

Minutes of the Meeting of the Budget Council held on 27 February 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Barbara Rice (Mayor), Terry Piccolo (Deputy Mayor), Qaisar Abbas, Abbie Akinbohun, John Allen, Alex Anderson, Russell Cherry, Colin Churchman, Gary Collins, Mark Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish (*arrived 7.13pm*), Mike Fletcher, Leslie Gamester, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, Garry Hague, James Halden, Graham Hamilton, Shane Hebb, Victoria Holloway, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Angela Lawrence, Steve Liddiard, Susan Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Bukky Okunade, Jane Potheary, David Potter, Joycelyn Redsell, Gerard Rice (*arrived 7.03pm*), Elizabeth Rigby, Sue Sammons, Sue Shinnick, Peter Smith, Luke Spillman, Pauline Tolson, Aaron Watkins and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillors James Baker and Clare Baldwin

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Sean Clark, Director of Finance & IT
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
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
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Jenny Shade, Senior 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.

106. Minutes

The minutes of the Meeting of Council held on the 30 January 2019 were approved as a correct record.

107. Items of Urgent Business

No items of urgent business were received.

108. Declaration of Interests

No declaration of interests were received.

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

The Mayor reminded Members of the Giving for Thurrock Day, a day for communities, charities and for the good causes in Thurrock which would take place on Friday 29 March 2019. The Mayor stated a donation box had been placed in the Chamber for any welcomed donations.

The Mayor, on behalf of Members of the Chamber, thanked those retiring Members for their service to Thurrock and wished those up for re-election well in the May elections.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Gledhill, updated Members on the Great British Spring Clean which would take place between the 22 March and the 23 April 2019. An opportunity for local groups to run clean-up events in their area to keep the community clean with the Council supplying equipment and organising the pick-up of rubbish bags. The Leader thanked Mr Harrington, residents and Councillor Cherry for an organised event that took place in Little Thurrock at the weekend.

The Leader would be contacting Connect Plus and Highways England in regards to the laybys on the A1089 to insist that these are maintained and tidied up as Thurrock residents deserved better.

The Leader stated the part of the A13 in Thurrock would be cleaned as part of the Great British Spring Clean.

The Leader moved onto Regeneration and referred to the New River Retail Project and plans for the Grays Shopping Centre which had been purchased last year for £20m and showed that the borough was attracting investors.

The Leader gave a quick update on Clean It Cut It Fill It:

2085 potholes had been filed
1130 acres of grass had been cut
1739 fly-tips had been cleared
3150 tonnes of waste collected
3338 fixed penalty notices had been issued

Finally, the Leader thanked all retiring members for their service to Thurrock who included Councillors Smith, Hamilton, Cherry, Coxshall, Huelin, Baker, Pothecary, Kelly, C Kent, Jefferies, Churchman, Hebb, Gamester, Tolson, Baldwin and Holloway.

Those Members had worked hard in their 4 years of service, and 1 year of service for Councillor Jefferies, to make Thurrock a better place.

Councillor J Kent echoed the Leader's comments and stated that it was not the time a Member served but what that Member had achieved in that time. Members had made a real contribution to the Council and to residents. Councillor J Kent stated that all retiring Members would be missed but looked forward to the battles ahead leading up to the May elections and wished all candidates well.

Councillor Spillman echoed the Leader's comments and stated it had been a pleasure to meet those Members up for election. That friendships had been made at committees and hoped that those candidates up for re-election were successful.

110. Questions from Members of the Public

A copy of the transcript of questions and answers can be viewed under the relevant meeting date at <http://democracy.thurrock.go.uk/thurrock> and are attached at Appendix 1 at these minutes.

111. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

The Mayor informed Members that in accordance with the Council's petition scheme no notices of petition had been received.

112. Petitions Update Report

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

Councillor Watkins provided an update to Petition 519 "Air Quality and Pollution Review in Tilbury". The Steering Group had met in November 2018 and would continue to apply the appropriate pressure on the Environment Agency and would also continue to work with residents to ensure that the dust issues go away. Councillor Watkins agreed to report back and keep Members updated.

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

The Mayor enquired whether Group Leaders wished for any changes to be made to the appointments previous made by Committees and Outside Bodies, statutory and other panels.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Gledhill, informed the chamber that he had no changes to make.

