

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 26 February 2020 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Terry Piccolo (Mayor), Sue Shinnick (Deputy Mayor), Qaisar Abbas, Abbie Akinbohun, John Allen, Alex Anderson, Gary Byrne, Daniel Chukwu, Colin Churchman, Gary Collins, Mark Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Mike Fletcher, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, Garry Hague, James Halden (*arrived 7.24pm*), Shane Hebb, Victoria Holloway, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Susan Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Fraser Massey, Allen Mayes, Sara Muldowney, Bukky Okunade, Jane Potheary, David Potter, Shane Ralph, Joycelyn Redsell, Gerard Rice, Elizabeth Rigby, Sue Sammons, Jennifer Smith, Luke Spillman, David Van Day, Aaron Watkins and Lynn Worrall

**Apologies:** Councillors Chris Baker and Angela Lawrence

**In attendance:** Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive  
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health/Interim Director of Children's Services  
Sean Clark, Director of Finance, Governance and Property  
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation  
Andrew Millard, Director of Place  
Tim Hallam, Acting Head of Legal, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer  
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer  
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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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.

### **103. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on the 29 January 2020 were approved as a correct record.

### **104. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no urgent items of business.

### **105. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **106. Announcements on behalf of the Mayor or the Leader of the Council**

The Mayor announced he had held a fund raising event at Amazon for his charity, Giving for Thurrock (GiFT), where mayors from as far as Folkestone had attended.

The Mayor thanked all Members for their contributions this year, thanked those Members who would be retiring at the upcoming elections and sent good luck wishes to those Members up for re-election.

The Leader also thanked those Members who would be retiring at the upcoming elections.

The Leader stated the Council's working relationship with Essex Police had some excellent results taking drug dealers off the streets of Thurrock and securing convictions. Another eight criminals had been arrested and either pleaded guilty or been found guilty thanks to the excellent work carried out by Essex Police Operation Raptor Team. During Op Raptor Essex Police had arrested 42 people, they had seen a 12% decrease in reports of Anti-Social Behaviour in Grays and Lakeside areas and in the last year alone had managed to secure a total of 42 years jail time for 16 C17 members. With Thurrock Council playing a significant role in providing funding and supporting the work being carried out by the team and would continue to work closely with Essex Police to see excellent results taking criminals off our streets.

The Leader referred to two consultations taking place in Grays. Plans for the regeneration of Grays Town Centre, which the Council wanted to get residents feedback on. Grays was set to be transformed with redevelopment stretching from the banks of the Thames to the very heart of the town. With £200m investment already secured including an underpass at Grays Station, which had received £11m funding from the Government through the Local Growth Fund. A further £49m had been bid for via the Future High Street Fund and the Towns Fund for Grays.

The other consultation was the Grays Public Space Protection Order and again would like to hear views from local residents and businesses who want to live and work without being affected by those intent on street drinking. The Leader reminded Members that both of these consultations can be completed through the Council website 'Have my Say' pages.

The Leader stated Highways England had launched a new round of consultation on their proposals to build the Lower Thames Crossing in Thurrock. Their first consultation had received more than 28,000 responses and had been instrumental in them making some significant changes to the proposals including scrapping plans for a rest, service and maintenance area. This new consultation was another opportunity to make sure residents of the borough had their voice heard and had another opportunity to make Highways England reconsider their proposals. The Council would continue to challenge Highways England and provide constructive feedback and objection to their

proposals. The Leader reminded Members the consultation was available online until 25 March 2020.

The Leader was delighted to say in commemoration of VE Day the Council had planned to install a memorial in Grays Town Park, this would include renewing the ringed garden area paths, a new low level wall in the same style as the memorial in Grays Town Centre to give a commonality of look and feel, linking the two memorials. There would be a centre monolith, with new planting that would dramatically improve the look of this area. Work would commence in early March to give the maximum amount of time for any planting to establish prior to May Bank Holiday with a joint celebration with the Royal British Legion.

The Leader stated the Council had been working with the Police over the noticeable increase of tagging and graffiti across the borough and was pleased to announce on the 30 September 2019 a Grays resident had been cautioned and issued a Fixed Penalty Notice in relation to graffiti on Anchor House, Grays. On 25 October 2019 a Grays resident had been charged after partnership working with Essex Police in relation to a series of graffiti offences and this matter awaits court appearance with compensation costs having been requested by the Council with another piece of partnership working another significant Tag offender in Thurrock had been identified and this was subject to an ongoing investigation in partnership with Essex Police. The Leader stated the amount of criminal damage one person could cause in a night was significant and not only unsightly it meant residents and businesses had to go to the expense of clearing it up. If this happened on a Council building or property it would be the taxpayer who footed the bill for its removal therefore this was not a victimless crime it was a crime all ended up paying for.

The Leader provided a Clean It, Cut It, Fill It update since April 2019:

- 2,241 potholes filled, more than 99% within agreed timeframes
- 1,017 fly-tips cleared
- 3,383 tonnes of waste cleared from our streets
- 3,737 fixed penalties have been issued for offences such as littering, dropping cigarette butts and various forms of anti-social behaviour
- 227 £400 fly-tipping fines issued
- 268 people prosecuted at court for not paying their on the spot fines
- 3 traveller encampments moved under our new interim injunction powers granted last September

#### **107. 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.co.uk/thurrock> and are attached at Appendix A at these minutes.

#### **108. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors**

Mayor informed Members in accordance with the Council's petition scheme, two requisition of notice had been given to present a petition at the meeting.

Councillor Little presented a petition on behalf of residents requesting Council and the Portfolio Holder to remove the Ridgwell Avenue proposal from the consultation document that went to Overview and Scrutiny on Tuesday 11 February and to Cabinet on 12 February 2020.

