

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 22 July 2020 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-in is Monday 3 August 2020 at 5.00pm

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Leader), Shane Hebb (Deputy Leader), Mark Coxshall, James Halden, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Ben Maney, Allen Mayes and Aaron Watkins

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed to YouTube.

11. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 17 June 2020 were approved as a correct record.

12. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

13. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

14. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by explaining that Thurrock had recently received independent verification from Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) that the borough was now cleaner than ever before. He stated that only 3.67% of sites that KBT visited had any evidence of litter, graffiti, dog fouling, fly-posting or fly-tipping. He described how this may have partly been due to COVID-19, but KBT had confirmed that they had not seen such a reduction in litter in other areas also affected by the pandemic. He outlined the percentages of the borough which had seen no evidence of issues, such as 96.33% of the borough had no littering, 94% had no graffiti, 99.8% of the borough had no fly-posting, 96.7% had no fly-tips, and 99.67% of the borough had no dog fouling. He added that there were still areas in which these problems occurred, but thanked the street cleaning teams for their hard work, particularly during such a difficult time, in keeping parks and other areas open and tidy. He also

thanked residents for their participation in keeping the borough tidy, by taking rubbish home with them.

The Leader moved onto discuss the developments made in COVID-19 since the last Cabinet meeting, as pubs and restaurants had now been opened, and a new track and trace system had been launched. He stated that locally, Thurrock had produced their Outbreak Control Plan, which would help prevent and monitor the spread of COVID-19 in the borough. He stated that contact tracing had also been established, which was particularly important for people in care homes and other vulnerable residents, to ensure their safety. The Leader felt proud of Thurrock as residents had risen to the challenge to prevent the spread of the virus, and asked them to continue to enjoy the new freedoms responsibly. The Leader outlined the current government guidance including staying 2m apart from other people, 1m apart from other people when wearing a mask, staying alert for symptoms, staying indoors when necessary, and visiting shops and other local establishments safely.

The Leader also commented on the new Highways England (HE) design refinement consultation, and asked residents to get involved to make sure Thurrock voices were heard. He stated that this would likely be the third and final consultation, so would potentially be the last chance for residents to change the scheme. The Leader felt that the scheme did not go far enough to mitigate the harm that the proposed route would cause, and urged residents to make their feelings known. He stated that the consultation would run until 12 August 2020, and due to COVID-19 would be mostly online. The Leader confirmed that he had asked HE to delay the consultation due to its limited online nature, but HE had continued with their scheduled dates. He added that the previous consultations had received more responses than any HE consultations before, and thanked residents for taking part in those. He again urged residents to take part and make their voices heard.

The Leader finished his statement by giving the Clean It, Cut It, Fill It Update since April 2020, and stated that 1347 potholes had been filled in (all within target time); 777 tonnes of litter had been cleared; 388 fly-tips had been cleared; 1163 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) had been issued; and 64 £400 fines had been issued for non-payment of FPNs. He added that 58 of these non-payment of fines had been issued to court, but as courts were currently closed due to COVID-19, it could take a while for these to be heard. He summarised and stated that Cabinet had recently agreed for photographs of people who gave false information to be published on the Council's website, which would help catch people for non-payment of FPNs.

15. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Watkins thanked officers for their hard work regarding the KBT scores, and stated that he was proud of the team for their efforts. He also apologised to residents who had been affected by problems with the waste management and bin collection service. He thanked residents for their patience, and crews and the NHS for their hard work during the difficult time. He stated that although the borough was entering a period of 'new normal',

the pandemic had not yet gone away, and could still cause disruption. He stated that the level of demand and level of waste had increased during lockdown, and this had recently been compounded by staff not being able to attend work. He confirmed that the Council were working with unions and central government to increase the team's capacity. Councillor Watkins added that the collection of brown bins would remain bi-weekly, but would now be on the date of normal collections, and specific information relating to this could be found on the Council's website. He stated that this was due to resident's feedback and wish for continuity regarding their bin collection. He mentioned that food waste could go into both the grey and green bins, and the communications team would be highlighting this on social media, online, and would be sending out letters. Councillor Watkins summarised and stated that the Waste Management Working Group were currently finalising their plans regarding the Waste Strategy, which would go to the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October, before being signed off by Cabinet.

