

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 11 November 2020 at 7.00 pm

Deadline for call-ins Monday 23 November 2020 at 5.00 pm

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

Apologies: Councillors Mark Coxshall and Andrew Jefferies

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Ian Hunt, Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, and live-streamed onto the Council's website.

50. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 14 October 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

51. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

52. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

53. Statements by the Leader

The Leader began his statement by giving thanks on Armistice Day and remembering those who sacrificed, which was particularly significant as this year marked the 75th Armistice Day since the end of the Second World War. He stated that remembrance had been different this year due to COVID-19, but that the Royal British Legion had ensured safe remembrance services across the UK. He explained that Reverend Cannon Darren Barlow of St Peter and St Pauls Church in Grays had made an excellent virtual service available online, which had already been viewed by nearly 200 people.

The Leader moved onto discussing the second lockdown, which had been implemented to bring the infection rate down, protect the NHS, and save lives. He stated that people should stay at home and only go out for specific reasons such as shopping for necessities like food and medicine; going to work where it is not possible to work from home; for students going to college

or school, or for anyone to exercise. He urged residents to follow the month long lockdown and stick to the rules, after which he hoped the country would go into a new tiered system. The Leader asked people to work together to make sure that Thurrock comes out in the lowest tier, so that residents could visit family and friends again; open businesses; and play their part in getting the national economy back on track. He stated that since the start of the pandemic Thurrock Council had received more than £102million from government to support residents, businesses and the Council through this period, which included £79million for local businesses in grants and business rates relief. He stated that this week Thurrock would also receive £523,004 from the government to provide support to help families with children, and other vulnerable households with food, energy and water bills.

The Leader then moved on and described how the Council were taking tough action on people who broke the rules. He gave the example of landowners on Buckles Lane who had been forced to pay tens of thousands in costs and return the greenbelt to its original state. He stated that due to the injunctions which had been granted to the land north and south of Buckles Lane, the Council were able to stop unapproved work, force the landowners to re-seed the greenbelt and pay tens of thousands in costs to cover the council's legal bill. He explained that the Council would take action to tackle decades of unchecked development on the site, and stated he would take similar action if necessary to resolve the issue. The Leader also gave the example of a rogue landlord who had been forced to pay £18,000 in fines and costs after their company let undersized rooms to tenants. He stated that the Council had previously issued Civil Penalty Notices to the company, but the Council had seen no action and therefore took them to court to ensure the rights of residents to live in a decent home. He gave a final example of organisers of a Halloween Party in the Pilgrims Lane traveller site who now face large fine and possible evictions after they held a party for more than 50 people. He explained that the party organisers told police who saw them erecting a marquee that they would abandon the party, but simply moved the marquee to an area where they thought they could not be seen and continued with their plans. The Leader felt this was reckless and duplicitous, as the party organisers were given the opportunity to do the right thing. He summarised and stated that the Council would work with Essex Police to ensure they face the weight of the law.

The Leader then wished Councillor Huelin and Councillor Hebb good luck for their nominations in the Local Government Information Unit Councillor awards. He explained that Councillor Huelin was a finalist in the Community Champion category and Councillor Hebb had been shortlisted for the Finance and Economic Development category. He felt that both Members had done excellent work in their portfolios, which had been strongly impacted by the pandemic, and explained that they find out the results at a virtual award ceremony on 26 November.

54. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

There were no briefings on policy, budget or other issues.

55. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

No petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

56. Questions from Non-Executive Members

No questions had been submitted from non-Executive Members.

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

Other than those items already contained within the agenda, no matters had been referred to Cabinet for consideration by an overview and scrutiny committee.