Councillor Potter presented a petition on behalf of residents calling Thurrock Borough Council to carry out a public consultation on parking in the following roads: Lime Close; Copper Beech Road; Church Crescent; Cliff Place; The Green; Peartree Close; Tyssen Place; Cheelson Road; Wilsman Road; Nelson Road; Hall Lane; and Canterbury Parade.

#### **109. Petitions Update Report**

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

#### **110. Revised Political Balance**

Councillor Gledhill presented the report that requested Council to confirm the calculations relating to the allocation of seats on committees following Councillor Allen becoming an Independent Councillor on 3 February 2020.

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

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the political balance and allocation of seats, as set out in Appendix 1, was approved.**
- 2. Council noted the manual adjustment requirements outlined in 2.8 and 2.9 and agreed those adjustments proposed by Group Leaders at the meeting.**

#### **111. 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 previously made by Committees and Outside Bodies, statutory and other panels.

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

Councillor Potheary, Leader of the Labour Group, informed the Chamber she had the following changes to make:

For Councillor Abbas to replace Councillor Rice on the William Palmer College Educational Trust.

Councillor Spillman, Leader of the Thurrock Independent Group, informed the Chamber he would like to relinquish seats on the Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Licensing Committee.

For the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force, Councillor Spillman gifted the vacant appointment to Councillor Allen to which Councillor Allen accepted and agreed by Members.

## **112. Appointment of Director of Children's Services**

Councillor Gledhill stated that following a robust search and selection process, the General Services Committee had unanimously agreed to recommend Sheila Murphy be appointed Corporate Director of Children's Services. The report presented this evening was to seek the agreement of Council. Councillor Gledhill thanked Roger Harris for covering the interim period.

Councillor Potheary extended her best wishes and congratulations to Sheila Murphy on her appointment and stated this would be a good opportunity to look at processes on the recruitment of directors to ensure processes in place were the best.

Councillor Spillman congratulated Sheila Murphy on her appointment and also thanked Roger Harris for this hard work during the interim period.

Councillor Okunade thanked Roger Harris for covering the interim period and congratulated and wished Sheila Murphy well in her new role.

Councillor Little stated Sheila Murphy had been the best person for the job and sent her congratulations. Councillor Little also thanked Roger Harris for the work undertaken during the interim period especially with the Ofsted inspection.

Councillor Redsell thanked Sheila Murphy with the work undertaken on the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Councillor Gledhill summed up by thanking the stakeholder panel members and members for their contributions.

Upon being put to the vote, Members voted unanimously in favour of the recommendation, whereupon the Mayor declared this to be carried.

### **RESOLVED**

**That Sheila Murphy be appointed the Director of Children's Services.**

## **113. Annual Pay Policy Statement 2020/21**

Councillor Huelin, Portfolio Holder for Central Services and Communities, 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 Potheary thanked Councillor Huelin for the report and welcomed the increase across the Council and thanked the Council's front line staff for all the work they undertook for residents.

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

## **RESOLVED**

**The Annual Pay Policy Statement 2020/21 was agreed in line with the Council's obligations under the Localism Act 2011, the Collective Agreement, the recommendations by the independent market assessment and the output of the pay review project (as agreed by General Services Committee on 8 October 2018).**

### **114. Capital Strategy 2020/21**

Councillor Hebb, Portfolio Holder for Finance, presented the Capital Strategy report that covered the Council's borrowing for capital purposes and included investments which were instrumental in financing capital programme that was designed to regenerate the borough and improve the borough's open spaces. Last year the Council had received over £31m income from investments and projected for the coming year to be over £33m which equated to around 25% of this Council's non grant income. Councillor Hebb stated the Investment Strategy had worked since October 2017 with statutory services safe and secure until at least mid-2023 and would fund additional services for the benefit of local residents such as £1m new fully warranted Police Constables, £0.5m injection funding to help primary care and education sector, front line environmental and highways department and £0.5m to help improve air quality in the borough.

Councillor Potheary thanked Councillor Hebb for the report but had concerns on the high level of debt which had risen without a huge amount of democratic oversight and there being a lack of transparency of the level of debt the Council was currently in. The Capital Strategy Review had met and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny had made recommendations to improve member involvement to scrutinise the process and would not be agreeing to any increase until these recommendations had been fully implemented and would be voting against the capital strategy at this time.

Councillor Spillman thanked Councillor Hebb for the report and stated he had been very supportive of the investment strategy with demand rising and the Council had looked at more initiative ways to bring money into the borough to

ensure the level of services continued. Although there were still questions to be answered such as the overspend on the A13 widening project.

Councillor Rice raised concerns the Council would be looking to borrow over £2m and asked for reassurance this had been managed in the proper manner. Councillor Rice also requested information on the capital programmes such as the A13 widening and the Stanford Le Hope rail station which was both overspent and questioned when the projects would be completed.

Councillor Duffin thanked Councillor Hebb and Officers for the report and voiced his support for the report. The report had been positive and proved how well things were going and the Council should be proud of this and should continue the trend to raise more investments to bring money into the borough.

Councillor Gerrish expressed this concern on the staggering level of debt that had arisen without any democratic oversight which was very risky and as Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee had asked for more accountability had been disappointment the report contained no clear plan. Councillor Gerrish suggested that an investment committee be formed to overview and scrutinise those decisions.

Councillor Halden referenced the majority of the Council's investments were short term and all the debts the Council had incurred were stable debts and Members should be proud of the capital plan delivered this evening by Councillor Hebb.