Councillor J Kent, Leader of the Labour Group, informed the chamber that he had no changes to make.

Councillor Spillman, Leader of the Thurrock Independence Group, informed the chamber that he had no changes to make.

114. Annual Pay Policy Statement 2019/20

Councillor Collins, Portfolio Holder for Central Services, presented the report which sought the approval of the Council's Annual Pay Policy Statement. That Thurrock's statement included a pay policy for all categories of employees which reflected the existing employment terms and conditions.

Councillor J Kent stated the Labour Group support to the recommendation.

Councillor Spillman stated he had concerns on how changes to bandings could affect staff's pay and questioned how many staff would be affected, how many staff would benefit and how many staff's salaries would stay the same following the band changes.

Councillor Collins stated that the Pay Policy had the agreement of all interested parties who all stated the policy to be agreeable and acceptable and that further information would be sent to Councillor Spillman.

Councillor Collin's summed up by stating that nobody would lose with many members of staff and apprentices gaining from the change. Councillor Collins stated it was a good policy that had the support of all trade unions and urged members to vote in favour.

The Mayor called a vote on this item to which Members voted unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Pay Policy Statement 2019/20 is agreed in line with the Council's obligations under the Localism Act 2011, the Single Status Agreement , the recommendations by the independent market assessment and the output of the pay review project (as agreed by General Services Committee on the 8 October 2018).

115. Capital Strategy 2019/20

Councillor Hebb, Portfolio Holder for Finance, presented the report that set out the strategic framework underpinning capital expenditure and the associated financing at the Council. The report also included the Treasury Management Strategy which had been previously considered in isolation up to 2018/19 which was also linked to the Council's ambitions of becoming a more commercially focused borough; one where sensible transactions were completed which created revenue returns that could then be allocated to spending on the services for Thurrock residents.

A sheet had been tabled for this item which reflected changes to Pages 65 and 66 of the agenda. This sheet can be found as a supplementary item on-line.

Councillor J Kent stated the Labour Group support to the recommendations.

Councillor Spillman stated the Thurrock Independent Group support to the recommendations.

The Mayor called a vote on this item to which Members voted unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

- 1. Approved the Capital Strategy for 2019/20 including approval of the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement for 2019/20; and**
- 2. Approved the adoption of the Prudential Indicators as set out in Appendix 1; and**
- 3. Noted the revised 2018/19 and 2019/20 Treasury Management projections as set out in Annex 1 paragraph 2.32.**

116. General Fund Budget Proposals

The Mayor invited the Leader of the Council, Councillor Gledhill, to introduce the budget and advised that he had 20 minutes to do so.

Councillor Gledhill

Stated that 33 months ago the Conservatives took control of the Council after 6 years of a Labour administration, as I have outlined before we were told there was not enough taxpayers money coming in to supply basic services like street cleaning, grass cutting and pothole filling. A budget where the reserves had not been reviewed for six years despite rhetoric to the contrary. A budget where the graph of doom reigned supreme leaving a Council that was frankly dying of death of a thousand cuts to meet a political message rather than getting on with job of supplying public services.

In those 33 months we have seen external pressures put strain on the ever decreasing taxpayers funded income from Government which we have faced head on and tabled within budget. Indeed as a Council we receive £3.3m less in direct support than in 2016 yet despite this the only service cuts have been those agreed in those years' budgets.

The highest number of unaccompanied asylum seekers reduced to near maximum assumed level but now on the way up.

Vital equipment and staff replaced at a cost of £13.5m over both the capital and revenue budgets to replace that was either sold, unserviceable or released from service to ensure our streets are cleaner, our bins collected weekly and our parks and green spaces cut and cleared to be useable by all.

I remember at my first budget speech after only 9 months being elected leader I brought you the outcome of the same cash envelope that Labour and the then UKIP Councillors had agreed. Had we stuck to that budget we would have seen no street cleaners, no grass cutting ability, massive over spends in children's and adult social care, other non-statutory services costing the taxpayer money month in month out and so on. But instead, I brought you all the good news. Nearly £1/2 million extra in reserves, kept weekly bin collections, street cleaners removing tonnes of rubbish and a small surplus of £44 thousand, Oh boy how much has that changed.

We also promised in that budget: £1m increase in the environment department to continue clean it cut it fill it, £420 thousand in reserves, £1.3m investment in play equipment for our parks, £8.75m extra for new refuse and environmental support vehicles ensuring weekly bin collections, up to £2.6m redeveloping the civic amenity site.