The Leader added that as more people were now working from home, and schools had been closed during the lockdown, more people were generating rubbish at home, rather than their places of work or education. He stated that the waste collection teams were now having to visit the depot in East London two or three times during their shift to dispose of waste. He stated that the bin collection teams were also having a problem accessing some areas due to poor parking, and asked residents to park responsibly to ensure that bin lorries could get through.

16. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

17. Questions from Non-Executive Members

The Leader informed Members that one question had been received from Councillor Shane Ralph in relation to Item 11 of the agenda, but this would be heard during that item.

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

No matters had been referred to Cabinet for consideration by an overview and scrutiny committee.

19. Thurrock Council Home to School Transport and Travel Policy Update

Councillor Jefferies introduced the report and stated that it proposed a change to the home to school transport and travel policy, which was usually the responsibility of parents, but was also a statutory duty of the Council for children that were eligible. He stated that this proposal needed Cabinet approval as it affected people across the borough, and stakeholders and overview and scrutiny had been consulted on it. He stated that one of the

proposals was to implement a charging regime for transport to post-16 facilities for pupils with SEND aged 16-25, but this could improve physical health, open up opportunities for jobs, and ensure that they could access school clubs and activities. Councillor Jefferies explained that the new policy would not mean that free transport for all children would stop, and confirmed that each child would be assessed under the new policy, and would continue to receive support if they were suitable. He added that many children with SEND needs received PIP support, as well as a family mobility car which would help with their transport needs, but the new policy would also include an independent travel course to increase independence. Councillor Jefferies stated that due to the comments from overview and scrutiny, he was proposing the removal of recommendation 1.1.

Councillor Halden welcomed the report, and highlighted that discretion would still be applied to all applications, but felt it was healthy to encourage young adults to be independent, which included through transport. He commented that the new policy would be on a means-tested basis, but parents could still currently apply based on the existing policy. He concluded and hoped that he would see a reasonable response from the opposition. Councillor Coxshall added that it was good to see overview and scrutiny comments being taken into account, and changes being made based on their input. He stated that Cabinet listened to overview and scrutiny, and felt it was good to see the collaborative work between the two functions. The Leader stated that the role of overview and scrutiny should be that of a critical friend, and the majority of policies brought before Cabinet had been through the scrutiny process for their comment. He felt that the removal of recommendation was a good example, as he would have raised the recommendation as an issue if it had not been mentioned previously at scrutiny.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

Considered the proposed policy refresh to the 2016 policy and agreed to adopt the proposed refresh of the policy, with specific reference to the two areas listed below:

- 1. The implementation of a charging regime in respect of transport to post-16 facilities for pupils aged 16-25 with SEND. Pupils will be required to pay the full cost of make a contribution towards the cost of transport. This service is discretionary and the Council may charge for the delivery of such transport.**
- 2. That transport be delivered, in accordance with legislation, only when there is no suitable school with a place available within the maximum walking distance from the child's home (two miles for pupils under the age of 8 and 3 miles for pupils over the age of 8).**

*Reason for decision: as outlined in the report
This decision is subject to call-in*

20. Hospital Discharge Bridging Service

The Leader stated that one question had been received from Councillor Shane Ralph on this item, which was: *with the recent media publicity in regards to patients being released back into care homes without being tested; what procedures and risk assessments have been carried out by Thurrock Council to ensure the safety of returning residents back to care homes?* The Leader stated that the Portfolio Holder would reply to the question as part of his statement, and a written response would also be sent to Councillor Ralph.

Councillor Halden introduced his report and thanked Councillor Ralph for his question as the new Chair of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He stated that the report looked to extend the current contract, whilst the care market was in such a stressed position due to COVID-19, and whilst the Council looked for a more permanent option. He stated that the current arrangement was successful as even during the height of the pandemic, 95% of all hospital discharges to care homes had been achieved within target time. He commented that lots of work had already been done regarding the future of the care home market and domiciliary care, with the aim of closing the gap between what was being charged and what was being paid. He commented that Oak House had been recommissioned during the lockdown as a 'step up-step down' facility, to provide care to those people who were discharged from hospital, but not quite ready to return to their own homes, and for those that were due to go hospitals, but could not because of COVID-19.