58. Lower Thames Crossing Task Force Update Report (Decision: 110534)

Councillor Massey introduced the report in his role as Chair of the LTC Task Force and stated that it had been some time since the Chair of the Task Force had reported to Cabinet and referenced the Terms of Reference, outlining the reasons for the Task Force. He stated that in February Highways England (HE) had released a supplementary consultation, which they had presented to the Task Force in March. He explained that the Task Force had considered the consultation, before approving the Council's response. He then described that HE had also attended the July Task Force meeting during which they had presented their design consultation, and attended again in September to talk through more detailed design elements of the scheme, such as noise barriers. He stated that the Task Force were pleased to welcome this information from HE, but felt it could have come earlier in the process. He described how the Task Force had received reports in October's meeting regarding the Health Impact Assessment and Economic Impact Statement, although the Task Force had been lacking some HE data, which was not published until Development Consent Order (DCO) submission at the end of October. He stated that November's meeting of the Task Force had been cancelled due to the DCO submission, but a briefing had been held where the Task Force had agreed to move to a position of constructive opposition. Councillor Massey thanked the Cabinet for listening to his presentation and welcomed feedback on the move to constructive opposition.

The Leader thanked Councillor Massey for his attendance and felt it was good to hear directly from the Chair regarding updates. He stated that as the DCO submission process continued, he wished to see the meetings of the Task Force continue too.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Noted the work of the Task Force and thanked the Task Force for their work.

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

59. Waste Strategy Update (Decision: 110535)

Councillor Watkins introduced the report and stated that the strategy had been developed by the cross-party Waste Management Working Group (WMWG) which included Councillor Fletcher as Chair; Councillor Byrne as Vice-Chair; Councillor Muldowney; Councillor Ralph; Councillor Smith and Councillor Van Day. He thanked those Members for their eighteen months of hard work and delivery of the strategy. He stated that the Waste Strategy had seen continued focus from opposition groups, but the report had been through the cross-party Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the WMWG.

Councillor Watkins explained that since 2014 recycling rates across the borough had been decreasing, and had decreased further since the start of the pandemic. He felt that the proposed Waste Strategy would help to increase recycling rates across the borough, and had been through a period of consultation, as well as communications via leaflet drops and a social housing pilot. He stated that the consultation had already helped to promote recycling across the borough, and this would be supported by the new waste contracts as the Council worked with the waste team to improve recycling, and reach the government target of 50% recycled waste by 2025. He stated that the WMWG had undertaken lots of detailed work including regular meetings, site visits, and had spent £30,000 on consultation. He explained that the WMWG had chosen option 2A, which Cabinet were being asked to endorse, and this involved a move to weekly recycling collections; bi-weekly refuse collections; and weekly food waste collections. He stated that the current recycling rate in Thurrock was only 33.86%, but this could rise to 54% with the introduction of the new measures. Councillor Watkins explained that as the recycling bin should be the fullest every week, accounting for roughly 64% of all rubbish; this would continue to be emptied on a weekly basis. He added that if any further collection changes were proposed then they would go through the WMWG, and the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee, before coming before Cabinet for approval.

Councillor Watkins then moved onto explain the affect the proposals would have on the workforce and explained that if there were any decreases in the number of waste staff, this would go through a process of rigorous consultation, but that the current plan was to freeze recruitment on the thirteen vacant posts. He stated that the proposed Waste Strategy had no immediate effect on the number of waste staff, and described how more staff might be needed in future due to housing development across the borough potentially leading to the introduction of new waste routes. He explained the changes that had been undertaken since the October Cabinet meeting, and stated that the Waste Strategy remained the same, but questions had been answered in more detail and had been shared with Cabinet Members.

Councillor Watkins explained that the Waste Strategy, if agreed, would begin an eighteen month implementation period, and research undertaken by the WMWG showed that the implementation stage was very important to the success of recycling rates, and could lead to a wholesale recycling change across the borough. He felt that the majority of measures Thurrock Council had put in place up until now had had little or no impact on recycling rates, but that other Councils who had moved to a system similar to option 2A had seen recycling rates increase to approximately 60%.

Councillor Watkins described how residents would be informed of the changes to their collection, and £120,000 would be invested in these communications, which were outlined on page 51 of the agenda. He stated that the communications around the strategy would be ongoing, but if there were any changes in the policy, these would go before the WMWG and Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He stated that option 2B involved a charge for garden waste, but cross-party Members agreed that option 2A was better for residents and were therefore not proposing this new charge. He again stated that if there were any proposals involving 2B, these would go before the scrutiny committee.

