

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 14 October 2020 at 7.00 pm

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

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

40. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 16 September 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

41. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

42. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests to declare.

43. Statements by the Leader

The Leader of the Council opened by stating that many would have seen that Essex County Council had made an application to the Government to voluntarily increase its Covid alert level to High and be subject to tier 2 Covid restrictions. This would mean that residents would not be able to meet anyone outside of their household or support bubble in any indoor setting such as their home, pub or restaurant.

He continued by commenting he was sure everyone would recognise the impact this would have on certain businesses, especially the hospitality and entertainment venues and in addition would mean families across Essex would not be able to meet unless they are in that same bubble and restrict travel. The Leader highlighted it was already clear to see the impact this could have on those who already felt isolated and alone as well as the impact it may have on some residents mental wellbeing.

Councillor Gledhill, informed Cabinet Members that he had spoken to the secretary of State for Health at the weekend outlining why he felt Thurrock should not be subject to these extra restrictions requested by Essex County

Council and he would continue to resist any call for voluntary increase in restriction to Thurrock Residents. Members heard how Thurrock's MP Jackie Doyle Price also made clear at parliament that Thurrock should not be included in the County Council's call for more restriction, for which the Leader said he was truly grateful. He also thanked the Chief Executive and the Director of Public Health for their hard work including over the weekend in supporting the position that Thurrock should not be included in the Tier 2 restrictions.

The Leader moved onto Remembrance Day and commented that unfortunately this year Remembrance Day parades would not take place as usual. With the need for continued social distancing, avoiding crowds and maximum numbers of people in groups; the Council were exploring different options to commemorate Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day as was done earlier in the year with VE Day.

He mentioned that private services and virtual tributes would replace traditional parades to commemorate and remember British and Commonwealth military and civilian men and women who paid the ultimate price in the two World Wars and later conflicts. A special red, white and blue light display would be put on the outside the Thameside Complex, Grays, to mark the occasion.

The Leader commented on the importance of wearing face coverings when in enclosed public spaces. It was also important to show respect for one another and the local environment and to remember some people were exempt from wearing face coverings, such as anyone with a physical illness, disability or mental health issue.

Councillor Gledhill moved on and stated last week a drug driver was convicted, fined and banned from driving for two years thanks to a joint initiative carried out between Thurrock Council enforcement officers and Essex Police. Members heard how he was just one of the people caught as a result of the joint initiative which took place between August and December last year to target people who litter the borough's car parks with nitrous oxide canisters.

The operation also resulted in 11 Fixed Penalty Notices issued for fly-tipping, 15 Fixed Penalty notices for anti-social behaviour including littering, urination and fly-posting, one man arrested for drug driving and possession, 10 Community resolutions for cannabis possession and 30 Community Protection Warnings given for anti-social behaviour.

The Leader stated Thurrock Council would continue to work closely with Essex Police and would continue to get these kinds of results to make our borough a safer place for the residents who live here.

The Leader finished his statement by giving the Clean It, Cut It, Fill It Update since April 2020, and stated 1,776 potholes had been filled with every single one of them completed within agreed timescales, 1,700 tonnes of litter had

been cleaned from Thurrock streets, 776 fly-tips had been cleared and 1,935 Fixed penalty notices for anti-social behaviour like spitting, littering and dropping cigarette ends had been issued.

Councillor Coxshall offered his thanks to Officers, the Chief Executive and the Director of Public Health for all their hard work in helping to keep Thurrock excluded from Essex County Councils voluntary request for further restrictions.

44. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

45. Questions from Non-Executive Members

No questions had been submitted from Non-Executive Members.

46. 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.

47. Waste Strategy Update (Decision: 110532)

Councillor Watkins introduced the report to Cabinet Members and in doing so explained a cross-party working group was established in August 2019 to look at the Council's Waste Strategy, with the sole aim to increase recycling figures, and he thanked the group for their work. He continued by commenting Officers had been working to improve the Borough's recycling rate which had been decreasing since 2014, it was important to meet the government target of 50% . Many different schemes had been trialled over the last four years this included educating residents using a number of different outlets such as signage and leaflets.

Councillor Watkins explained the Borough wide consultation on the updated Waste Strategy commenced at the beginning of the year and following the report being presented to the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 1 October; Officers had received questions from Residents about the suggested changes and therefore requested the report be deferred to November's meeting of Cabinet.

The Leader thanked Councillor Watkins for his introduction and sought confirmation that he was seeking Cabinet's agreement to defer the report to the November meeting. Councillor Watkins confirmed this was correct.

RESOLVED:

That the Waste Strategy Update is deferred to the November meeting.

48. Procurement of Electrical Services (Decision: 110533)

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and in doing so outlined the proposal for the re-procurement of the electrical services contract as the current contract was due to expire on 11 March 2021. It was the expectation that a new contract would commence on 12 March 2021 and proposed a contract term of five years plus an option to extend for a further five years if necessary.