Councillor Halden stated that no one had been discharged from hospital into a care home without a COVID-19 test, barring those in Oak House, which had been recommissioned for the purpose of COVID-19. He stated that this process would be stress tested when the infection control team met later this month, to discuss processes and procedures. The Leader added that Thurrock tried not to extend contracts, but this was necessary due to the current pandemic. He added that a written response would also be submitted to Councillor Ralph and thanked him for his question.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Agreed the extension of the Bridging Service until March 2021**
- 2. Agreed the procurement for a rapid discharge service and delegated the award of contract to the Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health in consultation**

*Reason for decision: as outlined the report
This decision is subject to call in*

21. Grays South Regeneration Area: Underpass and Public Realm Option Selection

Councillor Coxshall introduced the report and stated that all three options presented in the report would be a cost overrun of roughly £27m, but these

were only estimates and not exact figures. He commented that the Council were already looking at ways to bridge this funding gap, and had enough time to solve the problem. He described how the project had changed, as it was now much bigger and was counted as a major piece of infrastructure. He commented that this project would benefit the wider Grays area, which was seeing lots of investment, including £25m from the High Street fund; £25m from Grays Town Board; £11m in central government funding for the underpass and £2m for the shopping centre; £40m from Thurrock Council; and £150m from the private sector. He stated that lots of people were committed to improving Grays, and felt that option three listed in the report would help the wider regeneration plans to be delivered.

The Leader commented that lots of versions of the proposals had been developed by numerous previous administrations, but that this was the furthest the project had ever gotten. He commented that the third option was the most positive as it allowed for a large plaza area in Grays, and although the plans had been expanded and would cost more, he agreed that there was plenty of time to find funding. He asked Councillor Coxshall what would happen to the businesses situated near to the proposed development area, and asked if a compulsory purchase order could be avoided. Councillor Coxshall responded that the plaza option offered a different alignment and a better design, so would potentially change the need for the purchase of nearby businesses. He stated that he wanted to get businesses on board, and any shops that would have to be brought, would be relocated.

Councillor Maney felt that this was an important step in regeneration of Grays. He commented that the state of Grays town centre was an important issue for local residents, and welcomed the report both as a Cabinet Member and Ward Councillor for an area near Grays. Councillor Coxshall highlighted that the money given to the Grays Town Board from central government, had to be spent by 2025, and although this seemed like a long time, plans would have to be drawn up this year to ensure that building could start in 2-3 years' time and the money could be spent.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved option C as the selected concept to be designed in more detail through the current Development Services Agreement contract with Network Rail

*Reason for decision: as outlined in the report
This decision is subject to call-in*

22. Multi Functional Device Contract Conversion

Councillor Huelin introduced the report and stated that the contract for printers was due to end in March 2021, and although the current printers were only 4-5 years old, they were already out of date models that were reaching end of life. She stated that the cheapest option would be to extend the current

contract, but this would leave the Council with out of date equipment, which could be detrimental to different departments. She added that the contract for library equipment and council tax billing was currently with external companies, but was also due to come to an end. She commented that currently the best option was to amalgamate these three contracts, which would mean that all three systems could work together and benefit residents. She stated that this would increase flexibility, and introduce technology such as barcoding, ticketing, mail-merge, large documents being sent to the most efficient printer, paper folding and enveloping, as well as a fully automated GDPR trail. She added that if the three contracts were amalgamated residents would also be able to visit a library or hub to scan and send documents securely, rather than having to visit the Civic Offices. She added that caseworkers would also be able to print and collect documents securely from libraries and hubs, rather than travelling back to the offices. She added that the new printers would also reduce the carbon footprint of the offices, as they could produce 'green agendas' through a fully automated, robotic process. She stated that the current contract cost £190,000, and the new contract would increase this figure by £35,000 to £231,000. She stated that the contract for libraries and council tax billing currently cost £41,000. She stated that the new printers would also reduce ink costs, envelopes and paper usage, although the cost of printing per page would be higher. She stated that as the Council currently used nine million pages of paper per year, the Council would have to reduce printing by at least 10% over two years to come in on budget. She stated that a review into paper usage would be completed, and she hoped to see the paper reduction target changed to 35%.

