

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 26 January 2022 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Sue Shinnick (Mayor), James Halden (Deputy Mayor), Qaisar Abbas, Alex Anderson, Gary Byrne, Adam Carter, Daniel Chukwu, Colin Churchman, Gary Collins, Mark Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Robert Gledhill, Shane Hebb, Victoria Holloway, Deborah Huelin, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Steve Liddiard, Susan Little, Ben Maney, Fraser Massey, Allen Mayes, Sara Muldowney, Bukky Okunade, Augustine Ononaji, Maureen Pearce, Terry Piccolo, Georgette Polley, Jane Potheary, Shane Ralph, Kairen Raper, Elizabeth Rigby, Jennifer Smith, Graham Snell, Luke Spillman, James Thandi, David Van Day, Lee Watson and Lynn Worrall
- Apologies:** Councillors Abbie Akinbohun, Chris Baker, Mike Fletcher, Martin Kerin, Joycelyn Redsell and Sue Sammons
- In attendance:** Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

81. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on the 22 September 2021 were approved as a correct record.

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on the 24 November 2021 were approved as a correct record.

82. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

83. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

The Mayor agreed to change the order of agenda so the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner item was heard first.

84. Police Fire & Crime Commissioner

The Mayor welcomed Roger Hirst the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner, Darren Horsman, Strategic Head of Policy and Public Engagement, and Mark Barber the District Commander to the meeting and asked they deliver their presentation which would then be followed by questions from members.

Roger Hirst updated members on the following:

- Crime Trends – Theft, Burglary, ASB and All Crime - Figures for anti-social behaviour had increased through lockdown with the impact of social distancing, engaging with residents and explaining how Government guidelines were being broken and to encourage behaviour. Figures continued to decline, but not where we want to be with lots to do to get crime down, knowing what to do and how this was working.
- Crime Trends – Domestic Abuse and Injury and All Crime – Levels had been down during the pandemic which may have been due to it being harder to report when in a domestic environment and this had been confirmed by charities who offered support. Violence with Injury, drug related, were at unacceptable levels and this issue would be given a big focus and support from the Government.
- Current Landscape of Crime – Thurrock's crimes were up and down and were having the same issues in Thurrock that were similar across Essex and would be taking the same approach.
- 2021-2024 Police and Crime Plan – Highlighted the 12 policing key priorities to get crime down.
- 200 more Police Officers taking total growth since 2016 to 900 officers and this had been strongest it had ever been with more Police on the streets, dealing with crime prevention in hot spots following the sharing of information and partnership working.
- Safer Streets – Launched by Government to make streets safer. In June 2021, Essex Police Fire & Crime Commissioner and Thurrock Council had been awarded £432k in funding and an additional match funding of £193K totalling £625k.
- Violence and Vulnerability – Working in partnership to reduce the volume of serious violence across the county, focusing on tackling gangs, county lines and exploitation.
- Thurrock Police Operational Activity – Off road motorbikes remained the number one anti-social hot spot in Thurrock. Referred to road policing operations which included cruisers.
- Ports and IOC – Tackling modern slavery, human trafficking and organised immigration crime continued to be a priority in the police and crime plan.
- Police Community and Visibility – Committed to invest even more in community and neighbourhood policing to get crime down.

The full PowerPoint can be found on-line from the following link:

<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/b18593/Item 10 - Police Fire Crime Commissioner Presentation 26th-Jan-2022 19.00 Council.pdf?T=9>

Members raised the following questions:

Councillor Ralph: Questioned how the Police were engaging with those using e-scooters to deliver drugs in Corringham town centre. Mark Barber stated the Town Centre teams around Corringham and Grays town centres had been briefed on the zero tolerance policy on e-scooters and had the enforcement to take e-scooters away for those undertaking a crime. It was the Town Centre teams that were the front facing officers who would respond quicker in town centres but if this was felt this was not being addressed he would be happy to have a conversation outside the meeting.