Councillor Gledhill stated the democratic oversight was being addressed and understood the concerns of Members when they saw such large numbers and suggested members asked appropriate questions at overview and scrutiny committees rather than relying on press coverage. Councillor Gledhill had some nervousness on the investment committee but understood some committee could be formed that would give steerage on individual investments. Councillor Gledhill reiterated the 82% of the debt was short term and would be paid back within a couple of years.

Councillor Mayes expressed his support for the report and stated investments made had been able to fund services for residents. With two external auditors giving positive opinions on Council's finances which was a tribute to the Council.

Councillor Hebb responded as follows:

To Councillor Potheary question – the levels of debt were managed well with 82% of debt being short term and paid back and Councillor Potheary attendance at the Capital Strategy Review had been noted.

To Councillor Spillman appreciated his support but stated the report was about investment income and not so much around the capital programme and information on the A13 widening would come out in due time.

To Councillor Rice a report had been already been presented to Cabinet, Council and Overview and Scrutiny and stated without the investment, £30m would need to be cut from services and challenged Councillor Rice to say what services his residents would want to be cut.

To Councillor Duffin thanked him and appreciated the support given.

To Councillor Gerrish reference had already been made to the short term debt and how that debt was being managed well with two independent external auditors giving positive opinions on the Council's finances. Councillor Hebb took Councillor Gerrish point on scrutiny and oversight and stated that some research could be useful to see what worked well.

Councillor Hebb summed up and stated that Members voting in favour of the recommendations would continue to fund the services that residents of the borough used and demanded and to start to fund the services that residents want.

The Mayor called a vote on this item to which the majority of Members voted in favour.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Council approved the Capital Strategy for 2020/21 including approval of the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) statement; and**
- 2. That the Council approved the adoption of the Prudential Indicators as set out in Appendix 1.**

### **115. General Fund Budget Proposals**

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

#### Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mister Mayor and it is at this point that I really wish I would have visited Specsavers about three months ago, or indeed brought my reading glasses.

Yet again it is my pleasure to present to this chamber a budget that sees no cuts in services. What it is a budget for, is a budget that delivers more money to be spent on social care, more money to be spent on the environment, and more money to be spent on tackling anti-social behaviour across the borough. This is all done at the same time as having the maximum recommended

amount in reserves at £11m for this year, but also...quite clearly I need to give up...but at the same time as the £11m in reserves, earmarked reserves of a further £10m to deliver transformation and ensure budget resilience as we move forward as a council.

So now to some of the detail. Members will see at appendix 2, page 115 a comprehensive list of the revised current budget envelopes and the proposals for next year's spend in those areas. You will note in Adults, Health and Housing, an increased spend of £1.95 million; in Children's Services, half a million; Environment £1.1 million. Indeed, with the exception of corporate cost, which covers council tax and benefit administration budget, all areas are seeing more money spent on them to deliver the services that residents need and expect. Indeed, overall it was about £5million extra spend across the board.

I would of course remind Members that this increase is on the current revised in-year budget totals. So, if we compared them to the original budget totals in 2019/20, so the beginning of this municipal year, we would see the increase as such: social care increase £4m, £1 million... sorry one third of £1 million in general fund homelessness support, and £1.2m extra spent on the environment team. So as we know social care for both adults and children is a very complex matter, and it just takes a few extra cases can put extreme pressure, not just on the services workload, but also on their finances. We are very fortunate to have a surplus at the moment that can absorb this in-year unexpected increase in demand, and this was a demand over and above the increase that we put in the end of the last financial year into these budgets. This is one of the reasons we are increasing the budget envelopes in these areas to ensure that as we move forward our most vulnerable are still looked after. Obviously, it is not just those in social care; it equally applies to those presenting themselves as potentially homeless, under our new duties under the Homelessness Prevention Act. Of course no one likes to see an overspend in a budget, but equally I'm sure not one of us here would not want to see us as a Council failing some of our most vulnerable adults, children and indeed residents who fall to be homeless.

So, how are we doing this? Well its simple by not just relying on the tax payer to dig deeper and deeper into their pockets each year, or by death through a thousand budget cuts as we've seen under previous administrations, but it is our long and short term investment strategies, as we've just agreed, which brings in over £30 million per year. However in line with spending rules, as I've pointed out in response to Councillor Duffin, we're unable to spend all of that income on keeping council tax down, although we are obviously doing exceptionally well in doing so. Indeed our medium term financial strategy produced and approved in previous years has relied on an increase of 1.99% each year. However, despite this recommendation as we know last year we agreed a zero percent council tax increase, and in front of us tonight is an increase of only 1.49% in the general fund Council Tax amount. Indeed, if agreed this evening, since taking administration in 2016 the Conservatives will have increased the general fund council tax amount by 5.47%. This is some 2.5% lower than originally forecast. In doing so our residents in a Band D

property keep a further £46 of their hard earned cash in their pockets, rather than giving it to us and our coffers. On top of this, also as mentioned, in the past couple of years, no cuts other than those agreed by the previous administration and, at the same time, seeing a whopping 85% of our key performance indicators now being met or exceeding targets.

But, of course, I cannot and will not just brush over the social care precepts that we have applied to help ensure our most vulnerable adults and elderly receive the care that they need. This year we are also seeking a maximum 2% or 53 pence per week on a Band D council tax bill to help meet these costs. All of the money raised by this precept is ring fenced and goes directly to the adult social care. These precepts have meant a further £1.3m spent on adult social care, which has allowed, for instance, to maintain our record of 'good' across our internal services, such as Collins House, extra care, and the joint re-enablement team. This means we will not have to increase the cost of service charges to our users in care homes and other services, and the three levels will be frozen at 2019/20 levels. It will also allow us to pay for our residential homecare, care home providers, with a slightly higher uplift to cope with the national living wage. That means we will hopefully be able to keep the carers that are working for us and have done over the many years.

