

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 28 October 2020 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Terry Piccolo (Mayor), Sue Shinnick (Deputy Mayor), Qaisar Abbas, Abbie Akinbohun, John Allen, Alex Anderson, Chris Baker, Gary Byrne, Daniel Chukwu, Colin Churchman, Gary Collins, Mark Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Mike Fletcher, Oliver Gerrish, James Halden, Shane Hebb, Victoria Holloway, Sue Hooper, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Angela Lawrence, Steve Liddiard, Susan Little, Ben Maney, Fraser Massey, Allen Mayes, Sara Muldowney, Bukky Okunade, Jane Pothecary, 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: Councillor Robert Gledhill

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed to the Council's online webcast channel.

157. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on the 30 September 2020 were approved as a correct record.

158. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

159. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

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

The Mayor requested that those Members laying wreaths on his behalf to do all they could to remain socially distanced and if there were more than six people gathered around the memorial to hang back until it was safe to lay the wreath. The Mayor announced that he would be laying a wreath at Purfleet on

Thames this Sunday and on the 8 November would be attending the Remembrance Day Service at St Peters and St Pauls Church in Grays at 11am and then would be laying a wreath at Chafford Hundred in the afternoon. The Mayor thanked all those residents who would be observing the two minutes silence and laying wreaths outside their own homes.

The Mayor also announced that he was still looking for imaginative ways of raising money for GiFT, the Mayor's chosen charity, but this was proving difficult with the restriction on gatherings of more than six people.

The Mayor thanked the many shops and organisations that were supporting people during these arduous times.

The Deputy Leader of the Council made the following announcements on behalf of the Leader who had been taken unwell and was unable to join the meeting this evening.

In regards to COVID, the Council had taken the decision that Thurrock should remain in the lowest risk level, Medium Alert or Tier 1, based on the available data, information and balancing the risk posed by coronavirus with the harm we knew would be caused to our residents if stricter rules were imposed on their lives. The decision was not made based on just one metric, that being the number of positive COVID tests per 100,000 people in the population, but on a number of factors including the number of residents in hospital and the number of deaths where COVID was a factor. Councillor Hebb confirmed that between the 1 September 2020 and the 27 October 2020, 17 people from Thurrock had positive COVID results and had entered hospitalisation at Basildon Hospital and positive result tests was still being seen across the borough. It was important to note that the outbreaks in Thurrock were in two specific non-community environments, those in a single care home and in hospital where there was an increased positive infection rates attributed to those settings.

We know that Thurrock's strong communities, determination and common sense have helped but we have so much more to do. We must ensure we remain vigilant against the threat posed by COVID, now was not the time to allow complacency to creep in. We have already come together to achieve so much. By carrying on taking personal responsibility, playing our part and looking out for each other we can continue to make sure the borough stays as safe as possible. We now must play an active role in the fight against his virus and that none of us could have predicted that we would find ourselves in this position but would definitely have predicted that Thurrock and our communities would have risen so superbly to the challenge.

The pandemic was global but the solutions were local and the best defence will come from our actions. If we all continue to practise hands, face, space abide by the rule of six and most people use their common sense to help prevent the spread of this virus that way we are doing all we can to ensure that Thurrock stays at the lowest level wherever possible and stricter rules were not imposed on us.

We continue to closely monitor and review the situation on a weekly basis and would make sure that all decisions we make put our residents' health and wellbeing first and protect us all no matter what.

Councillor Hebb took the opportunity to thank the Government who so far had provided more than £14 million of emergency funding which had been fully spent on covering the extra costs of the coronavirus such as:

- Our excellent test and trace service which had around a 95% success rate in getting in touch with people who had been in contact with someone who had tested positive.
- Contracting our own testing service for the borough's care homes to help protect those most vulnerable.
- Providing help and extra care to the most vulnerable people in the borough including those who had to shield, the homeless and young people.

Remembrance Day - This year we would not be able to mark Remembrance Day as we usually would by coming together but I would encourage all residents to mark this, the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, privately and remotely as we honour the tremendous sacrifices and efforts made by that generation by making a small sacrifice ourselves and staying at home and marking the event in our own way.