Councillor Jefferies: Referred to the two push bikes which had been delivered to the South Ockendon Police Station in 2019 from the Council. Councillor Jefferies raised this point at January 2021 Council but still the bikes were not being used and asked for reassurance they would be out on the streets in the near future. Roger Hirst apologised and would follow up.

Councillor Potheary: Referred to the stats on violent crime and questioned were these still ticking up and what the next steps would be to tackle those crimes. Roger Hirst stated this unfortunately was still ticking up and they were not yet ahead of violent crime. There had been successes in terms of drug and knives being taken off the street and there were domestic abuse solving teams picking up on victims and perpetrators.

Councillor Muldowney: Referred to the issue of off road motor bikes in Chadwell St Mary and questioned what the plan of action was to address this issue. Roger Hirst stated there was a plan and involved closer working with Councillors through the community safety partnership and had signed off his share of investments that would help to improve the situation. Mark Barber stated Chadwell St Mary had been recognised as one of the five hot spots. An action plan was in place for each of the five areas and highlighted some were more difficult to hard target than others. Mark Barber stated the Task and Finish Group was in place, the action for each area was in place and the Community Police Teams number one priority was around anti-social behaviour specifically around off road motor bikes through Operation Caesar to help tackle and the joint investment would help.

Councillor Gledhill: Thanked Roger Hirst for the joint work undertaken last year to help reduce fly tipping and the illegal transport of waste and questioned whether these, going forward, those joint operations would still continue to which Mark Barber stated yes absolutely and would be more than happy to have further conversations with Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Collins: Referred to the "whose controlling your child" section on the 2021- 2024 Police and Crime Plan and questioned who they were targeting. Roger Hirst stated this was about the exploitation of young people by drug gangs intended to help parents, carers and teachers to enable them to spot signs of young people at risk, who were being groomed. This was predominately around sexual exploitation but mainly drug violence was the

bigger issue and there were some good training and education programmes in place.

Councillor C Kent: Referred to the 12 policing priorities to get crime down, specifically “Reducing Violence against Women and Girls” and questioned what the Essex Police had learnt from lessons of other Police authorities and what confidence could Roger Hirst give this evening that reports made by women and girls would be taken seriously and in a confidential and helpful manner. Roger Hirst stated this had formed part of this manifesto from last May and in his Police and Crime Plan, he stated this was an important issue and personally condemned violence by men against women and girls. Roger Hirst stated he would hold Essex Police to account to ensure they also did this. Roger Hirst was unable to offer a guarantee that every interface or contact between a woman and girl with Essex Police was going to be as it should be but was aware of the cultural challenges. Not to be complacent there was still a big job by Essex Police to do to help and support women and girls in Essex to feel safer and to have the confidence to report.

Councillor Spillman: Questioned the best example of partnership working in Thurrock and what areas were being looking at to develop in the short and medium term to improve this, to which Mark Barber stated anti-social behaviour focused on issues reported by local residents and local Policing and the successful partnership around anti-social behaviour, target hardening and the work undertaken in a short amount of time. In the last nine months there had been a reduction in anti-social behaviour. The partnership was good and strong around organised immigration crime but would like to see this grow, continue and widen across the force.

Councillor J Kent asked for this item to be extended so further questions could be heard.

The Mayor thanked Roger Hirst, Darren Horsman and Mark Barber for their time this evening.

Roger Hirst, Darren Horsman and Mark Barber left the meeting at 7.40pm.

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

The Mayor stated she would be attending a Holocaust Memorial service tomorrow to remember those who had suffered in the Holocaust and to reflect on our will to build peaceful communities for the future.

The Mayor stated in place of providing refreshments for Members following Council meetings she had made and would continue to make donations to food banks and made a donation to a children’s party in Tilbury.

Councillor Gledhill stated Members could send their un-answered questions to himself or directly to the Police Fire Crime Commissioner for a response.