It does mean that the average council tax rise for all council services will be 68 pence per week for over 70% of our residents. I'm going to say that again, 68 pence per week, of which the largest share will go to support our elderly and vulnerable.

Now I know there's been lots of discussion in the past about how the increase in adult social care should be funded, with some proposing it should be in income tax. However, if one thing I've learnt in local government for over 20 years of service and 14 years as an elected member has taught me: if money goes into a central government pot, it's a hell of a job trying to get it back, it involves all sorts of formulas to get it back where it's needed. So I stand by the decision made by government and indeed this chamber in the past, that raising this precept locally is the right thing, with the majority of council tax payers across the borough only paying an extra 39 pence per week to ensure our most vulnerable adults get the support they need.

Further to these increases, and increases outside of our control, we have the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner precept to help pay for the police and fire service across the whole of Essex. This year, instead of going for the maximum increase, which I believe was £10, he has decided to go for a much lower percentage, as he feels that now with the maximum, sorry with police numbers over 3,000 police officers, which is the highest since 2010, all he needs to do is increase to cover the cost. That works out at 11 pence per week for the average Band D property increase this year. So as I said last year, it's the same, taxpayers will be paying coppers for coppers. We will also see a 3% a week increase for our fire and rescue service; again, I'm sure nobody in this chamber will complain about a 3% increase for those brave firefighters who work tirelessly to make sure we're safe.

We also again are in the enviable position to have a one off surpluses which we can spend to enhance our borough and I am pleased to announce that we agreed at Cabinet a fortnight ago:

- £660k on our Kerb It Programme to help protect our verges and pavements; and we heard very eloquently Mr. Perrin say why this is so much needed
- £500k to support mental health outcomes
- £320k on environmental enforcement officers to help tackle ASB including £50k increase to tackle the scourge of graffiti on council owned spaces. Everyone will remember from my opening speech, there's already been two prolific taggers charged in relation to the damage they've caused and this is ongoing. However, this money will be used to help clean the cost these vandals caused in their nightly pursuits
- £230k for over 1,000 trees to be planted across the borough but I will touch on that again a little bit later
- £250k to look at our leisure and tourism offer across Thurrock
- And further support for our youth offending team, again keeping our youngsters out of reoffending, and hopefully keep them much more productive as they go through their adult life.

We also have a Capital Programme, which will see money invested into:

- Bridge maintenance across the borough, whilst not the sexiest of spend, we will agree that this will help keep our borough moving and ensure the safety of all of our residents
- More creative work spaces and repair to High House Production Park. The borough should pride itself in its creative industries that we have here and this vital work spaces will help as part of the Thames production corridor
- Improvements to Coalhouse Fort in East Tilbury, something long overdue and will help the trustees of the fort move forward with new exciting possibilities to make this more attractive to visitor from around the world.
- Also, to increase in size and access to our waste and recycling centre to make it more accessible to our residents
- Increasing the ability for our residents in flatted accommodation to be able to recycle and enjoy the benefits of the three-bin system the rest of us do. This will help not only drive up recycling rates, but therefore reduce the amount of landfill or incineration for our waste
- Better access put in place for new schools and existing schools in Little Thurrock Blackshots area.
- An increase in cycle routes

Which now leads me nicely into the climate change agenda voted on earlier in this year.

As we have already mentioned, Cabinet voted over a fortnight ago for another 1,000 trees to be planted across the borough and to help clear our air, and in

the Capital Programme, if agreed this evening, will expand our cycle routes across the borough. This will be a total spend of £900,000 next year to improve our environment. But we cannot forget that on top of this we have a significant amount of our investments in the green energy sector. So not only are making money from these investments to supply the services that residents expect we are also playing a bigger part in supplying renewable energy sources across the country, something that I hope will benefit even more our residents in the coming year, and again something we will be able to speak about as positive news in the coming year or so.

There are many more small schemes that I'm sure Members will find interesting in Appendix 7, and I'm sure they'll talk about it as they go through the meeting.

As Members are aware, Cabinet has already agreed the Dedicated Schools Grant that is included within tonight's report for information only. The main headline being a £10.1m extra towards the education of our children across the borough. You'll see as part of this report, something I mentioned earlier, about money held centrally going through very complicated formulas to get it back. But to be clear, even as it stands now, the £10.1m extra comes to Thurrock schools from our government.

So to sum up on this Mr Mayor, what will residents see for this modest increase in tax, from our allocation of the one off spends from Cabinet, and indeed from our government?

Should this budget be approved, this evening our residents will see:

- A council delivering on its Clean It, Cut It, Fill It priorities: with thousands of potholes filled; fly tips cleared; thousands of more tonnes of waste removed from our streets; more fixed penalties issued for those offences such as littering to improve the look of our area; more people prosecuted in court for not paying their on the spot fines; more £400 fly-tipping fines.
- A council increase - its met or exceeded performance indicators beyond the record 85% that have met targets this year.
- A £10.1m spent on children across the borough
- They will see more trees planted
- More money for our most vulnerable residents
- More investment in tackling anti-social behaviour
- More help for mental health outcomes across the borough
- Another year of one off surpluses and
- Most importantly Mr Mayor, it will see a council still delivering the lowest Council Tax bills in the whole of Essex.

Thank you.

The Mayor then invited the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Potheary, to respond and advised she had 15 minutes to do so.

## Councillor Potheary

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Gledhill for presenting the budget report. I am not planning on taking the 15 minutes.