Leap towards a year and not only did we deliver that but we exceeded it.

£3m into reserves, a one off budget surplus of £2.3m and a promise of the same year on year for the term of the MTFs, assigned £250k to tackle ABS which as I outlined in my portfolio holders report last month has delivered results, replaced the bin lorries and plant fleet, assigned more money to challenge the Lower Thames Crossing Proposals and to help with the local plan consultation.

This December with the one off surplus of 2018/19 we have set aside nearly a £1m for extra police over 3 years, £1/2m for mental health summit and support, £1/2m to help the Dedicated Schools grant for the higher needs unit, £1m for our kerb it campaign to protect and improve the public green spaces across Thurrock.

Again I have to make clear these one off surpluses are not something we can use for day to day running of the Council. So I could not for instance say I am putting an extra £250,000 into adult social care packages, supplying more staff for schools or three extra bin rounds. All this would do is put a pressure on the Council tax payer when these surpluses dwindle out in future years.

Equally making sweeping announcements and making massive spending commitments on surpluses that are not in the bank is dangerous. Yes we can outline what we would like to do but Conservative prudence would say that the approach of waiting for the money to be in the bank is better. Equally we do not know what pressure in year may need support to deliver the long term investment strategy. Just imagine if Thurrock Regeneration Limited hits similar problems to the St Chads scheme and needs extra support. Having committed the one off surplus money to other projects would in this example put at risk this long term income stream having a massive impact on the MTFs.

Finally we must remember it is in the gift of Cabinet, not full Council to allocate these surpluses so whilst I would be easy for me to mention possible projects like improving our CCTV capability tonight it will not be until Cabinet next December can any certainty to those plans be finalised. Equally we could decide that instead of lots of small one off spends we undertake one big project over a few years that would have a massive impact on the borough.

Now to the bit that annoys me the most, envelope setting. I have said it before and will say it again; I do not believe setting budget envelopes is setting a budget. A budget is not just an amount on a vague heading it should be outlining what you will be delivering for that amount.

However legislation is very clear only the Cabinet have the power to decide exactly where the money is spent so I will only refer to the envelope at page 98 paragraph 5.5.

However you will see in Appendix 3 an outline of the indicative budget for all areas. So where are the cuts I hear you ask? Well there are no cuts in this budget again only efficiency savings.

Let me take some time to make the clear distinction between cuts and the efficiency savings we have implemented. A cut is where you take service and reduce the spend in that area and remove part or all of the service as a good example the street cleaning service being slashed to next to nothing in 2015/16. An efficiency saving is where you remodel a service, make improvements to the efficiency or model of supply and the resulting savings are taken from that budget as example Councillor Halden remodelling of the children centres, moving some of them away from fixed buildings and supplying those service direct has saved £400,000 an seen a 25% increase in residents receiving the service.

It would be wrong for any public body not to look to being more efficient, to look at different models or models of delivering services, to supply the statutory requirements not just carry on doing what we have done in the past because that is what we have always done. As example by transforming the way we deal with adoptions and bringing them in house gives us better outcomes and a saving despite increasing the overall staff budget. Doing this across children's service as you will see on page 97 at 5.3 there are identified savings of nearly £3m but we have only allocated £800,000 reduction with the remaining £2m gives the budget more resilience and an increase of available funding in that department.

So yet again despite the amount of tax payers money allocated to us by central Government being reduced by 7.3% and no cuts, we are proposing a below the maximum Council tax increase as we did last year, not just below, WAY below.

So as I am sure you have all read we are proposing a zero % increase in the Council's portion of Council Tax this year. Why is that, well I think that is clear.

A balanced budget for not only this year but for the four future years. Not only a balanced budget but as mentioned a budget with one off surpluses year on year. Asking Thurrock residents for more money this year from their pockets when we have achieved this would be wrong, very wrong. We could have asked for a further 2.99% which is about £38 per year on a band D property but when we demonstrate that we do not need this increase why should we.

So that means this year nearly every copper coin our residents will see in Council tax increase will go towards coppers on the beat. Something no other Council in Essex can boast.

So yet again I have demonstrated that instead of spending time bemoaning that the Government is not giving Councils the money they want to spend, that we got on making efficiencies and raising the money ourselves through an investment and commerciality strategy that is delivered.

