providers, but that she wanted more providers to increase competition, which would hopefully include activities outside the borough. She added that there was the option to increase the new contract for a further year if it was successful.

Councillor Huelin welcomed the report and stated that as the procurement process became simpler, the number of providers could increase as local volunteer groups could get involved to support young people and children with disabilities. The Leader reiterated the fact this was a serious report and disabled children should have access to activities that all children enjoy. He also felt it was good for able-bodied children too as they can interact with disabled children and learn how to help them.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Agree to the tender to provide Short Breaks and Support Services for Disabled Children with a term of 3 years and the option to extend for a period of twelve months be issued.

2. Delegated authority to the Accountable Corporate Director of Children's Services, in agreement with the Portfolio Holder to award contracts to meet the assessed need and preferences of children and young people.

62. Approval to Increase the Current Scope of the Schools Capital Programme (Decision 110486)

Councillor Halden introduced the report and stated that it would increase the amount invested in education by almost £7 million, and would facilitate the expansion at St Clere's school and the Orsett Free School. He stated that the council were working with the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to deliver difficult projects such as Thames Park School and Orsett Heath School, and whilst these projects were being finalised, this report would ensure there were enough school places for every child. He described how temporary accommodation at the Orsett Heath site would mean permanent buildings that would complement the school in the long term, for example expand the sporting element of Orsett Heath and their relationship with Thurrock Rugby Club. He added that £500,000 was being invested in a 3G pitch at Harris Riverside, and in rebuilding the nursery at Corringham Primary School. He added there were also plans to expand Benyon Primary in South Ockendon, to alleviate placement issues, rather than building a new school on the site at Brandon Groves. Councillor Halden felt that as all these projects were being undertaken at the same time, it was an impressive list of options. He added that in addition 90% of all schools had now received a 'good' or 'outstanding' rating by Ofsted, and the borough had seen an improvement in GCSE results, even with the difficulty in changes to GCSE marking and criteria.

Councillor Hebb continued that injecting money into schools, was injecting money into the future of the borough. He added that this report covered the entire borough such as Stanford, Orsett and South Ockendon; was multi-use as contained provisions for sporting facilities; and was multi-choice as parents now had a diverse market and could decide which school best suited them and their child's needs. He directed Members to point 3.2.2 of Appendix 1 in the report, which stated that infrastructure was coming first in the St Clere's project, as additional capacity was being placed on-site, rather than off-site. He felt that schools now were vastly improved from that of those 20 years ago, although the problem of pupil deficit still existed as those coming from primary to secondary school needed places, and capacity would have to expand.

The Leader was glad to see money being spent on the future, but without problems such as temporary demountables. He felt glad to see that Benyon Primary was expanding, rather than a brand new school at Brandon Groves, as this would have caused traffic problems in the area.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the extended School Capital programme budget of £6,900,000 for St Clere's and bulge classes for the new Orsett Heath Free School.

2. Approved the invitation of tenders in accordance with EU procurement procedures for a one year agreement for providing a

Specialist Project Team, and Principal Contractor for a school capital programme.

3. That, following a selection procedure compliant with EU procurement regulations, the subsequent decision to enter into the contract be delegated to the Accountable Director reporting back to the Portfolio Holder, such report to detail the selection procedure results, and compliance with EU procurement regulations.

4. Endorsed the forward work and feasibility studies coming forward for the expansions and/or improvement works at Corringham Primary, Harris Riverside and Benyon Primary, and the works to continue to deliver inclusion units across Thurrock and their associated costs.

The meeting finished at 8.09 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