A very rosy picture of the Thurrock Council has been painted for us but the truth is there is a very very different reality about living in Thurrock today. Many residents listening this evening simply won't recognise the story being told. The Tilbury resident paying service charges for a lift that doesn't work. The West Thurrock resident living day-in and day-out with choking air pollution and congestion. The Corringham resident too scared to visit the town centre out of fear for their own safety. The older resident who relied on receiving care at Orsett hospital, now forced to travel to Brentwood for appointments. The Ockendon resident fearing the loss of the green space outside his home. Another motorway ripping through our borough and destroying our health.

This borough needs a council that is on the side of its residents, that understands their needs and their aspirations. Thurrock is a place of great potential but we need to start getting the basics right and ensuring our residents can see every day we are working for them, to improve their lives. At the moment, our residents tell us the gulf between rhetoric and reality is too great.

We cannot keep increasing council tax year on year at a time when wages are stagnating and the cost of living continues to rise. Therefore Thurrock Labour opposes a rise in Council Tax. An increase of 1.49% doesn't sound like much. But add to it the 2% in adult social care precept and an almost 5% rise from the Conservative Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, band C properties will be paying an nearly £1,500.00 a year.

This comes on top of years of hikes by this Conservative council. If this new rise goes through, the increase in Council tax since the Tories came to power will also be 15%. By contrast, the last Labour council froze bills nearly every year.

I would also remind the chamber, that five current members of the Conservative Party, elected under a different banner, were elected on a pledge to cut council tax, not just freeze it, but actually cut it.

I would suggest those five members consider very carefully the promises they made to their residents when they were elected under different colours, before they vote through yet another increase.

It cannot be stated clearly enough, that this increase does not mean necessarily new services. It increases a surplus. An item listed in section 5.3 such as the kerb-it scheme are actually being funded from the 2019/20 surplus not next years. We also don't trust this Conservative Council to spend that surplus in the best interest of our residents. £10 million pounds (at the

very least) so they can sit in plush new offices, whilst the borough's services see no additional investment, against the wishes of our residents.

Further to the council tax increase, this Conservative Council is determined to continue their assault on council tenants and leaseholders with whopping increases to both rents and service charges. Whilst it is true the council was forced to cut rents by 1% in previous years, the burden of this was placed on tenants living in high and low rise flats.

Lifts, communal lighting, a safe and secure main door, and cleaning the lobby floors were all charged in addition to rent. Essentially a tax on walking to your front door. Both tenants and leaseholders complain consistently and bitterly of poor service and overstretched staff, lifts and communal front doors out of action for days, sometimes weeks in one case months. Year on year we have seen 3% increases in these charges, yet no discernible improvement in the quality of the service being received. Indeed, the complaints in our inboxes and at our surgeries and at our community forums just go up.

On the subject of rents, the council now has the ability to start raising rents again. After the length of time these haven't been rising Thurrock Labour believe it is downright irresponsible of this Conservative Council to impose a major rent hike straight out of the gate. A more sensible and fairer approach would be a freeze this year, followed by a commitment to fair rents in the future.

A large percentage of our council tenants pay their own rent from the wages they earn, often working for minimum wage or low pay.

This year, the Conservatives are taking more money straight out of their pocket, in council tax, service charges, rents, the precept, the police precept and the fire precept. We're talking about families who are working hard and only just managing to get by. In-work poverty is a huge problem in this country and in our borough, and this budget, plus the extras, will only make the situation worse.

So everything's going up but what do our tenants and leaseholders gain? What do these increases do to improve their lives? There is nothing additional being offered to justify these increases. Like with the council tax increases, residents are gaining nothing. That is why Thurrock Labour is proposing a triple freeze. A freeze on council tax, a freeze on rents and a freeze on service charges.

Nationally, we continue to count the cost of this Conservative Government which has presided over nearly ten years of devastating cuts, set to dole out even more. They've failed to get a grip on spiralling costs for local councils in children's and adult social care, homelessness provision, school funding and supporting children with special educational needs and the new money from Government for schools just makes up what has been cut over the last 10 years.

Not only do these failures have an acute impact on council spending, they have a huge human cost too, too often being paid by those in our society who deserve the most help.

And there are also failures closer to home that will make residents question why they are paying more for incompetence. Major infrastructure projects like the A13 widening the overspent which the question members ducted early is delayed, hugely over budget and has clearly been mismanaged, through a shocking lack of oversight by the portfolio holders since the Conservatives came into power.

The budget is when we reflect on our vision for Thurrock and the priorities for our borough. We know our borough faces huge challenges, but it also has huge potential. In setting the budget envelope here tonight, this is the opportunity for elected members to have their say on the priorities we want to see the council delivering on.

Three key priorities loom large for our residents at the moment: tackling crime and antisocial behaviour; saving our open spaces from over development; and ensuring every community in the borough can enjoy clean streets and clean air.

The council needs to get a grip on the spiralling levels of crime and antisocial behaviour that are holding our borough back and making our residents' lives a misery. Last year saw reports of violent crime increase by almost 45%. Our residents deserve to feel safe.

The council needs to save our open spaces from inappropriate development. We recognise that green spaces are vital to our health and wellbeing, and must be protected. Development needs to be evenly spread across the borough and align with areas of economic growth. In other words, it needs to make sense and it needs to be fair. It also needs to make an "offer" to existing residents, prioritising their needs and using development to fulfil these. This needs to be the starting point, not an afterthought.