That we are determined to review every service to drive out every efficiency and commercial possibility to protect services to residents,

This shows that this administration is committed to supplying the services residents want like street cleaning, pothole filling, weekly bin collections, protecting verges, tackling anti-social behaviour, support those with mental health issues.

Not only supporting our residents but supporting the NHS by already investing £31m into designing and initial stages of delivering new integrated medical centre in Tilbury as a start on the four across the borough.

Putting in high quality bids to Government and SELEP and working closely with our MPs whilst applying for grants from growth and regeneration brings in vast amounts of capital to help improve infrastructure long overdue in Thurrock. You will see from appendix 7 page 129 £46.5m from Government for the long overdue East Facing Slips from Lakeside for an investment of 1/10th of that from Thurrock Council for example.

You will also note a significant difference in the potential capital spend for the Thameside. These upper and lower estimates are based on the two possibilities of just a refurbishment of the current provision all the way up to having to build a whole new theatre provision. We will of course await the long overdue options for this in the coming financial year.

So in conclusion, I am seeking approval from Council to set a zero % increase in Council Tax, an overall spending envelope of £111.69m from the Council Tax General Fund.

And £10.3m of additional capital for Major Schemes, £22.5m operational capital requirements with a further £5-30m over three years from improvement to the Thameside dependent on the finally agreed model of improvement or replacement.

The Mayor then invited the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor J Kent, to respond and advised that he had 15 minutes to do so.

Councillor J Kent

Thank you Madam Mayor and I can promise that I won't take anything like 15 minutes.

Can I start by welcoming, genuinely, much of the budget we have before us this evening. The idea of using borrowing and some of the money we have put away to make sensible investments with one of the previous Labour administrations. In fact, if we look at investments that we made such as investing money with CTLA that has now reached £10 million since we started. Other investments have raised roughly £3 million since we started. If we look at Labour's policy of debt restructuring, that has now amounted to £30 million worth of savings, but if I had gone into reserves or helped to prop up services, so I am not going to be in any way churlish at saying that I am glad that the current administration has continued with that policy.

I am also glad to see that Council Tax here is recommended to be frozen having battered people with a 10% increase in Council Tax over 2 years. People deserve a break. Now, I would just remind everybody that during the last Labour administration, we froze Council Tax three times and actually managed to reduce it once. There is a caveat – Councillor Gledhill finds that amusing, you'll remember it Rob –

Mayor

Councillors, can you please give Councillor John Kent the opportunity to present his report as we have done the same for Councillor Gledhill. Thank you.

Councillor J Kent

Madam Mayor, you're too protective, I took that as being supportive, not anything else. I promise you. There is a caveat with the Council Tax freeze and the same as any sensible Member of this Chamber this evening, I read the section 151 of the Officer's report very closely before I decided whether or not I could support the Council Tax freeze and he is very, very clear that this is pretty near the boat. That this is a kind of fine judgement call that it does rely on those savings – sorry, those efficiencies being delivered, as yet, unidentified but they have to be delivered. And Members and Officers have to be on their mettle to make sure that it happens. So I think we all need to be quite clear on that.

Councillor Gledhill was quite right, of course, when he said one of the things we would all like to discuss and would all like to make decisions on tonight is what we do with a surplus. That won't happen until December but what I would like to do is just to say, what a Labour's administration priority would be with that surplus and the first would be around homelessness.

We know that in this financial year so far, there are now in excess of 800 families that have come to this Council in fear of losing their homes. We know, because we get it in our casework, we get it in our surgeries; we are housing Thurrock residents in caravans on Canvey Island; as far as Maidstone, Kettering. We are sending dozens of families down to Southend. Madam Mayor, I think that is a scandal that has to stop. And I think that the bulk of the surplus that we have, some within the region of £2.5 to £3 million should be used in buying properties in Borough for Thurrock's homeless.

I then come to fuel poverty. Madam Mayor, we have seen in the last couple of weeks EDF Energy, EON, Npower, British Gas; all announced that they're putting the gas and electricity tariffs up by 10%. Fuel poverty in Thurrock is a real issue. I believe we should be putting forward a pot of money in the region of £750,000 as a one-off pot to help deal with the effects of fuel poverty here in Thurrock.