There would still be a two minute silence which we can observe on our doorsteps but we would not be able to gather for large communal events as the Mayor had already mentioned. Instead we would have to come together virtually or show our appreciation privately. It was the most fitting way to commemorate our nation's heroes and thank all those who had served. The Leader would like to thank the local Royal British Legion for helping us shape how we remember those who made that ultimate sacrifice in a way which respected both them and the needs imposed by this pandemic and there were a number of communities across the borough who would rise to that challenge.

Halloween and Bonfire Night - I would ask everyone to be considerate and respectful of their neighbours. The Leader had been asked what the rules would be for the upcoming Halloween and Bonfire Night to which the Deputy Leader stated there were no specific rules for these events and would go back to what was said previously, residents should use their own common sense and think of the risk that would be imposed on groups of children knocking on residents doors, residents who may be susceptible or vulnerable or indeed infectious. Regarding bonfire night this year would see no organised events across the borough and I am sure many residents would be planning on holding private family displays in their garden. I would urge them all to make sure they know the fireworks code and have taken all precautions they need to prevent injury and accident. If they are buying fireworks they should do so from reputable dealers and not buy those intended for large displays and feel that using them in their back garden was a safe option. We should also remember the impact this has on our furry friends and should think about pets and wildlife and should think of that as well as their own safety. There was

plenty of advice on how this can be done and I would urge residents to seek that out.

The Deputy Leader stated that last week had marked the first anniversary of the tragic incident that had happened in Eastern Avenue with the Leader taking a strong view that he hoped his colleagues in France and Belgium regularly watched the approach taken by Thurrock and urged their authorities to work with their respective border control forces to help prevent further issues of people being put at risk by ruthless people and urged all Members to take a moment's thought for those that had died on that sad and tragic morning.

The Deputy Leader provided a Clean It, Cut It, Fill It update:

- Filled 1,776 potholes, every single one of them within agree timescales
- Cleared 1,700 tonnes of litter from our streets
- Cleared 776 fly-tips
- Issued 1,935 fixed penalty notices for anti-social behaviour like spitting, littering and dropping cigarette ends.

161. Questions from Members of the Public

No questions from members of the public had been received.

162. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

No notices of petition had been received.

163. Petitions Update Report

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

164. 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.

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

Councillor J Kent, Leader of the Labour Group, informed the Chamber he had the following change to make:

For Councillor Liddiard to replace Councillor Worrall on the Prevent Violent Extremism Members Working Group.

Councillor Byrne, Leader of the Thurrock Independent Group informed the Chamber he had no changes to make.

Councillors Massey and Allen informed the Chamber they had no changes to make.

165. Assistant Director Appointments

Councillor Hebb introduced the report and sought the approval from Council to appoint to the Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help and Assistant Director Planning, Transport and Public Protection. That following a robust search and selection process, General Services Committee interviewed on 14 October 2020 and unanimously agreed to recommend the appointment of Joseph Tynan as Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help and Leigh Nicholson as Assistant Director Planning, Transport and Public Protection. These were both supported by the recommendations of the Stakeholder Panels.

The Mayor called a vote on recommendations 1 and 2 to which the Members voted unanimously in favour.

RESOLVED

1. That Council approved in accordance with the Council's Constitution the appointment of Joseph Tynan as the permanent Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help.
2. That Council approved in accordance with the Council's Constitution the appointment of Leigh Nicholson as the permanent Assistant Director Planning, Transport and Public Protection.

166. Report of the Cabinet Member for Education

Councillor Jefferies stated he was privileged to present his first portfolio holder report for education and some of the areas covered in this speech were:

- Having taken up his role in February 2020, two months later the country had gone into lockdown due to the pandemic and would like to thank all teaching staff, teaching assistants, dinner ladies, care takers and everyone else who worked in Thurrock schools who ensured that children in Thurrock received their education and ensured that free school meals were provided in the Easter and Summer holidays for some of Thurrock's most vulnerable children.
- Due to the pandemic, he had been unable to visit schools and had begun a weekly zoom call with head teachers and CEOs for them to tell us how things were going in their schools.
- That schools communicated regularly with their children and there had been some great examples of teachers engaging with their pupils.