The report included a timeline for the procurement and award of the contract and the Portfolio Holder commented he was pleased to advise that the Excellence Panel was to be invited to participate in the tender evaluation process.

Councillor Johnson stated the contracts aim was to meet corporate priorities to deliver high quality services, whilst ensuring best practice followed in line with regulations and the Council's Electrical Safety Policy.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- 1. Approve the re-procurement of Electrical Services Contract for a period of up to five years with an option to extend for a further five years.**
- 2. Approve delegated authority for award of the above contracts to the Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.**

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

49. Medium Term Financial Strategy Update & General Fund Budget Implications

Councillor Hebb presented the report and in doing so stated Councils across the country were presented with challenges as a direct and indirect result of COVID-19. He continued by saying recessions calibrate perceptions about wants and needs, what is really important or what is just desirable. What was important was how to achieve and secure what the Council needed to do.

He continued to inform Cabinet Members that Thurrock had a 'nest egg' of sorts, built up from prudent financial planning and policy. Its useable reserves position had increased by 131% since 2016 levels, as a direct result of the policy of reforming services and the member agreed investment approach.

Councillor Hebb continued by commenting the Council should be thankful, that they have a reserve to fall back on as it is something that most authorities do not have, however it will not solve the problem but would give a temporary lift. He stated that the collection fund losses were accounted for in the years

ahead and such a spike in reduced collections and increased benefit claimants would have to be paid.

Members heard how elements of the Capital Strategy had to be paused. Cabinet were in the process of working with Directors Board to review timescales of capital initiatives which had not yet started, re-planning for the life after scenario and unfortunately some plans would have to be cut altogether.

The Portfolio Holder continued in his address saying it was important for Members to remember where the investment market existed the Council would have longer to make reforms which would be at a more considered pace. New investments were not something the Council was looking to do as the market was not what it once was, this was for a number of reasons.

Councillor Hebb mentioned the plans to increase reserves to 'weather the storm' had allowed Members and Officers to tidy up the borough, allowed funds for mental health reform, allowed to invest in the children social care market and they had allowed funding for extra police within the borough. He continued to state spending commitments on the Police and investment in Environment and Social Care had been ring-fenced, as this was used to provide one of support helping them stabilise and operate at a high level.

Cabinet heard that the Council strongly believed in a regeneration lead objective to help stimulate spending and recovery, which was why cabinet had agreed to put £1 million into progressing with the housebuilding objective of the third stage of the Local Plan Refresh.

Councillor Hebb further advised that his portfolio holder peer group of finance portfolio holders across Essex had met a couple of weeks ago to shape the approach being put forward by local government in the Essex area to the Government. The Government had now announced a further £1 billion to support the local government pressures emerging from Covid-19 and Members across Essex waited for further details. In the meantime, action had to be taken and action had begun. As people left roles through retirement or moved on to new opportunities, vacancies which were less critical would not be replaced.

It was explained that an Assets Review had been completed in the spirit of a "few buildings better services". A rationalisation of the asset estate was something that had been required to be completed, spending taxpayers money propping up and maintaining estates which would be better utilised as identified under the Retain, Re-use and Release scheme was something that was needed.

Councillor Hebb moved on, commenting on Councillor Huelin's report from Full Council which attracted widespread coverage for her thanks to Council staff during the first 6 months of the pandemic and further commented that her comments were echoed by all Members across the council. Finally he

extended thanks on behalf of all Members to all staff of the Authority for their hard work.

Councillor Coxshall thanked the Portfolio Holder for his report and commented on the importance to refresh the Assets Strategy which enabled updates on Corporate Policies and to be able to deliver better services for residents.

Councillor Hebb agreed with fewer buildings better services could be offered, an example of this was the children's centres whereby now a service was being used by 90% of residents/parents rather than the 60% before.

The Leader stated the children centres were a good example of showing how a change in services can work better for residents. He continued by thanking the finance team for their excellent work over the last couple of months on the local government reform.

Councillor Hebb closed the discussion by commenting on a question which was asked by those who did not work within local government, if there are reserves then why do we have to have efficiencies. He continued to say that the world was changing at such a pace that services may not be the same again, and we may need further support later down the line, whether it be in the social care market for example.

He commented that although it assisted with the issues that were ahead, it was important to be prudent with the reserve as there could be additional pressures coming that had not been forecasted.

The Leader of the Council agreed mentioning that an analogy would be if you have savings, you can only spend savings once. Likewise monies being put aside to complete a certain project.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- 1. That Cabinet support the approach to meeting the budget pressures in 2021/22 through short term measures; and**
- 2. That officers bring reports to Cabinet, and the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees, as the proposals for next year (2021/22) are further developed.**

The meeting finished at 7.38 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**