And thirdly Madam Mayor, we also see in surgeries, we all get the same issues coming to us time and time again. One of the issues that we get more than any is on the cleanliness of the Borough on those bits of unregistered land. It's back alleyways where the Council says we will not clear them, it's not our land. We have a surplus that will allow us to put some money to one side to do what residents want us to do and to clear that rubbish for them so I would suggest we put somewhere in the region of £250,000 to one side for that purpose.

Finally, I come back to the police. I cannot be hypocritical; I've stood here and bemoaned the lack of police. The administration has taken some action, has taken some money out of that surplus as a one-off to fund extra police. I support that; I'll support it being taken out of next year's surplus as well and the next year after. The difficulty though is that, you carry on funding it as a one-off, it becomes, to all intents and purposes, part of a mainstream service. I think the challenge is, for this Council to decide whether it actually wants to permanently find mainstream funding for an element of policing or whether it wants to continue to do it as a one-off. I don't think it's a debate for this evening but I'll put it out there. We need some clarity; we need to make a decision on it.

So, in closing, Madam Mayor, this is a budget but I hope the debate will be brief, I hope the debate will be collegiate in supporting the Council Tax freeze and therefore, supporting everything that follows from it.

The Mayor invited Councillor Gledhill to respond to Councillor J Kent and advised that he had 10 minutes to do so.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and I will not be taking the full 10 minutes. I will, as Councillor Kent suggested, be keeping this brief as I hope everyone else does too.

I welcome your welcoming Councillor Kent. It is always good to see we do get it right and hopefully, this whole budget will be passed this evening and I welcome your support on that. Not so much correct, but bring attention to everyone that the full story about the 10% increase, cannot forget that 6% of that was for adult social care. 6% of that is going to our most vulnerable in our society that we need to support. And we're going to hear a bit later on from Councillor Duffin in relation to his motion – which I will be supporting – about how Government changes its mind. So where we've always said oh Government this, paper this, Government this, paper this; this come out of central, ordinary taxation, that's really great but let's face it, Government will change its mind when it feels like it. And other mandarin will come up with a better idea and it will be put forward, it will be floated, it will go through consultation and end up with winners and losers. Sometimes Thurrock wins, sometimes they lose.

Now I'll move to the increase of 0% that under your previous administration, again, you forget to mention, they were propped up by extra support from central Government so the taxpayer paid it through the backdoor. And I think the one reduction we were talking about, was actually forced by one of your Members and it was a pittance of pennies. Oh yes, sorry, two reductions. I forgot the reduction that we forced upon you after you wanting to cut the bin collections to fortnightly. Councillor Hague, who was Leader at the time, quite rightly led for a quarter of a percent reduction. How could we ever forget that.

But moving onto the one you said on funding's. I'm sure it won't come across as a surprise that actually; a lot of the things you've mentioned are things we all agree across the Chamber. The homelessness support, shipping people out the Borough, I've had, not only residents been a victim of this, had no alternative to house them within the Borough. It isn't right, it isn't fair on them and it does cause problems. But equally, those people that have come from other Boroughs when their homelessness period support is up, that Borough needs to have them taken back to wherever they may have come from, invariably in London.

But I do support what you're saying, it wouldn't be right to buy properties that already exist. Should we build new properties specifically for homelessness support? My personal view is the second rather than the former. But ultimately, the outcome will probably be the same.

Yet fuel poverty. We also, as you can fully appreciate, have these enquiries from our residents. There is something that we are doing about it. I cannot actually tell you tonight because it's in the final stages of hopefully, agreement. But it is a different way so whilst I understand where your sentiments are coming from. Councillor Kent, it's not something specifically that we could probably accommodate but I'm not saying that we wouldn't do so if necessary.

Now we move onto this issue of back alleyways. Now you say this is unregistered land invariably and I know what this is like being a former

property owner myself, and the alleyway at the back is part of your deed and it says that you're responsible for x proportion of this with exception of x, y and z and various other little caveats. So invariably, these, and I say invariably, not all the time, are part of residents' properties. They just don't form part of the boundary access, the fences to the rear. If we clean it once, we're going to end up cleaning it every time which is not what we should be doing because this gets on to your last point. Should we put this into regular income and regular expenditure? I think not, far from it. I think what we should be doing is making very clear to all residents that they have a responsibility to look after their own back alleyways and it's their responsibilities to get it cleared up. However, where it is unregistered and we're not sure, then we do need to take action so again, there may well be some scope to accommodate some of the idea as we go through in December.