Councillor Mayes commented that although he felt concerned over the increased cost of printing per page, he could see the benefit that the new printers would give to the Council. Councillor Huelin commented that the procurement of the new contract would follow Council rules, and she had also raised concerns with officers over the cost of printing per page, but had been reassured that the other printing savings would ensure a balanced budget. The Leader added that this was an important report, as the Council needed to bring control over council tax billing back in house, due to the problems seen in this service during the height of the pandemic. He agreed with Councillor Huelin that the paper reduction target should be increased, and felt it was good to see that residents could safely scan documents to the council from across the borough.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Recommended to grant ICT authority to procure a new MFD contract.**
- 2. Recommended to grant delegated authority to the Director Finance, Governance and Property to contract award, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.**

23. 2019/20 Financial Outturn Report

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and stated that this was a 'rear view' look at the Council's finances in 2019/20, which was mostly in a pre-COVID19 world. He stated that although the Council would be placed under financial pressure because of COVID-19, the balanced budget and reserves could help ease these pressures. He stated that during 2019/20 reserves had been increased by 131%, and the Council had received £4.7m in funding from central government to help tackle COVID-19 pressures. He moved onto looking at the different department's budgets during 2019/20 and started by congratulating the Adults, Housing and Health team for ensuring their service balanced their budget with in-year mitigation. He felt that this department experienced numerous pressures throughout the year and thanked the team for their hard work in balancing the budget. He stated that for the 2020/21 financial year, Adults, Housing and Health would experience very significant pressures due to COVID-19, particularly relating to the care market.

Councillor Hebb moved onto talk about the Housing General Fund, which also covered the homelessness budget. He stated that although the number of people presenting as homeless to the Council had increased last year, the team had still managed to deliver all aspects of the Homelessness Reduction Act, and had reviewed staff structures to ensure the budget had been balanced, with a one-off surplus injection.

Councillor Hebb congratulated the Children's Services team for also balancing their budget, as well as their 'good' OFSTED rating. He stated that cash from the surplus had been invested in the team, and they had continued to reform and make positive changes. He discussed the in-house foster care arrangements, and mentioned that lots of work was ongoing to bring the team back in-house. He felt that this would benefit looked after children by offering stability, as well as reducing the cost of the service. He stated that the team still had issues surrounding attracting and retaining staff members, but the team was working hard to find qualified people for vacant positions. Councillor Hebb then thanked Councillors Maney and Watkins for their hard work in balancing the budget for the Environment and Highways team, as well as their recent success on the good KBT scores. Councillor Hebb understood how variable the waste contracts could be, but felt happy to see the balanced budget. He also thanked the HR team for bringing their department in under budget, and the Finance, Governance and Property team for balancing their budget, even with significant spend on conditions surveys.

Councillor Hebb then discussed the Place directorate who had balanced their budget with in-year mitigation. He stated that the team had had to increase money spent on consultants due to the Local Plan, as well as the lack of pantomime ticket sales at the Thameside Theatre, which had meant they were unable to break even. Councillor Hebb then discussed the Dedicated Schools Grant, which had nationally been a problem regarding the High Needs Block, and had also seen a spend increase in 2018/19. He stated that the capital programme had spent roughly £101m on projects in 2019/20, such as the A13 widening scheme and the Stanford-le-Hope Interchange project. He stated that the 2019/20 financial year had only included two months of COVID-19 pressures, but that next year would be more financially difficult

because of the pandemic.