- That at the start of the lockdown, schools remained open for key worker children with the average number of 300 to 400 pupils per day and had dropped off to about 200 pupils a day at Easter.
- That all schools should be commended as once the Government stated they could reopen, all the schools reacted positively and ensured that children returned as quickly and safely as possible.
- Thanked the Education Team who had worked hard to ensure that support was provided for all the educational settings and specifically thanked Sheila Murphy, Director of Children's Services, and Michelle Lucas, Assistant Director of Education, who had always been there to offer help, advice and guidance.
- That 92% of primary schools were rated as good and 70% of secondary schools had been rated as good or better.
- Last year had achieved 100% of 16 year olds having a place of learning and hope to reach that target this year.
- As part of the Skills Summit had brought together South Essex Skills and Education portfolios and alongside officers to plan how they could work together to provide the skills and training to help rebuild the local economy.
- Agreed that the Head of the Adult College to work closely with Opportunity South Essex so that the best assistance can be provided to all Thurrock residents who were looking for additional skills and qualifications.
- In September 2020 a new independent travel training session was launched for post 16 year old SEND pupils to equip them to travel independently.
- Had attended a grand opening of the new Thameside Academy and wished staff and pupils all the best for the future and looked forward to visiting Orsett Heath Academy shortly that also opened in September.
- Concluded by recognising the outstanding work of the education providers from early years, schools, post 16 and adults and all that had been achieved in this unprecedented times.

Councillor Okunade thanked the portfolio holder for this report and asked for his response to the issue of Thurrock children going hungry as a result of the Government's recent refusal to fund free school meals in holidays. Councillor Jefferies stated that the Government had provided free school meals in the Easter and Summer periods when the schools were in lockdown and only open for key worker pupils. Now that the schools were open and residents were back at work it was only right that free schools meals were provided in term time. That the Government had put policies in place for those in need such as the increase of Universal Credit, increased local housing allowances and with Thurrock receiving £193,000 from Government it would be the intention to use this money to help struggling families to get hold of food and essentials.

Councillor Okunade referred the portfolio holder to page 48 of the Agenda where the report had stated that "all children returned to school in September and the attendance had remained high" and questioned the number of elected home education of pupils due to parent's concerns of the transmission of

COVID in schools and asked the portfolio holder what he was doing in regards to these figures. Councillor Jefferies stated that head teachers and CEOs were doing everything to reassure parents that schools were safe for pupils to return with Thurrock way ahead of the number of pupils returning and had seen an increase since the schools had reopened.

Councillor Okunade referred to the National Funding Formula and school budgets and asked the portfolio holder for more information on the challenges of this funding. Councillor Jefferies stated he had nothing further to add unless there was something specific Councillor Okunade was referring to. Councillor Okunade stated the report had referred to challenges around high needs funding and questioned what these challenges were. Councillor Jefferies stated budgets were tight and that work would continue with schools to ensure they had the funding they need and this was something for the future to have conversations with schools to understand any issues and concerns and to work with them to resolve them.

Councillor Anderson asked what the long term plan would be for providing skills and re-education in the borough specifically looking beyond COVID. Councillor Jefferies stated that the Government had recently announced that every adult would have access to four years of funding post 18 and it was Thurrock's intention to give to everyone to meet their own potential. Councillor Jefferies announced that it was the intention to move the Adult Education College from its inadequate building into classrooms and buildings fit for the 21st century.

Councillor J Kent echoed the comments made by Councillor Okunade and had seen the commitment and dedication of members of staff throughout Spring to ensure that schools could stay open for those children of key workers and then the hard work to ensure that schools could open more widely, safely and as normal as possible in September to ensure the best learning experience could be provided. Councillor J Kent stated he had been incredibly impressed with the work undertaken and all Members should take time to thank all those in schools. Councillor J Kent then referred to the issue of free school meals through the holidays and questioned the portfolio holder how he intended to spend the £193,000 to ensure that no child in Thurrock goes hungry during the school holidays. Councillor Jefferies stated it was not just about the £193,000 payment, the Government had increased the Universal Credit payment by £1000, local housing allowances increased to help residents pay their rent and aim to distribute the £193,000 to struggling families so that they can get hold of food and essentials.