Also, agree in principle what you say about the policing, should we be having a discussion about having this continual support for part of the Council Tax that we ask residents for. We already do that through the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners pre-set and I think that's the way we should continue to do it. This is a 3 year project and the point of having a 3 year project is to see will it make a difference. But should it continue? If not, then we can disband that group. The police have a full understanding that it's only a 3 year contract. But if we feel that at the end of that, we are getting much, much more benefit than just the cash that we are paying for it, then that's the time we should be having that discussion. I don't mean 5 minutes to a 3 year end period, I mean, having a meaningful discussion and a meaningful vote long before.

So with that Madam Mayor, I do hope that the rest of the Chamber agree with the budget and agree with it accordingly.

The Mayor asked Members for any questions.

Councillor Duffin welcomed the zero % Council tax but stated his disappointed on how this had got there and needed to go further. Councillor Duffin suggested an amendment to Recommendation 1.2 "Agree to a 0% general fund Council tax increase". Members agreed to this amendment.

Councillor Cherry question how the surplus was spent and that further funding was required for the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and mentioned that the scheme had been relaunched in Tilbury and Chadwell St Mary. That the scheme was to build up community spirit and to help prevent crime. Councillor Cherry stated that the Neighbourhood Watch Chair, Roger Passfield, had received additional funding of £1000 which was not sufficient to enable road signs and window stickers to be purchased.

Councillor Collins congratulated Councillor Hebb on the budget.

Councillor Gerrish stated he was pleased with the Council tax freeze but the budget was all "smoke and mirrors" where residents may be tricked into forgetting all previous budget increases. Councillor Gerrish agreed on the

Council tax freeze but stated the Council could not go on borrowing money tomorrow to pay for today with no plans to meet the gap in the deficit. The Administration and the Council needed to tackle the approaches currently being undertaken.

Councillor Huelin stated the Administration had balanced the books and had allowed spending on vital services such as the development fund for Tilbury, libraries, bus routes, new schools and Clean It Cut It Fill It. Councillor Huelin continued to thank all Officers that had helped to achieve this.

Councillor Spillman stated that the cost of living was increasing and that those costs were being piled onto residents. Councillor Spillman had concerns on retail outlets outside of the Lakeside Retail Park, on the efficiency savings for Children's Services and Looked After Children, the reduction to agency staff in the Council, temporary accommodation issues need to be addressed and to stop moving homeless Thurrock residents out of the borough as this could be seen as social cleansing.

Councillor Allen questioned why the Council had not invested in purchasing Grays Town Centre when it had been up for sale and stated the Council should be looking at investments to earn the Council more money.

Councillor C Kent commented on street services and how residents would like to see more action taken on fly-tipping in alley-ways and was disappointed with the proposed plan and asked the Leader to reconsider and to look at each case individually.

Councillor Potheary stated that the priorities should be what residents want and that the Council had been failing expectations. That tackling of fly-tipping in alley-ways and in communal areas had to be addressed. The Council should be spending more on homes to house homeless residents. Councillor Potheary stated that there was no reference to how congestion and air pollution would be tackled and that Thurrock residents deserved better.

Councillor Redsell applauded the Neighbourhood Watch work that Councillor Cherry was undertaking but Councillors should not come to the Council for everything and it was about Councillors raising money similar to the work being undertaken by the Friends of Blackshots.

Councillor G Rice stated his support for the budget but stated action had to be taken on homelessness and welcomed the money spent on police following the reduction of 22,000 police in 2010 and understood that residents were turning to the Neighbourhood Watch schemes as police were no longer walking the streets.

Councillor Halden stated Members should be proud of the balanced budget which had changed the culture of the Council. Councillor Halden referred to the regeneration and investment into the borough, the Clean It Cut It Fill It initiative, mental health, extra police, and injunctions against gangs,

improvements to the community hospital, the integrated medical centre programme and the next generation Council housing initiative.

Councillor Watkins stated this was his third budget Council and it was vital for all Members to have their individual views. The Council had continued to see investments such as fly-tipping, roads, potholes, enforcement officers, weekly bin collections, bus services and investments into new schemes such as mental health and police officers.