Councillor Watkins summarised and stated that this strategy had been undertaken for the right reasons and all three parties had worked on this to ensure recycling rates improved across the borough and hoped they could continue to work together during the implementation stage. Councillor Watkins read out the recommendations being put to Cabinet and asked that recommendation 6c be removed as consultation had already been undertaken in early 2020 and £120,000 had been earmarked for the first year communications plan, with any problems going before the WMWG. Councillor Watkins instead proposed recommendation 7 which read “subject to the approval of 2A, which was agreed from the cross-party working group in recommendation 1.2, this Council commits to launching a borough-wide communications strategy to go forward to the Waste Management Working Group to demonstrate how £120,000 will be spent in the run up to the 2022 implementation” He thanked the staff and the WMWG for their commitment to recycling, and hard work even throughout the pandemic.

Councillor Halden thanked Councillor Watkins for his report and felt proud of the work that the cross-party WMWG had achieved. He stated that the proposed option research showed other Councils had adopted this strategy and improved recycling rates to over 50%. He added that there were also fringe tax-payer benefits to this scheme as the Council would receive fines if recycling targets were not met within the government deadline. He felt pleased that there had been cross-party support for the strategy, and felt glad to see that all parties were working together for the benefit of residents. He commented that he also felt pleased to see the communications strategy would include advice for people who needed to dispose of medical waste, and again thanked Councillor Watkins and his team for the report.

Councillor Hebb also thanked the WMWG for their collaboration shown on the strategy, and the conclusions they had reached. He stated that the world view

on recycling was changing as manufacturers reduced the number of single-use plastics being used in packaging, which formed part of a global shift towards increased awareness of recycling. He thanked the waste team for their dedication to the job, as they were out in all weathers, and stated that the Council would work with them as the project moved towards implementation. Councillor Watkins added that these changes would affect all residents and stated that the team would work to answer any questions that residents might have on the scheme. He added that he hoped the recommendation would be agreed that would allow the WMWG to continue their good work.

The Leader thanked the WMWG for their work on the strategy and felt that there was an increasing national trend to move towards bi-weekly refuse collection and weekly recycling collection, and felt it had been proven to work elsewhere. He thanked Councillor Byrne for his idea regarding the reduction of single-use plastics and stated that services were already starting to implement this reduction across the Council. Councillor Maney asked if data regarding recycling at ward level could be found, as he felt recycling rates would vary dramatically across the borough. He felt that the recycling communications would need to be focussed, so areas with lower recycling rates could be targeted. The Leader agreed with this statement, and added that recycling in flats was particularly difficult, so this should be an area of focus. He stated that this would be fed through the scrutiny committee and the Director of Environment, Highways and Counter Fraud to see if this approach was possible.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Agreed the new Waste Strategy, noting the input of the Waste Cross Party Working Group.**
- 2. Reviewed the options relating to potential changes in the Waste Collection Service as proposed by the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and agreed option 2A from the table in 2.3.7 of this report.**
- 3. Engaged with the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider a charge for garden waste service with a view that any recommendation be subject to a future report to Cabinet.**
- 4. Delegated authority for the re-procurement and/or extension of the Waste Disposal contracts to the Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property and the Director of Environment, Highways and Counter-Fraud, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Sports and Leisure.**
- 5. Delegated authority for the procurement of waste containers, collection vehicles and communication materials to facilitate the change in collection to the Corporate Director of Finance, Governance and Property and the Director of Environment, Highways and Counter Fraud, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Sports and**

Leisure.

6. Considered and agreed the recommendations of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

6a. That the Cross Party Working Group continue to have a role in reviewing the progress of the implementation of the Waste Strategy.

6b. That Thurrock Council lead by example and act to reduce and where possible eliminate single use plastics.

7. Subject to the approval of 2A, which was agreed from the cross-party working group in recommendation 2, this Council commits to launching a borough-wide communications strategy to go forward to the Waste Management Working Group to demonstrate how £120,000 will be spent in the run up to the 2022 implementation.