The council also needs to take bold action to tackle the scourge of fly tipping to ensure our public spaces are clean, tidy and inviting for our residents, including communal spaces such as shared alleyways. Thurrock has some of the worst rates of COPD and related diseases outside of London. We need definitive action on this. We need to explore the feasibility of introducing a low emission zone and continue the fight against the Conservative Government's pet project, the Lower Thames Crossing. We need to deliver clean streets and clean air for all of our communities.

So as we set the budget envelope for the forthcoming year, we would like to stress Labour's key priorities of tackling crime, saving our open spaces, clean streets and clean air.

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

## Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Councillor Potheary for your response.

I've got to say, this is as confusing as ever and we hear that you're not going to back this budget. A budget that's tackling air pollution, something that's actually on your budget that wants to do that as well. And tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, more to the point, that was in your speech as well. Pretty much everything that you want to put forward is what's in our budget, but yet you wish to vote that down.

I'm going to say some of the things that you did mention, as I say, air pollution, in our budget, being tackled. Anti-social behaviour, in our budget, being tackled. With the NHS as our partners in relation to the closure of Orsett Hospital, something started, of course, under a Labour government, you seem to be very, very quiet upon, for new integrated medical centres coming, by working with our partners.

You say that wages are stagnating. According to the Office for National Statistics, actually they are on the rise and indeed, on the highest we've seen since Labour were last in power nationally. And again, you mentioned 'Oh when we were in charge, we froze Council Tax'. The only reason you had the ability to freeze Council Tax is because the Conservative government were matching it every time you were putting it up by 1%, they would give us 1% extra. So if it had not been for that, there would have been monstrous Council Tax increases year on year as we saw the last time you were in administration.

You mention the surpluses. Obviously we spend the surpluses that we raise rather than trying to spend them in advance. We've already been accused of borrowing and not repaying but actually we wait until we finally got the money to spend it.

This ridiculous £10 million on the new Council offices, let me remind everybody, yet again. Money put aside by the Labour Group, when they were in charge, to build, no sorry, to improve the offices. So would you rather, an office that is decaying and dying in the way that the offices are here. Or a much more efficient, fuel efficient and indeed, more importantly, a greener building being delivered and 82 new properties on a brownfield site. Or we pour more and more and more money into a building that is quite frankly, as dead as a parrot.

As I was quite rightly saying, ASB tackled, air pollution tackled, NHS working with us to deliver four new integrated medical centres, wages up. I'm just seeing how far we've got down now. That's it, an office that's dying but rather than having it as a much better facility, 82 extra houses, yet again we see Labour saying 'No, no, no'.

Council rents are now up from four years' worth of 1% national cut but they are still lower than they were under the previous Labour administration. And

yes, we have introduced service charges for those residents that are using services such as lifts and I will pay for the services that they are using. I'm not happy as well, I'm very not happy that they are not being provided with the service that they should do. Again, you've got the share of Overview and Scrutiny for Housing, perhaps this is something that needs to be looked into. Because, I'm not happy with it, residents are not happy with it, probably the only thing that we agree on this evening.

But when it comes to building houses, it's always the same. Labour – 'Let's build more Council houses, let's build more Council houses. Let's build some up there, ooh no, no, not there, not there.' But they never ever, ever, where. So please, stop saying, 'no' and start saying, 'yes'.

So in response to the elected Member, perhaps all this dog-whistle politics that seems to be going on in relation. So we want to do something else which actually, most of it, is exactly what we want to do indeed. All of it is what we want to do, plus go a bit further, plus ensure, that we are trying to meet the green agenda, something that they voted through, that again, they wish to say, 'no, no, no', every single time we do it.

And finally, who is going to pay for this mythical triple lock? I'll tell you who is going to pay for it. It's going to be residents. The only reason that residents will end up paying for it, not in cash, were it wise, they will be paying for it through poorer services. Where are the cuts that you are going to make to match those funds, every single thing that we need to provide as a service. You, again, have no idea where it's going to come from. Perhaps you're going to be planting except just ordinary trees, these magical money trees that you seem to think can pay for everything that's there. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

*At 8.25pm, Councillor Halden called Point of Order, requesting further information from Councillor Potheary on the elderly resident referred to in her speech who was now forced to travel to Brentwood for appointments.*

*At 8.29pm, Councillor Potheary called Point of Order, requesting Members stopped banging the tables as this was disrespectful and rude to all in the Chamber.*

The Mayor asked Members for any questions.

Councillor Spillman stated he did not believe general fund council tax should be raised rather the Council should be looking at investments and providing better services more efficiently. Councillor Spillman was opposed to the Civic Offices redevelopment and there was no guarantee the 82 houses being built would go to Thurrock residents. Councillor Spillman expressed his surprise on the Labour's response to the "triple lock" on tax, rent and service charges and would be abstaining on the increase of 1.4% on council tax but would be supporting the 2% increase towards the cost of Adult Social Care.

Councillor Duffin stated he would be voting against the recommendation. All 49 members had failed residents by raising council tax. Members should not

be congratulating themselves on the 1.49% increase; a freeze on council tax would be worthy of some congratulations. Councillor Duffin stated that going forward there should be more investments, more commercial ventures or different means of raising money.

Councillor Watkins stated his support on the report stating the budget had been strong and successful for residents with money being spent on the borough to ensure it was cleaner and greener. Those investments had been made to the environment of the borough over the last four years such as weekly bin collections, new tractors, street bins, tree planting, Kerb-It, fly tipping and street cleaners. Councillor Watkins stated the 2% increase towards the cost of Adult Social Care was right to deliver the services to those in need and supported the 1.49% council tax increase that would allow investments into the Council services and keep those services residents depended on.

Councillor Kerin referred Members to the 12 major schemes that had been committed to under the Current Programme and stated these should be good news to residents but with millions of pounds overspend this had been mismanaged and residents deserved better value for money.