Councillor Hebb stated the Thurrock Council economy was strong with the Administration committed to doing things differently by embarking on a long term self-sufficiency objective. The success of which ensured that services used by residents would be protected for 4 years. The Budget Review Panel had been replaced with the Council Spending Review, initiated more savings for the rainy day fund, moved to top down cuts and bottom up service review. Councillor Hebb made references to other Authorities that were not in the same position as Thurrock with them looking to see what Thurrock had been doing differently.

Councillor Coxshall stated that the homelessness issue would be addressed in the next stage of the Local Plan where conversations would take place on where new homes should be built. Councillor Coxshall encouraged all Members to work together on this and have honest conversations so this could be delivered as one voice.

Councillor Worrall reiterated that no libraries had been closed under the Labour Administration. Councillor Worrall commented on Orsett Church providing clothes and feeding the homeless, the increase number of MHO for younger people and the conditions that young mothers had to live in was shameful. The Council needed to go further and tackle the waiting list of 800 homeless families. A change of plan was required as it was not sustainable to send Thurrock residents out of the borough. The Council were not taking full advantage of the Thurrock Regeneration Limited which appeared to be doing nothing. The Council should be building Council homes, buying homes and questioned what was stopping the Council from doing this. Councillor Worrall also welcomed the increase of funds to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour but this was not sufficient.

Councillor Akinbohun questioned whether the cause of anti-social behaviour and crime in Chafford Hundred could be down to the number of refugees and to the lack of benefits that they received.

Councillor Fish agreed that more had to be done on homelessness and quickly so that those residents could be better housed.

Councillor Gledhill briefing provided updates to Member questions.

Councillor Cherry – A payment of £1000 had been given to the Neighbourhood Watch scheme this was compared to the £800 provided by the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner.

Councillor Gerrish – No smoke and mirror just clear on what is being delivered and the improvements being made.

Councillor Spillman - Children's Services only a third of the allocated budget had been applied with an agreement on temporary housing being looked at on how this would be delivered.

Councillor Allen – Return of investments – the Council had decided not to invest in Grays Town Centre and had decided to invest elsewhere.

Councillor C Kent – This was taxpayers money and should not be wished away.

Councillor Rice – The number of Police was 3000 in November and would increase to 3200 in the next financial year.

A non-recorded vote took place on recommendation 1.1. Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendation 1.1 to be carried.

A recorded vote took place on the amended recommendation 1.2 the result of which was:

For : Councillors Abbas, Akinbohun, Allen, Anderson, Cherry, Churchman, Collins, Coxshall, Duffin, Fish, Fletcher, Gamester, Gerrish, Gledhill, Hague, Halden, Hamilton, Hebb, Holloway, Huelin, Jefferies, Johnson, Kelly, C Kent, J Kent, Kerin, Lawrence, Liddiard, Little, MacPherson, Maney, Okunade, Piccolo, Potheary, Potter, Redsell, B Rice, G Rice, Rigby, Sammons, Shinnick, Smith, Spillman, Tolson, Watkins, Worrall (46)

Against : (0)

Abstain : (0)

Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendation 1.2 to be carried.

A non-recorded vote took place on recommendations 1.3 and 1.4. Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendations 1.3 and 1.4 to be carried.

Finally, a recorded en-bloc vote would take place on recommendations 1.5 to 1.10 the result of which was:

For : Councillors Abbas, Akinbohun, Allen, Anderson, Cherry, Churchman, Collins, Coxshall, Duffin, Fish, Fletcher, Gamester, Gerrish, Gledhill, Hague, Halden, Hamilton, Hebb, Holloway, Huelin, Jefferies, Johnson, Kelly, C Kent, J Kent, Kerin, Lawrence, Liddiard, Little, MacPherson, Maney, Okunade, Piccolo, Potheary, Potter, Redsell, B Rice, G Rice, Rigby, Sammons, Shinnick, Smith, Spillman, Tolson, Watkins, Worrall (46)

Against : (0)

Abstain : (0)

Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendations 1.5 to 1.10 to be carried.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

- 1. Considered and acknowledged the Section 151 Officer's (Director of Finance and IT's) S25 report on the robustness of the proposed budget, the adequacy of the Council's reserves and the Reserves Strategy as set out in Appendix 1, including the conditions upon which the following recommendations are made;**
- 2. Agreed to a 0% general fund council tax increase;**
- 3. Approved the new General Fund capital proposals, including the allocation for feasibility work on future and aspirational proposals, as set out in section 10 and Appendix 7;**
- 4. Delegated to Cabinet the ability to agree schemes (a) where it can be evidenced that there is a spend to save opportunity or (b) that use any unbudgeted contributions from third parties, including those by way of grants or developers' contributions, and these be deemed as part of the capital programme.**

Statutory Council Tax Resolution

(Members should note that these recommendations are a result of the previous recommendations above and can be agreed as written or as amended by any changes agreed to those above).