Councillor Gledhill, Leader of the Council, made the following announcements:

New Chamber - It was a shame this meeting could not take place in our fantastic new Chamber, but it had simply not been possible to get it finished in time due to problems directly linked to COVID, and particularly the Omicron variant that had been prevalent since the start of December. Like many other businesses had been faced with the issues in the supply chain and contractors having to be absent because they have had to self-isolate. The good news was the major construction work had taken place and the building looked magnificent. This had helped kick-start the renaissance of Grays we know was coming including the Grays Town Fund, the new Weatherspoon's Pub at the State Cinema and the work was on-going with the owners of the Shopping Centre. The Leader also referred to the Safer Street scheme in Grays following funding received from Government to increase CCTV, lighting and security on Grays High Street.

COVID-19 Update - Tomorrow England would go back to Plan A measures with the requirement being lifted to wear face-coverings in indoor public spaces and on public transport. The Leader was pleased to report that Thurrock had seen vast improvements across the borough with the number of people testing positive in Thurrock dropping by 50%. Thurrock had also moved from having been in a position amongst the highest Upper Tier Local Authorities in the country in terms of infection to being in the bottom half of the table. The Leader stated it was important that everyone who was eligible sought the protection of the vaccination offer as this would reduce the chance of catching and spreading the virus. Thurrock had been awarded £485,000 in Government funding to help boost that rate and to ensure more Thurrock residents got the excellent protection vaccines offer and work would continue with partners in the Community and Voluntary Services to find innovative ways to encourage more people to come forward. The Leader urged anyone who had not been vaccinated to take action by booking an appointment on line, by phone or visiting a pop-up centre within the borough.

Thames Freeport – A full Business Case would be submitted at the end of this week for the Thames Freeport starting in the borough and ending in Barking and Dagenham and would, when open for business, would attract billions in private sector investment that would contribute to the delivery of many of the Council's objectives including economic growth, regeneration and levelling up for the benefit of residents and businesses across the borough. This would also create well-paid jobs and exciting apprenticeships in cutting edge green energy industries and it was the future being developed right here in Thurrock.

The Leader provided an update on Clean It, Cut It, Fill It that since April 2021:

- Had filled 2,912 potholes on our borough's roads. More than 99% within agreed timeframes.
- Had cleared 1,419 fly-tips.
- Removed 1,975 tonnes of waste from streets and other public areas.

- Had issued 3,666 fixed penalty notices for offences including littering, spitting and dropping cigarette ends.

Finally the Leader stated that having worked for Thurrock Council for 20 years working in Adult and Children's Social Care and also in the shared post of Chief Social Worker for Adults, Fran Leddra would be retiring. The Leader stated she had been a fantastic social worker who had been committed and wished her well in her retirement.

86. Questions from Members of the Public

Question 1 was withdrawn prior to the meeting.

A copy of the transcript of questions and answers can be viewed under the relevant meeting date at <http://democracy.thurrock.co.uk/thurrock> and are attached at Appendix A at these minutes.

87. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

The Mayor informed Members that in accordance with the Council's petition scheme, no requisition of notice had been given to present a petition at the meeting.

88. Petitions Update Report

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

89. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies, Statutory and Other Panels

The Mayor enquired whether Group Leaders wished for any changes to be made to the appointments previously made by Committees and Outside Bodies, statutory and other panels.

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

Councillor J Kent, Leader of the Labour Group, stated he had no changes to make.

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

Councillor Massey stated he had no changes to make.

90. Appointment of Interim Monitoring Officer

Councillor Gledhill stated that in accordance with the relevant legislation and Constitutional requirements the report provided Council with information for

noting with regards to the appointment of an interim Monitoring Officer, as an Emergency Decision, in order to ensure statutory and governance requirements were maintained. Councillor Gledhill made the recommendation that Mr Boulter act as the Council's Monitoring Officer on an interim basis.