Councillor Ralph welcomed the investments being made to Coalhouse Fort.

Councillor Mayes stated there seemed to be some confusion how Labour Members were voting this evening and stated that should the budget not be approved the £0.5m set aside for improving air quality in the borough would be frozen.

Councillor Johnson referred Members to the average weekly rent now compared to the higher weekly rent when Labour was in Administration in 2015/16.

Councillor Redsell stated a lot of negativity had been received this evening but Members should be mindful of the positives from the budget such as the transforming homes, tree planting schemes, A13 and new schools being built in the borough.

Councillor Maney referred Members to the three year Kerb-It programme where residents could benefit from slab replacements on kerb edges. Councillor Maney emphasised as this was part of the budget proposal Labour Members should be very mindful of how they voted.

Councillor Worrall welcomed some good aspects within the report which included the increase spend on homelessness but had some questions on how much of the £2.217m would be for homelessness and how much would be to bail out TRL. That mental health spends should always have money available and should not be dependent on council having to agree to a council tax rise and understood the Council had received grants to tackle this problem and hoped the monies referred to in the report was new money and not identified funding streams. Councillor Worrall welcomed money that could be

spent on programmes such as the Kerb It programme across the whole of the borough as there were verges in very poor condition that needed to be addressed. Councillor Worrall referred to capital receipt, disposal of land and buildings and the recent publicity on the rights and wrongs of disposal of green spaces. That part of the land once released would be to build affordable housing to rent as part of the HRA and had raised land disposal at the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and asked for some clarity on any disposal of Thurrock owned space to TRL had to follow strict rules and that best value must be achieved from the sale. That any disposal of land should be agreed in the Chamber by all 49 members and not just within Cabinet.

Councillor Gerrish stated that residents would be hit with six separate taxes when the cost of living had also risen and the Council had a wellbeing to balance the finances of the Council services so that residents had the ability to pay. Councillor Gerrish questioned why residents were being asked to pay more when the surplus of the Council would stand at £4.1m next year and could not understand why the Council was asking residents to pay such increases. Councillor Gerrish stated that instead of increasing council tax but to cut out the waste and mismanagement of the Administration who were wasting money on new offices for councillors, spending millions of pounds on the A13 widening and was the right time to put residents first.

Councillor Halden answered Councillor Worrall's point on the mental health spend. The £1m allocated for schools was additional money with the funds being voted on this evening. The work to expand general practitioner surgeries was also additional money.

Councillor Hebb stated it was clear that Labour would be cutting services if they were to get into Administration and that this should never happen.

Councillor Gledhill thanked Members for their questions and thanked Councillor Spillman for his consistency in his approach, there were clear rules to prevent all investment money to hold down council tax increases and would like to see this changed nationally. There had been significant stand against fly tipping and stated that an external audit would be carried out on the A13 to which when completed would be shared with everybody. The chair of Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been informed that the consultation was not predetermined with Labour members seeing this consultation process as planning consent which it was not. The Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny was reminded a one off spend was a one off not a continual spend.

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 recommendation 1.2 the result of which was:

For: Councillors Abbas, Akinbohun, Anderson, Byrne, Chukwu, Churchman, Collins, Coxshall, Duffin, Fish, Fletcher, Gerrish, Gledhill, Hague, Halden, Hebb, Holloway, Huelin, Jefferies, Johnson, Kelly, C Kent, J Kent, Kerin, Liddiard, Little, MacPherson, Maney, Massey, Mayes, Muldowney, Okunade,

Piccolo, Potheary, Potter, Ralph, Redsell, Rice, Rigby, Sammons, Shinnick, Smith, Spillman, Van Day, Watkins and Worrall (46)

Against: (0)

Abstain: Councillor Allen (1)

Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendation 1.2 to be carried.

A recorded vote took place on recommendation 1.3 the result of which was:

For: Councillors Akinbohun, Anderson, Churchman, Collins, Coxshall, Gledhill, Hague, Halden, Hebb, Huelin, Jefferies, Johnson, Kelly, Little, MacPherson, Maney, Mayes, Piccolo, Potter, Ralph, Redsell, Rigby, Sammons, Van Day and Watkins (25)

Against: Councillors Abbas, Allen, Chukwu, Duffin, Fish, Fletcher, Gerrish, Holloway, C Kent, J Kent, Kerin, Liddiard, Muldowney, Okunade, Potheary, Rice, Shinnick and Worrall (18)

Abstain: Councillors Byrne, Massey, Smith and Spillman (4)

Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendation 1.3 to be carried.

A non-recorded vote took place on recommendations 1.4 and 1.5. Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendations 1.4 and 1.5 to be carried.

Finally, a recorded en-bloc vote would take place on recommendations 1.6 to 1.11 the result of which was:

For: Councillors Abbas, Akinbohun, Allen, Anderson, Byrne, Chukwu, Churchman, Collins, Coxshall, Duffin, Fish, Fletcher, Gerrish, Gledhill, Hague, Halden, Hebb, Holloway, Huelin, Jefferies, Johnson, Kelly, C Kent, J Kent, Kerin, Liddiard, Little, MacPherson, Maney, Massey, Mayes, Muldowney, Okunade, Piccolo, Potheary, Potter, Ralph, Redsell, Rice, Rigby, Sammons, Shinnick, Smith, Spillman, Van Day, Watkins and Worrall (47)

Against: (0)

Abstain: (0)

Whereupon the Mayor declared recommendations 1.6 to 1.11 to be carried.

