

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 June 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Valerie Morris-Cook (Chair), Joycelyn Redsell (Vice-Chair), Alex Anderson, Mark Hurrell, Cathy Kent and Maureen Pearce

Apologies:

In attendance:

Anita Cacchioli, Director of Street Scene and Leisure
Michael Dineen, Assistant Director Counter Fraud, Enforcement and Community Safety
Charlotte Edwards, Trading Standards Manager
Tracie Heiser, Operational Services Lead
Steven Mair, Interim Chief Financial Officer
Leigh Nicholson, Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection
Susan Reddick, Strategic Lead - Waste
Ewelina Sorbjan, Interim Director Housing
Vincent Taylor, Strategic Lead for Clean and Green Services
Stephen Taylor, Strategic Lead of Economic Development
Rhiannon Whiteley, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

The live recording can be viewed on the following link:

[Thurrock Council - Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 13/06/2023 - YouTube](#)

18. Minutes

The minutes of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 24 January 2023 and 27 February 2023 were approved as a correct record.

19. Items of Urgent Business

There were not items of urgent business.

20. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

21. Terms of Reference

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and explained that this item is to draw Committee Member's attention to the terms of reference of the Committee which is in the Council's Constitution. It sets out what areas the Committee covers and essential information such as the quorum for meetings.

The Chair commented that she has requested that the Committee meetings take place around the borough as she wants to be open with residents.

ACTION 1 – Senior Democratic Services Officer to investigate alternative venues and feed back to the Chair / Committee for comment.

22. Fees and Charges Review 2023/24

The Interim Chief Financial officer explained that the Fees and Charges report will be going to Cabinet next month and will report on the comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. In the budget report in March of this year the Commissioners commented that further financial work was needed to improve sustainability of the Council and a full review of fees and charges would need to be completed by the end of quarter 1. The Council has begun a three-part review of fees and charges. The first stage is to examine benchmarking and some price reviews. In the second stage there will be further price reviews. The third stage will be a longer-term piece of work which normally takes around 2-3 years and this will look at the profitability of all services and that the Council is actually charging what it can charge for. The policy recommends full cost recovery.

Following the update from the Chief Financial Officer, members were invited to ask questions. Key points raised included:

- The Committee raised the impact it could have on residents who have already had a 10% rise in Council Tax and charges increased from the 1st April 2023. The report talks about full cost recovery however the full cost of services and outturn over the last 3 years would have given a clearer picture as due to covid some of that period has not been real.
- The Chair noted that staffing costs also come under full cost recovery and commented on some of the high salaries and fees paid to consultants over recent years and queried why residents should be paying for this where consultants haven't done an effective and value-for-money role.
- The Chair raised that the 14% rise in charges at Thameside could force it to close. It was clarified that the Thameside prices have not increased in line with inflation over the last 5 years.
- The increase in charges is to get the Council in a sustainable financial position to allow it to deliver services in the future.
- The CPI was taken at the point in time as it does fluctuate.
- The Chair requested for a pay journey to be considered over a period of time for charges where the increase is a particularly high percentage

- The Chair raised that more should be done with enforcement as there is a lack of consequences for unacceptable behaviour
- The Chair requested for a pay journey to be considered over a period of time for charges where the increase is a particularly high percentage

Councillor Anderson commented that although he is not happy with some of these increases, especially charging people to park outside their homes through the use of permits however, he understands why the Council is adopting this policy and confirmed that he will be voting in favour of the recommendations tonight.

The Chair highlighted that she would like the Committee's comments on full cost recovery, profitability and looking at CPI going forward not just taking April's CPI as it is normally higher to be taken into account by Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the proposed Fees and Charges policy, Appendix 1, in particular agreeing the commitment to full cost recovery and annual CPI inflation increases as the default.**
- 1.2 That Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the proposed Fees and Charges increases for the material areas, Appendix 2.**
- 1.3 That Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the proposed new Charges in section 8 of this report.**
- 1.4 That Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the requirement for a further detailed review & analysis of remaining Fees and Charges by Quarter 4 2023/24.**

23. Violence Against Women and Girls

The Assistant Director for Housing Management introduced the report and stated that she is at the meeting tonight in her capacity as the Chair of the Violence Against Women Board.

During the discussion the following was acknowledged, confirmed and/or highlighted:

- A lot of young people are saying the problems are so commonplace with receiving inappropriate images/ text there is no point in reporting them.
- More information on the Safe Street website was requested.

- It was raised that the Ask Angela campaign could be broadened to reach more people and especially young people who don't feel safe. Although it originally came out of pubs and clubs it could be branched out to the retail sector.
- More information was requested about the champions in the Council for Violence Against Women and Girls and Men's mental health and how their success is measured.
- The Committee raised concerns that £490,000 is being carried forward and has not been spent.
- The Committee raised that more is needed to educate young people on unacceptable behaviour
- The Committee suggested a separate strategy for men may be better rather than it being included as a footnote on a strategy on violence against women and girls.

ACTION 2 - The Assistant Director for Investigation, Enforcement and Community Safety and the Chair of the Violence Against Women Board will feed back to the Community Safety Partnership and VAWG Board the request for more education for young people on inappropriate messages/ unacceptable behaviour

ACTION 3 - The Assistant Director for Investigation, Enforcement and Community Safety and the Chair of the Violence Against Women Board will ensure Child Sexual Exploitation and grooming will be added to the VAWG Board and Community Safety Partnership agendas as an item to find out what is being done in this area.