Councillor J Kent stated he would not be noting this report and requested Mr Boulter leave the meeting for this item. Mr Boulter left the meeting at 8.04pm. Councillor J Kent stated it was crucial for Members to discuss this statutory role here this evening in accordance with the constitutional legislation. Councillor J Kent provided Members a timeline of events following the departure of the previous Monitoring Officer. Commented that no specific reasons for his departure were provided to Members. Questioned why the General Services Committee had not been convened to make this decision. Stated the report quoted incorrect constitutional references and the committee had been misled. Councillor J Kent stated that Mr Boulter was a very good officer but had concerns he was not a lawyer. Members had been informed a speedy recruitment exercise would take place to substantially fill this post but had not seen any timetable for this. Councillor J Kent concluded that in the manner in which the previous monitoring officer had left the Council, lack of details and information on this had not been available to Members, with Mr Boulter not being a lawyer and with Members being misled he urged Members not to vote in favour of the recommendation.

Councillor Byrne stated his agreement with the recommendation.

Councillor Gledhill stated he fully understood Councillor J Kent's concerns as these had been aired at the General Services Committee and taken on board. In Councillor Gledhill's opinion, this report should be noted this evening following a recommendation from the General Services Committee and a recruitment timeline would be prepared. Councillor Gledhill requested the report be moved to the recommendation.

RESOLVED

Noted the appointment of Mr Matthew Boulter to act as the Council's Monitoring Officer on an interim basis, taken as an Emergency Decision.

Mr Boulter returned to the meeting at 8.12pm.

91. Appointment of External Auditor

Councillor Hebb presented the report that under the Local Government Audit and Accountability Act 2014 the Council was required to appoint an auditor to audit its accounts each financial year. The report set out the options and a preferred approach for appointing the external auditor to the Council for the five year period from 2023/24, noting the current appointment applied up to and including the 2022/23 accounts. The decision on the appointment of the auditor was one that was required to be taken by Full Council.

Councillor Ononaji stated this support for Option 3 as this had many advantages to the Council. The Public Sector Audit and Appointments Limited (PSAA) were a professional organisation who would provide cost effectiveness to the Council and would benefit from transparency as all projects would be taken into consideration.

Councillor Hebb thanked Members for their support and moved to the recommendation.

RESOLVED

That the Council accepts the Public Sector Audit Appointment Limited (PSAA) invitation to 'opt-in' to the sector led national scheme for the appointment of external auditors for the five financial years commencing 1 April 2023.

92. Interim Review of Polling Places, Polling Districts and Polling Stations

Councillor Gledhill presented the report that requested Council to consider and approve the recommendations of the Returning Officer and Chief Executive in relation to an interim review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations in the Polling Districts listed and for the reasons outlined in the Appendix.

Councillor Massey praised the changes made as these were as small as possible and would not impact residents too much.

Councillor Spillman thanked Officers for handling the process effectively, this had been communicated and responded to very well.

Councillor Gledhill echoed Councillor Massey's comments and residents would be notified of changes to locations well before the May elections.

RESOLVED

- 1. That Aveley Hub be confirmed as the polling place for Aveley and Uplands, polling district B.**
- 2. That Royal British Legion Hall be confirmed as the polling place for Belhus, polling district F.**
- 3. That Chadwell Library be confirmed as the polling place for Chadwell St Mary, polling district J.**
- 4. That Inspire Youth Hub be confirmed as the polling place for Grays Riverside, polling district V.**
- 5. That United Reform Church, Bradleigh Avenue be confirmed as the polling place for Grays Thurrock, polling district Y.**

6. **That Belhus Village Hall be confirmed as the polling place for Ockendon, polling district AF.**
7. **That Bannatyne Gym be confirmed as the polling place for South Chafford, polling district AL.**
8. **That Springhouse Club be confirmed as a temporary polling place for Stanford East & Corringham Town, polling district AP, for the polls to be held in May 2022.**

93. Local Council Tax Scheme

Councillor Hebb presented the report that provided details of Thurrock's current scheme and analysis to support the recommendation that the current scheme remained unchanged for 2022/23.