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

60. Council Tax Exemption for Foster Carers (Decision: 110536)

Councillor Halden introduced the report and stated that he felt proud of this report as it was important for Thurrock based foster carers, as they would not have to pay council tax starting in April 2021. He stated that the average cost of council tax in a Band D property was £1600 per year, but foster carers would be exempt from paying this. Councillor Halden stated that this was the biggest single investment in Thurrock foster carers in many years, and felt it would help improve the number of Thurrock based foster carers, and this would allow foster children to remain in their own communities. He stated that this exemption would be funded through the premium currently being paid for external foster agencies, which cost roughly £2million. He felt this council tax exemption would encourage more local people to become foster carers and therefore reduce the Council's reliance on expensive external foster care agencies. He stated that the criteria and process to become a foster carer would remain high, and foster carers would still need to commit to the 'Stay Put' policy, which ensured foster carers gave pastoral support for foster children up until the age of 21.

Councillor Halden explained that Thurrock would still need to use foster carers outside the borough in some situations, for example if a child required specialist support or had specific medical needs that could only be treated outside Thurrock, but that the exemption would apply to current foster carers in Thurrock and current Thurrock foster carers living outside the borough. He added that officers would also be able to use their discretion regarding the exemption if they felt it was necessary. He thanked the team for their hard work, as well as the Leader and Councillor Hebb for their support on the project.

Councillor Hebb added that he felt this policy was the right thing to do for

Thurrock, and hoped it would encourage more people to apply to become foster carers. He stated that although independent foster care agencies were caring and reliable, by increasing the number of internal Thurrock foster carers, more children could stay within their local neighbourhoods and receive continued support. He thanked the social care team and Councillor Halden for their hard work on the project. Councillor Mayes added that his parents had been Thurrock foster carers for forty years, and felt he understood the challenges that foster carers faced. He commented that any additional money or savings received by foster carers went on caring their foster children, and felt that this council tax exemption would really be of benefit.

The Leader summarised and stated that as a former council tax enforcement officer, he understood the benefit this council tax exemption would have on local foster families. He stated that by increasing the number of home-grown foster parents, this would increase savings for the tax base, and the Council were investing to save. He stated that this report was not designed around those savings, and the main focus was ensuring that foster children stay within Thurrock to ensure they could continue accessing the necessary support and stay within their schools, which would increase their life chances. He stated that as this exemption formed part of the council tax budget, it would be reviewed by Full Council every year.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Recommended the introduction of a Council Tax exemption scheme starting in April 2021 (2021/22 financial year) as outlined in section 3 in the report.

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

61. Mid-Year/Quarter 2 (April-September 2020) Corporate Performance Report 2020/21

Councillor Huelin introduced the report and stated that this was the mid-year corporate performance report, which ran from April-September 2020. She stated that during this time period 76.7% of key performance indicators (KPIs) had been achieved despite the ongoing pandemic. She thanked all staff members for their hard work throughout the pandemic, and understood that many people were now working differently at home, or had changed their services completely. Councillor Huelin gave the example of the library service who were now running a 'click and collect' service whereby people could order books online or over the phone and collect them from the library. She felt this was an excellent resource for people who may be self-isolating or who lived on their own. She stated that some KPIs had missed their target, but this was due to the impact of COVID, for example the Council had not been able to hold any physical recruitment days, so the number of new apprentices started had missed its target. She added that some KPIs could no longer be measured either, for example the face-to-face wait times in the Civic Offices.

Councillor Huelin summarised and stated that the report had been through Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who had no additional recommendations to add.

Councillor Johnson stated that he felt pleased to see the KPI regarding percentage of repairs carried out had maintained its high level, and thanked the repairs team for their hard work even during the pandemic. The Leader thanked all teams for their hard work in meeting KPIs, and added that if residents were unhappy with the service they were receiving they could email or phone the Council. He stated that some KPIs had not reached target due to COVID, such as the payment of Fixed Penalty Notices, which had dropped to 50%, and added that the Council would chase any non-paid fines, and encouraged residents to pay fines early rather than risk going to court. The Leader was also pleased to see the continuation of the red/green KPI system, rather than the traffic light system, as he felt this clearly showed when KPIs were meeting, or not meeting, their targets.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- 1. Noted and commented upon the performance of the key corporate performance indicators, in particular those areas which are off target and the impact of COVID-19.**
- 2. Identified any areas which require additional consideration.**

The meeting finished at 8.06 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**