## **RESOLVED**

### **That the Council:**

- 1. Considered and acknowledged the Section 151 Officer's (Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property'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 a 2% council tax increase towards the cost of Adult Social Care;
3. Agreed a 1.49% council tax increase to meet the increasing costs and demands of all other services and to move the council towards greater financial sustainability for the medium to longer term;
4. 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 6;
5. 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).*

6. Calculated that the council tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2020/21 is £69,168,853 as set out in the table at paragraph 5.8 of this report.
7. That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2020/21 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
  - (a) £477,989,694 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act.
  - (b) £408,820,841 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act.
  - (c) £69,168,853 be the amount by which the aggregate at 1.7(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 1.7(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) £1,332.81 being the amount at 1.7(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (Council Tax Base of 51,897), 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) £1,332.81 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.
8. Noted that the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner has issued precepts to the Council in respect of Essex Police and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service 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.
9. That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts Page 91 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.

**2020/21 COUNCIL TAX FOR THURROCK PURPOSES EXCLUDING  
ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY AND ESSEX POLICE AUTHORITY**

Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2020/21							
A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
888.54	1,036.63	1,184.72	1,332.81	1,628.99	1,925.17	2,221.35	2,665.62

10. That it be noted that for the year 2020/21 Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority has stated the following amounts in precept issued to the Council in respect of Essex Police for each of the categories of dwellings as follows:

Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2020/21							
A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
132.42	154.49	176.56	198.63	242.77	286.91	331.05	397.26

11. That it be noted that for the year 2020/21 Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority has stated the following amounts in precept issued to the Council in respect of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service for each of the categories of dwellings as follows:

Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2020/21							
A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
49.26	57.47	65.68	73.89	90.31	106.73	123.15	147.78

**2020/21 COUNCIL TAX (INCLUDING FIRE AND POLICE  
AUTHORITY PRECEPTS)**

Amounts for the Valuation Bands for 2020/21							
A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
1,070.2 2	1,248.59	1,426.96	1,605.33	1,962.07	2,318.81	2,675.55	3,210.66

*At 9.21pm, Councillor Potheary called Point of Order to suspend standing orders until 10.00pm and seconded by Councillor Kerin. Members agreed to continue.*

*At 9.22pm, Councillor Churchman left the Council Chamber.*

**116. Questions from Members**

The Mayor informed the Chamber no questions to the Leader had been received and nine questions to Cabinet Members.

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

The Mayor stated those Members whose questions were not heard a written response would be provided.

*At 9.36pm, Councillor Maney called Point of Order in regards to Council Procedure Rules, 14.17, Supplementary Questions that Members may ask two supplementary questions but must not extend into a statement. Councillor Maney stated that Members were abusing this rule.*

*At 9.50pm, Councillor Holloway called Point of Order in regards to Article 5, 3.1 (d) of the constitution, Mayor's Functions and Responsibilities, (d) to ensure that the Council meeting was a forum for the debate of matters of concern to the local community. Councillor Holloway stated that the Mayor was not allowing Members to have such a debate.*

*At 9.54pm, Councillor Byrne called Point of Order to notify the Mayor that he was still waiting for a written response from the Portfolio Holder to a question submitted at January Council.*

**117. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies**

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

**118. Minutes of Committees**

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

**119. 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.

**120. Motion submitted by Councillor Halden**

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

*The Chamber thanks those members retiring at the upcoming election for their service to the borough.*

Councillor Halden presented the Motion by stating when Members were elected they sign up for a period of four years and within that time they are committed to the role and the functions associated with it and Members often had to take compromises on family life when undertaking the role in representing their constituents.

Councillor Halden specifically mentioned Councillor Gerrish, Councillor Spillman, Councillor Duffin and Councillor Watkins who would be retiring in May 2020 and wished them well.

Councillor Halden summed up by stating that on behalf of all 49 Members and residents he thanked all those retiring members for their service.

Members voted unanimously in favour of this Motion to which the Mayor announced the Motion carried.

**121. Motion submitted by Councillor Redsell**

The Motion, as printed in the Agenda was proposed by Councillor Redsell. The Motion read as follows:

*Council calls on Cabinet to consider a new wood and bluebells to be planted on a piece of land at the edge of Woodside.*

Councillor Redsell stated the plans would be for a place for trees and greenery to grow which would lead to a wood being created for the future of Thurrock's children. That planting trees was a way to tackle air pollution, a great way to reduce carbon footprint and for the health and wellbeing of residents. This was now a good time to start with plans which could only getting bigger over time. Councillor Redsell stated conversations were taking place with the developers who owned the piece of land.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion.

Members voted unanimously in favour of this Motion to which the Mayor announced the Motion carried.

## **122. Motion submitted by Councillor Rigby**

The Motion, as printed in the Agenda was proposed by Councillor Rigby. The Motion read as follows:

*The high use of fireworks in the borough was causing distress and injury to pets and wildlife with an impact on air quality. Members therefore call on the Council to request the Government; via a letter to George Eustice, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with copies sent to our two local Members of Parliament, Jackie Doyle - Price and Stephen Metcalfe; review current legislation to include the following:*

- *Reduce the time period fireworks can be purchased.*
- *Reduce the decibel level of fireworks for private use.*
- *Restrict use of fireworks to official dates such as Bonfire night, Diwali, New Year's Eve and Chinese New Year. All other times, for example weddings, requiring a licence.*

*We also request the Council provide improved notification of big scheduled events.*

Councillor Rigby stated the Motion was not seeking to ban fireworks but to have more control over when fireworks could be used. To have reduced time periods and fixed dates when fireworks can be used and to have tighter controls.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion.

Members voted unanimously in favour of this Motion to which the Mayor announced the Motion carried.

**The meeting finished at 10.05 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](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**