Councillor Byrne questioned whether the Council were actually helping those lower paid residents who were being threatened by bailiffs to which Councillor Hebb stated as part of the mission of the fair debt approach was to help those that "want to pay, but can't" and to tackle those who "can pay, but won't". For this to be a process to help to pay debts in a compassionate and consistent way. Councillor Hebb asked Councillor Byrne to let him know of any particular instances outside of the meeting.

Councillor Massey referred to the full disregard of compensation payments and stated this was good to see for residents.

Councillor Little stated this report had been presented and discussed at the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and gave her full support to the recommendations and personally thanked Councillor Hebb.

Councillor Spillman stated he was pleased with the approach Councillor Hebb had taken which had taken some very dark places to better places. This had also been evident by the lower number of complaints he had received which had demonstrated a good campaign which had delivered good results.

Councillor Gledhill echoed Councillor Massey's comment on the compensation payments but disagreed with Councillor Byrne that the lower paid were being threatened with bailiffs, this was a long process to get to this point. Councillor Gledhill also echoed Councillor Spillman's comments when compared to where the Council had been some six to seven years ago. The process had paid off to help those that "wanted to pay, but couldn't". This support had been the right thing to do and at the right level.

Councillor Hebb thanked members for their support and reminded residents to reach out in a crisis as there was help and support available and the Council would help where and whenever it could.

RESOLVED

That Council agreed to maintain the existing scheme for 2022/23.

94. Report of the Cabinet Member for Finance

Councillor Hebb presented his report by stating:

- It had over 660 days since an adult-centric, once-in-a-century, international health crisis took hold of our lives and post COVID had been difficult for a number of Councils. This had not been the case for Thurrock as these Councils bought private sector assets, public ownership of private property the Council had invested in short term, ethical, already-established, municipal markets and as a result had bolstered the reserves. The impacts on local Government finance was well documented, with many reports on how the pressures to sustain pre-pandemic spending levels. Thurrock was able to withstand the immediate economic shock of the COVID storm and vulnerable residents were able to rely on Thurrock.
- The approach adopted by all parties and all members from 2017 enabled financial capability to withstand the economic shock, the useable reserves had increased by 300%, from £8m that this administration inherited, to £24m.
- To date the approach enabled the Council to fund an additional £115m worth of public services which would have otherwise been cut rapidly in 2016, and provide circa £28.8m to other public bodies.
- Despite the pandemic, Thurrock Council had balanced its budget. In the last 22 months, had seen some of Thurrock's best moments issuing over £43m of support to businesses and the 'at risk' and gave special thanks to the Finance team. Councillor Hebb gave thanks to officials in this Council, partners who the Council had worked with in the private and voluntary sector who had helped secure the ability to serve those who needed us the most.
- The Council had sustained focus on the three key tenets of the Fair Debt Summit by helping young adults identify the signs of household debt and how to avoid that; ensuring the collections process was reviewed with external groups to ensure collections were done right, consistent, with a compassionate approach to those who want to pay, but can't and mobilising efforts to ensure all elements of the armoury were available for habitual, long-term, debt avoiders who can pay, but chose not to.
- Last February the Council formally began the conclusion of the investment approach. Borrowing levels were set by the will of Full Council, choosing to provide officers the borrowing levels up to £2bn in 2017, 2018, and 2019; and in 2021, we chose to reduce them for the first time by nearly half a billion.
- With other Councils' collapse of their investment income, moving from surpluses to deficits and a lack of financial resilience prior to the pandemic in other Councils, HM Government were bound to change the rules. Thurrock had not been a victim of our success, but rather tarred with the same brush as our public-owning colleagues.
- It had been a long time since Governments called for self-sufficiency through income generation and being entrepreneurial.