- 5. Calculated that the council tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2019/20 is £66,062,077 as set out in the table at paragraph 5.8 of this report.**
- 6. That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2019/20 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:**
 - (a) £428,070,964 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act.**
 - (b) £362,008,887 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act.**
 - (c) £66,062,077 being the amount by which the aggregate at 1.8(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 1.8(b) above,**

calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its council tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).

- (d) £1,287.81 being the amount at 1.8(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (Council Tax Base of 51,298), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (including Parish precepts).
 - (e) £0 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act.
 - (f) £1,287.81 being the amount at (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (e) above by Item T, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.
7. Noted that the Police Authority and the Fire Authority have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated in the tables below.
8. That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in the tables below as the amounts of council tax for 2019/20 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.

**2019/20 COUNCIL TAX FOR THURROCK PURPOSES EXCLUDING ESSEX
FIRE AUTHORITY AND ESSEX POLICE AUTHORITY**

Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2019/20							
A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
858.54	1,001.63	1,144.72	1,287.81	1,573.99	1,860.17	2,146.35	2,575.62

9. That it be noted that for the year 2019/20 Essex Police Authority has stated the following amounts in precept issued to the Council for each of the categories of dwellings as follows:

Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2019/20							
A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
128.64	150.08	171.52	192.96	235.84	278.72	321.60	385.92

10. That it be noted that for the year 2019/20 Essex Fire Authority has stated the following amounts in precept issued to the Council for each of the categories of dwellings as follows (waiting on formal confirmation):

Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2019/20							
A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
48.30	56.35	64.40	72.45	88.55	104.65	120.75	144.90

2019/20 COUNCIL TAX (INCLUDING FIRE AND POLICE AUTHORITY PRECEPTS)

Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2019/20							
A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
1,035.48	1,208.06	1,380.64	1,553.22	1,898.38	2,243.54	2,588.70	3,106.44

117. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 5 questions to the Leader had been received and 8 questions to Cabinet Members. Those not heard would either receive a written response or have the option to withdraw and resubmit.

A copy of the transcript of questions and answers can be found at Appendix A to these minutes.

At 8.59pm Councillors MacPherson and Tolson left the Council Chamber.

At 9.06pm the mayor called time on this item.

Councillor Redsell requested question to be resubmitted.

Councillor Cherry requested a written response.

Councillor Worrall requested a written response.

Councillor J Kent requested a written response.

Councillor Akinbohun requested a written response.

Councillor Smith requested a written response.

Councillor Allen requested question to be resubmitted..

118. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

The Mayor informed the Chamber that no reports had been received.

119. Minutes of Committees

The Minutes of Committees as set out in the Agenda were received.

120. 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.

121. Motion submitted by Councillor Holloway

The Motion was withdrawn by Councillor Holloway prior to the meeting.

122. Motion submitted by Councillor Duffin

The Motion, as printed in the Agenda was proposed by Councillor Duffin and seconded by Councillor Spillman. The Motion read as follows:

Thurrock Council will write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling on the Government to reverse its policy of placing Authorities who do not increase Council Tax to the maximum level at a financial disadvantage by assuming such a notional increase have been made when calculating the amount of business rates they will be allowed to retain.

Councillor Duffin introduced the Motion by stating that those Authorities that did not increase Council Tax to a maximum level were being punished by the Government and recommend the Council to call on the Government to stop this practice.

Councillor Gledhill stated that it was a good motion and the policy should be reversed to ensure that those Authorities that do well on finances should not be penalised.

Councillor Duffin stated that Thurrock was already below the notional level and that with any further cuts and punishments from the Government would make it harder for the Council to deliver.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion.

Upon being put to the vote members agreed unanimously, whereupon the Mayor declared the Motion carried.

The meeting finished at 9.12 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