Councillor Byrne questioned whether those Thurrock schools that were isolating whole years was the right thing to do when compared to what other local authority schools were doing. Councillor Jefferies stated he could not comment on other authorities but it would be down to each individual school and by following the right rules and regulations. Councillor Jefferies stated he had been impressed how the schools had handled this, sent home children when necessary and communicated well on social media and letters to parents and further stated that Thurrock schools were doing an amazing job.

Councillor Allen asked the portfolio holder to ensure that more mental health support was provided at Thurrock schools as it was imperative this was identified and early intervention was taking place. Councillor Jefferies agreed that the Council had to be more vigilant and stated the Council was taking this very seriously to have mental health facilities available and working with Councillor Halden to help, assist and offer advice to schools.

Councillor Muldowney referred to the news that the Government had used its COVID emergency powers to impose a new legal duty on schools to provide remote education and then some schools in Essex having the number of laptops that had been allocated to help deprived children being reduced by 80%. The portfolio holder was asked how this had affected schools in Thurrock and what steps the portfolio holder would undertake to ensure that no child fell behind in their education if they were unable to attend school. Councillor Jefferies stated he was unaware of any Thurrock school having any difficulties with laptops and was confident they had their allocations within that scheme and asked Councillor Muldowney if she had any specific examples of schools to let him know outside the meeting.

Councillor Redsell questioned whether the portfolio holder was satisfied that all was being done in the school environment to ensure that COVID rules were being followed. Councillor Jefferies stated that when schools were opened from June, they were asked to complete a risk assessment to see if pupils were the safest at school which then enabled the number of pupils able to return. As risk assessments were completed, the confidence of parents grew and by mid-July there were over 4000 pupils attending per day and from September all children had returned to school. Councillor Jefferies was confident that schools had followed all the rules and only when necessary and in the interests of safety, were children sent home and was confident that all Thurrock schools were following the guidelines.

Councillor Collins referred to the SEND and active travel paragraph in the portfolio report and asked for more details as to what the awards would be. Councillor Jefferies stated he was unsure what the awards were and would find out and report back to Councillor Collins.

Councillor Worrall questioned the portfolio holder about parking and speeding outside of schools and asked for his agreement that the safety of children outside of schools across the whole of the borough was very important. Councillor Worrall asked whether the portfolio holder would consider and support in implementing a working group to look at enforcing the 20mph outside schools and to ensure that parking restrictions are enforced. Councillor Jefferies wholly endorsed what Councillor Worrall stated that children's safety was paramount and that there were more enforcement officers outside schools and when Members reported any issues those officers would be redirected to that area. That parking restrictions, speed signs, ramps and neon signs could be implemented around schools but took on board Councillor Worrall comments and the seriousness and would look into her suggestion and would respond.

167. Report of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Strategic Planning

Councillor Coxshall stated the world had changed dramatically since his last portfolio report due to COVID and in some way this may have affected the Council's investment strategies and investments in the local economy but in some other ways this had not changed and the report demonstrated the good work that had been done over the last 18 months in the borough. With the Council working with the private sector, with Government funding, outside bodies and local authorities across the SELEP region.

Some of the areas covered in this speech were:

- Tilbury2 - The borough's first national significant infrastructure project was now complete with the process involving close joint working between the Council and Port of Tilbury. This was another port for Thurrock and had the honour of visiting there last week. That this port had been a Brexit dividend which would create 500 new jobs in the borough.
- Two further development controller orders (i) Lower Thames Crossing had been handed over to the Secretary of State and was quickly moving onto inspections and onto the next stage and (ii) London Resorts would be a great economic benefit to Thurrock and could completely change the river front and how this could be used in the future with the opportunity of great leisure facilities.
- That Tilbury and Grays received £25 million from the Towns Funds of which £1.2 million had to be spent before March 2021 on small changes but big improvements in both Tilbury and Grays. With a further £50 million for Tilbury and Grays to be spent by 2025 with the Council having until January 2021 to deliver plans on how this money would be spent.
- Particularly pleased with Tilbury's £25 million as for too many years Tilbury had been left behind.
- That New River still had commitment to Thurrock and continued to see the great opportunities in Grays.
- Local Plan – it was important to move forward at a rapid pace and Members would be contacted very shortly before this was moved onto the next stage with partners, Princes Foundation, officers and the portfolio holder. That community engagement would be vital to ensure they benefit from what they want.
- Concluded that Thurrock was the best place to live, work and play and the report had demonstrated that.