- The blunt reality was the COVID aftershock, and the rule changes meant there would not be another £115m over the next four years of income for spending on services above core services.
- The administration stands ready to lead this borough through this challenge.
- Tax rises would not be a default to closing the gap, reform was needed. This year's proposed increase costs the same as a first-class stamp, and was about 2% under inflation, but would fund £2.2m worth of social care for a pressured Children's Social Care market and our Adult Social Care services.
- Residents expect politics to be put aside, and we hope to work constructively with all parties in the reforms ahead.
- Councillor Hebb concluded by noting on pages 118 and 119, 15/9/2021 and 10/12/2021 should both be 2020 and not 2021.

Councillor J Kent questioned whether the Council would reconsider this tax increase and instead recommend freezing council tax for this year. Councillor Hebb stated last year it had been decided to inject £2m into adult social care through the tax increase after the pandemic, the children's social care department had to be equipped as best as possible to deliver what needed to be delivered and had to progress with the plan.

Councillor J Kent stated the increase of council tax of 2.99% would bring in £2.14m and the recent financial settlement awarded to the Council of £2.5m more than expected and questioned why the Council would not use this windfall to fund a council tax freeze and give local residents some relief. Councillor Hebb stated that £8.5m would be put into council tax scheme and clarified that in pre-pandemic the number of cases were about 9800, then up to 10,400 and now around the 10,000 mark. That £8.5m had been injected last year when the cases were at their highest and although the numbers had come down they had still injected the same amount. So the Council continued to support those residents and for all the right reasons. Councillor Hebb hoped members would support the amendment to motion 4 this evening which was more a practical and ambitious approach.

Councillor Little thanked Councillor Hebb for the report and his attendance at the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, she warmly welcomed the report and was pleased that the report focused on those who wanted to pay but cant and those that can pay but choose not to.

Councillor Byrne thanked Councillor Hebb for the report but had been disappointed on his support for the closure of the adult day care centre. Councillor Byrne questioned whether the council had its own housekeeping in order against spending and overspending and referred to the enhanced redundancy payments and questioned whether the Council could afford this at this time. Councillor Hebb referred to the day care centre and stated the Council had voted on the concept of fewer buildings, better services and the consultation had demonstrated people were happy to move to a centralised estate. Redundancies had to be undertaken in the best possible way in terms

of efficiently and sensitivity and for the Council's housekeeping would continue to do what was needed.

Councillor Muldowney referred to the 2020/21 account having not been presented to the Standard and Audit Committee yet and stated the setting of the budget could be set before the previous accounts had been signed off and questioned when Councillor Hebb expected these to be signed off. Councillor Hebb reiterated the Secretary of State had written to about 350 Councils stating there were pressures in the system and had extended the deadlines with no Councils in Essex having had anything back to committee.

Councillor Duffin thanked Councillor Hebb and officers for including the investment breakdown on the website. This displayed clear and transparency and encouraged councillors and members of the public to check what was on there and see the good investments being made into the borough. Councillor Hebb stated the point of the website was for those who lived in Thurrock who had an interest in the subject and wanted to learn more about it.

Councillor Spillman stated inflation rates was not just a British problem but also a worldwide problem across all major economic across the world as issues came out of the pandemic. Councillor Spillman stated he would not put children's or adult services at risk by not telling the truth to residents that the Council could cover those costs without meeting those increases in inflation and was not what Thurrock residents deserved out of its representatives. Councillor Hebb stated also there was a requirement to increase pay and this also had to be funded.

Councillor Collins questioned what would the current reserves levels be if it had been kept at the same level as labour had done. Councillor Hebb stated after two years of COVID, nothing, the Council would have had to cut harder and further even than now. If we had not done what we had done the general fund balance would have been zero. With the Council having the reserve of £24m had allowed us to use £8m of that last year and this year to allow more the Council more headspace.

95. Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Sports & Leisure

Councillor Jefferies had the privilege of presenting his first portfolio report for environment and sports and leisure and thanked his predecessor, former Councillor Watkins for the work he had undertaken and the services offered to Thurrock residents. Through the Clean It, Cut It, Fill It policy had transformed the borough which continued to score well with Keep Britain Tidy and more importantly was complimented by residents. In particular, street cleaning, the frequency of grass cutting. Councillor Jefferies stated one of the best sights, following the pandemic, had been seeing young children running and playing around in Thurrock's open spaces and parks. This would not have been possible without Thurrock's workforce who throughout the pandemic had maintained those spaces and thanked all those who had worked in the department for all their hard work during that difficult time. When taking up this portfolio holder position, Councillor Jefferies had been determined to see

more trees planted and florals around the borough and has brought forward the land maintenance strategy which would see the Council's open spaces more efficiently managed and would help to improve the environment, air quality and bio-diversity in the borough. By doing this using the services more effectively and also making financial savings. Councillor Jefferies referred to two motions raised and approved for the planting of more trees in the borough and Councillor Jefferies reassured members where possible this process would be speeded up. Referred to possession of new bin lorries which would improve the services provided to residents and the service had suffered due to an unnecessary strike last year and now looked forward to an uninterrupted service for the residents of the borough. With the introduction of the food waste service and vehicles would see an increase in recycling rates. Finally, Councillor Jefferies gave thanks to the Towns Fund for their investment into the borough and the Government money was most welcome to make improvements in the borough's parks and open spaces.

Councillor Potheary asked when the KPI for recycling would be re-introduced to which Councillor Jefferies stated this had been suspended due to COVID as the amount of rubbish being generated was like Christmas every day and had effected the figures. Councillor Potheary was reassured the KPI would be reinstated soon and she would be the first to know when it had been.

Councillor Potheary stated cleaning the streets was key to the borough and requested in the next round of job cuts the front line staff would not be first in line again to which Councillor Jefferies stated it had been necessary to make savings and all resources would be looked into ways of working, using machinery, looking at all possible options to make savings but not to have reductions in services as these must be maintained and stay in place.

Councillor Potheary referred to brown bin collections and the welcomed u-turn on not charging for brown bin collections and questioned as part of that decision there was a £900k savings posted against this into the budget and questioned whether this was being met or deferred. Councillor Jefferies stated he had never been in favour of charging for brown bins and was opposed to those charges. That savings were being made but those savings had not fractured into finding any alternative.

Councillor Byrne referred to Balstonia Park in Stanford Le Hope and questioned when would the delayed work on the park be completed and questioned whether officers actually cared about Thurrock parks. Councillor Jefferies stated officers did care, they were a fantastic team. Councillor Jefferies apologised but stated errors had been made and had been let down by contractors and every effort would be made to get the park open for the school holidays.

Councillor Massey referred to Buckingham Hill Road and how the state of the road was dangerous to those using it and questioned were the plans for the concreting of the HWRC site still going ahead and if so when. Councillor Jefferies agreed to get back to Councillor Massey outside the meeting.

Councillor Duffin touched on the success of recycling in flats and questioned whether this was being rolled out in other places to which Councillor Jefferies stated yes this would rolled out into others and had already demonstrated recycling rates in flats was already up.

Councillor Ralph questioned whether the introduction of a Thurrock Spring Watch had been considered to reassure the different species of nature in Thurrock to which Councillor Jefferies stated this was a good idea, as part of the land maintenance strategy was to be environmental friendly and agreed to speak with Councillor Ralph further on this.

Councillor Worrall referred to Impulse Leisure and they were doing some fantastic work, with some success work with Impulse Leisure, trustees and the Council but stated she was the only woman on that trustee's board. Councillor Worrall questioned whether another woman from the conservative party could be appointed as part of the appointments made to outside bodies at annual council. Councillor Jefferies agreed Impulse Leisure had stepped up and was working well with the Council and agreed to look into the appointment of another woman on the trustee.

Councillor Maney referred to the Tree Strategy which was due to be presented to the Cleaner Greener Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee next week and requested ward Members be informed when trees were due to be taken down and questioned why those trees had been taken down had not been replaced. Councillor Maney asked Councillor Jefferies to familiar himself with the two motions submitted by Councillor Redsell and Councillor Rigby, to ensure they were on track to be delivered. Councillor Jefferies agreed trees were not being planted for those that had been lost and resources by officers would be doubled up to replace these as soon as possible.