ACTION 4 - The Assistant Director for Housing Management will provide further information to the Committee members on the success of the Safe Street website and also the criteria for becoming champions in the Council for Violence Against Women and Girls and Men's mental health and how their success is measured.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Note the progress on delivery of responsibilities detailed within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and scrutinise the funding allocations**
- 1.2 Note the key successes and the programme to deliver on the VAWG strategy for Thurrock 2020/23**
- 1.3 Provide comment on the proposed vision and 6 Ps to deliver the Thurrock Domestic Abuse and VAWG strategy 2023/6**

24. Provision of Tree Surgery Contract (Report to follow)

This report was withdrawn and will go straight to Cabinet on 12 July 2023.

25. Annual review of age restricted products work 2022-2023

The Trading Standards Manager introduced the report and confirmed that it sets out the work undertaken over the last 12 months on age restricted sales. There has been over 132 engagements with businesses undertaken including 98 advisory visits and 7 underage test purchases resulting in two sales. Two businesses sold vapes to an underage volunteer. They were formally interviewed and received warning letters for their actions and had their alcohol licence reviewed with further conditions imposed.

The Trading Standards Manager confirmed intelligence is required to be able to justify the need for surveillance under the RIPA legislation. There is a link on the Council's website to report incidents of underage sales. The Trading Standards Manager requested that members also share this information with residents. The Government has announced some funding for tackling illicit vapes and it will be ring-fenced for trading standards to complete this work.

Following the presentation the members were invited to ask questions. Key points raised included:

- There is no quota on how many vape shops can be opened as they come under 'retail' and planning policies currently protect retail use. If members are concerned about opening hours they can report this to the planning team
- The Trading Standards Manager confirmed there is no license required to sell vapes or tobacco there is only a licensing scheme for the sale of alcohol. They would need to lobby the Government to introduce a licensing scheme. A licensing scheme would provide an additional income stream for Local Authorities.
- School children are using vapes and are attracted to them due to their bright colours and flavours and something needs to be done like it has been done with cigarette packaging to make it less attractive.

The Chair proposed that the Council should lobby the Government to introduce a licensing scheme for tobacco and vaping products this was seconded by Councillor Redsell and Councillor Hurrell.

ACTION 5 – The Licensing Directorate to write to the Government to lobby in support of the introduction of a licensing scheme for tobacco and vapes.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny note the contents of this report.**
- 1.2 The Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee urge the Council to lobby the Government to introduce a licensing scheme for tobacco and vapes.**

26. Waste Report - (Report To Follow)

The Director of Street Scene and Leisure introduced the report and explained that the report considers the operation of the brown bin (garden waste collection) service delivery. Paragraph 2.8 and 2.9 of the report confirms that the current staffing levels do not allow for a consistent service. Garden waste is now approaching its peak season and there aren't enough staff to complete the work. The report outlines a range of options which have been fully costed in table 1. It was further confirmed that there is a slight typo on the table regarding option 5. Where it states a fortnightly refuse collection service it should say a fortnightly garden waste collection service. Option 5 is recommended as the interim solution and a full strategic review of waste services will be completed. The report is being considered at Cabinet tomorrow.

During the discussion the following was acknowledged / highlighted confirmed:

- The Chair commented that residents have been failed, communication has been poor and as a resident she felt frustrated and irritated that issues have not been resolved.
- The Chair highlighted that in relation to the recommendations she was particularly concerned with the wording 'interim solutions' at recommendation 1.1. The Chair requested assurance that the brown bin will continue to be collected whilst the review is being completed.
- The Strategic Lead for Waste confirmed that if approved at the Cabinet meeting tomorrow the first garden waste collection would take place on the 26th of June 2023.
- The Strategic Lead for Waste confirmed that in relation to food waste it will become a statutory duty from 2024 that a separate food bin will have to be provided. A trial has commenced in the borough and feedback from this will be considered and this can also be provided to the Committee.
- The Strategic Lead for Waste further confirmed that it is part of the Environment Act that producer responsibility will be introduced so that those responsible for producing waste will be responsible for the cost of dealing with the waste.
- Councillor Pearce raised that in the past there only was one bin but residents disposed of food and garden waste by having compost heaps and queried if a communications campaign to residents encouraging composting had been considered. The Chair raised that a leaflet is already being used to communicate service changes later this month and therefore the same leaflet could be used to communicate this.

The Chair proposed the wording of 'interim solution' is removed from recommendation 1.1 and replaced with until such time as a fully costed Waste Implementation Plan has been completed. The Chair was concerned this

wording was too vague and residents needed more certainty. This was seconded by Councillor Anderson and the members of the Committee unanimously agreed with the proposed amended wording.

The Chair also proposed that the wording of recommendation 1.3 be altered to include that the strategic review should be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee not less than one month before Cabinet. The amendment was proposed to give Overview and Scrutiny sufficient time to consider it in detail. The members of the Committee unanimously agreed with the proposed amended wording.

RESOLVED:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to recommend to Cabinet that:

- 1.1 Option 5 be approved for the collection of garden waste and the associated change to the frequency collection of recycling *until a fully costed Waste Implementation Plan has been completed***
- 1.2 A full strategic review of the waste service be undertaken to provide for a sustainable service in the context of reducing budgets, increasing costs, demographic and other pressures, changes in legislation.**
- 1.3 The scope of the strategic review will be developed for members consideration, but will include the type, levels and forms of delivery of service. *This should be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee not less than one month before Cabinet.***

27. Work Programme

The Committee considered the work programme, no further items were added.

The meeting finished at 9.05 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**