Councillor Kerin thanked the portfolio holder for his report and raised the matter on the legal situation in regards to Thurrock Regeneration Limited and asked for the full composition of directors and the situation regarding the resignation of the three directors this year. Councillor Coxshall stated that post COVID had changed everything and what was needed was to relook at the delivery of housing strategies and a review would be required to ensure that good quality housing would be delivered and a paper would be presented to the General Services Committee with the results of what would happen with Thurrock Regeneration Limited.

Councillor Kerin referred to the A13 Widening Project and questioned the mitigation plan that was in place and asked for confirmation from the portfolio holder that Thurrock tax payers would not be asked to pay the financial shortfall accrued by the mismanagement of the project so far. Councillor Coxshall stated he could not give that guarantee as this would stop all investments given to Thurrock by the Government and that every avenue would be pursued to ensure that Thurrock residents would not pay any more money.

Councillor Kerin referred to the Preston Model and the five year plan and asked what figure was the portfolio holder anticipating and what concrete examples could he give of Thurrock moving in the Preston Model direction. Councillor Coxshall stated the Thurrock model had been used but asked that if Councillor Kerin had any examples to bring them forward.

Councillor Allen asked the portfolio holder to ensure that the monies available for Tilbury would be well spent and not wasted and to ensure sustainability for years to come so that Tilbury be set for a brighter future. Councillor Coxshall stated that 10% of the £25 million had to be delivered on revenue spend with the rest to be capital spending. That engagement had commenced with the wider communities and ward members and as a board member would want this money to be spent on four or five big items of capital spending to ensure that an iconic legacy would be left in the borough.

Councillor J Kent referred to the disappointing decision made by New River to put Grays Town Centre up for sale and had been a blow to the plans that had already been carefully put together and asked the portfolio holder to categorically rule out that the Council would step up and buy the town centre. Councillor Coxshall stated absolutely, what the Council needed was partners and joint ventures and to look after those benefits of residents.

Councillor Muldowney referred to the Government's recently published White Paper which set out the proposals for the reform of the planning system and Council working as a pilot authority for the roll out of the new reforms and asked the portfolio holder how the Council would ensure that affordable housing and other accommodation would be delivered for local residents if the Council became a pilot on these reforms. Councillor Coxshall stated the Council had a forward looking and a low cost policy in delivering the local plan across party and to deliver low cost housing for the community and younger people at a reasonable cost and that these planning reforms could do that if carried out right.

Councillor Coxshall summed by stating the importance of the Local Plan, that engagement with communities and Members on how this plan could help decide what was being delivered and how those changes can help deliver low cost housing for Thurrock residents.

168. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that no questions to the Leader had been received and 8 questions to Cabinet Members.

As the item fell due to time limit of the meeting Councillor J Kent resubmitted question 8 for November Council.

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

At 8.40pm, Councillor Coxshall, called Point of Order, asking that the Constitutional Working Group consider looking at the running of Council post COVID.

169. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

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

170. Minutes of Committees

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

171. 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.

Councillor J Kent questioned why the Motion submitted by Councillor Rigby at the 26 February 2020 Council in regards to the high use of fireworks in the borough which was causing distress and injury to pets and wildlife and had an impact on air quality was not on this report. Councillor J Kent stated this should now be a priority as Members were still receiving emails from concerned residents and it seemed that little or no progress had been made on this motion. Councillor J Kent questioned the process of how this report was prepared and asked for a timeframe as to when the motion would be put in place as the Council did not want to be in the same position this time next year.

The meeting finished at 8.44pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at direct.democracy@thurrock.gov.uk