Councillor Halden stated that he had attended numerous overview and scrutiny meetings, and had received lots of questions regarding the reserves in social care. He confirmed that reserves would not be depleted, but the Council were unsure of how the market would change due to the pandemic, and the revenue position was always being analysed. He stated that reserves could only provide a one-off cash injection into a department, but felt that the administration should work with the opposition during the upcoming financial difficulties, so work could be scrutinised and options discussed.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Noted that the General Fund net expenditure has been met within the overall budget envelope and the General Fund Balance has been maintained at £11.000m

2. Noted that the balance on the Housing Revenue Account Reserve has been maintained at £2.175m

3. Noted that there was a total of £101.398m in capital expenditure and some of the key projects has been set out in section 5.

24. Report from Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA)

The Leader introduced the report and highlighted that even though he was the Chair of ASELA, he was presenting the report in his capacity as Leader of Thurrock Council. He explained that three years ago, local authorities across South Essex had joined together to form ASELA to be able to work together to provide better services and infrastructure for all residents. He described how all participatory authorities had signed a Memorandum of Understanding which set out their intentions and highlighted that each Council maintained their own sovereignty, particularly on issues such as planning and finances. He stated that all decisions made at ASELA had to be unanimous and they had already managed to bring forward good projects, such as the £400m central government grant for Local Full Fibre Networks. He commented that ASELA had also created an economic plan and identified their strategic priorities.

The Leader moved onto describing the report and outlined how it was a proposition to submit to central government, which would help increase prosperity for residents and business owners across South Essex, and would increase long term investment opportunities. He stated that by working together, the local authorities could complete projects that would benefit each other, such as three lanes along the length of the A13, and improvements on the A127. He stated that although the A127 did not run directly through Thurrock, the improvement on this road would have a knock-on effect for the A13 and local road networks. The Leader mentioned that ASELA also helped deliver national projects and objectives, such as the implementation of

nationwide 5G. He stated that the growth and recovery prospectus at Enclosure 2 outlined what ASELA wanted to achieve, including 100,000 new jobs by 2050, COVID-19 recovery, a carbon zero region by 2040, and 5000 new opportunities for 16-24 year olds. He stated that ASELA were not currently at the stage of presenting a report on governance, and had not decided on a particular model, but confirmed that each authority would maintain its sovereignty. He stated that the report would be agreed by each individual Council, before being presented to ministers and civil servants in Whitehall. He explained that the government was expected to announce the new devolution deal in autumn 2020, when ASELA's prospectus would also be announced, and the Leader hoped this would bring new opportunities to the region.

Councillor Coxshall stated that this report was in its early stages, but felt it was good to have a regional voice that central government would listen to. He commented that he was a part of an outside body tasked with looking at infrastructure across the East of England, from the Thames to Norfolk, and felt that these types of partnerships would mean they were taken seriously as sub-regional consultees. Councillor Johnson felt this was a positive report, but highlighted the five options that were being put forward for exploration on page 132 of the agenda. He stated that he did not like the option for a local development corporation, as one had been implemented in Thurrock between 2004 and 2012, and felt they had caused numerous problems, particularly in South Ockendon. The Leader stated that the report had to outline all options for consideration, and they were not at the decision phase yet, but he shared Councillor Johnson's concerns regarding a development corporation. Councillor Coxshall agreed that he was not supportive of a development corporation.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Noted ASELA's intention to immediately engage with central government ahead of the autumn Spending Review, regarding the economic agenda for the South Essex region, how it can deliver new jobs, new transport infrastructure, new homes, and the future governance arrangements to deliver better outcomes for its existing, and new, residents and businesses as set out in the 'Growth and Recovery Prospectus 2020' as Enclosure no. 2.**
- 2. Noted the work commenced by ASELA to begin to consider and explore the most appropriate and effective future governance arrangements to realise South Essex's full economic and social potential and shared ambitions as set out in the independent Review of Governance in South Essex at Enclosure No. 3. This report does not seek approval or endorsement of any specific governance proposals.**
- 3. Noted that a further report will be presented later in the calendar year to provide an update on the outcome of the discussions with central government and any proposals for more formal interim governance arrangements for ASELA to ensure transparency and accountability.**

The Leader ended the meeting and passed on his condolences to the family and friends of Barry Palmer, former Mayor of Thurrock. He stated that Mr Palmer had been a stalwart of Thurrock, and had felt sad when he had learned of his passing.

The meeting finished at 8.42 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**