Councillor Jefferies summed up by stating his thanks to the Administration for making the borough brighter, tidier and cleaner.

96. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that one question to the Leader had been received and ten questions to Cabinet Members. Those questions not heard would either receive a written response or have the option to withdraw and resubmit.

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

At 9.13pm, Councillor J Kent referred to paragraph 16.1 of the Council procedure and rules to suspend standing orders. This was seconded by Councillor Byrne. The Mayor called a vote to which 17 Member voted in favour and 24 Members voted against. The Mayor stated she would now move to the notices of motion submitted.

97. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

This item fell.

98. Minutes of Committees

This item fell.

99. Update on motions resolved at Council during the previous year

This item fell.

100. Motion submitted by Councillor Redsell

This item fell and would be resubmitted to February Council.

101. Motion submitted by Councillor Muldowney

Councillor Muldowney withdrew her motion and resubmitted for February Council.

102. Motion submitted by Councillor J Kent

Councillor J Kent withdrew his motion and resubmitted for February Council.

103. Motion submitted by Councillor J Kent

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

This Council is concerned at the impact the Cost of Living Crisis is having on residents of Thurrock and notes that domestic gas and electricity bills are predicted to rise by, almost, 50% this year - from an average of £1277 to £1865. The Council resolves to:

- 1. Write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ask him to help residents by scrapping VAT on gas and electricity bills for one year.*
- 2. Write to Thurrock's Members of Parliament asking that they use their positions to support residents by working to achieve a cut in VAT on domestic energy bills.*

An amendment to this motion was received from Councillor Spillman and read as follows:

This Council is concerned at the impact the Cost of Living Crisis is having on residents of Thurrock and notes that domestic gas and electricity bills are predicted to rise by, almost, 50% this year – from an average of £1277 to £1865. The Council resolves to:

1. *Write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to deliver a Brexit promise and ask him to help residents by scrapping VAT on domestic gas and electricity bills.*
2. *Write to Thurrock's Members of Parliament asking that they use their positions to support residents by working to achieve a cut in VAT.*
3. *Write to Thurrock's Members of Parliament asking for a temporary suspension of all green levies on domestic gas and electricity bills.*

Councillor J Kent agreed to move the amendments made by Councillor Spillman and requested this went to the vote. Members voted unanimously in favour of this Motion to which the Mayor announced the Motion carried.

104. Motion submitted by Councillor Collins

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

Modern Day slavery is seeing more and more people smuggled in to the UK using dangerous, and as we know too well sometimes fatal, methods as well as vulnerable UK minors and adults being groomed or duped and forced into sexual exploitation, domestic slavery, forced labour on farms, in construction, shops, bars, nail bars, car washes or manufacturing. We call on Thurrock Council to lead the charge in tackling this abhorrent practice by inviting all Thurrock based businesses to support our anti modern day slavery charter and drive down and stamp out modern day slavery.

Councillor Collins presented this motion by stating the Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee was a cross party committee that ensured all elements of the Council worked together to ensure the Council was fulfilling its duties in regards to Prevent, Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. The committee would work reactively rather than proactively to drive the improvement of the services involved by interacting with partners and stakeholders. With changes to Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act required commercial organisations carrying out business in the UK with a turnover of at least £36m would now need to prepare and publish a slavery and human trafficking statement for each financial year. A statement had been prepared by Thurrock Council and with the agreement from Cabinet would be put in place in Thurrock's businesses to support, protect and drive out modern day slavery. Councillor Collins stated modern day slavery had to be hounded out of Thurrock and urged all members to vote in favour of his motion this evening.

Councillor Collins thanked Fran Leddra for her commitment and the work she had undertaken in her role on the Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee and wished her every happiness in her retirement.

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

The meeting finished at 9.38pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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