

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 10 January 2024 at 7.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Monday 22 January 2023 at 5.00pm

Present: Councillors Andrew Jefferies (Chair), Deborah Arnold (Deputy Chair), Adam Carter, George Coxshall, Barry Johnson, Ben Maney and Graham Snell

Apologies:

In attendance:

Mark Bradbury, Interim Director of Place
Claire Demmel, Interim Director Public Realm
Asmat Hussain, Director of Legal and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Steven Mair, Interim Chief Financial Officer/Section 151 Officer
Patrick McDermott, Chief of Staff to the Thurrock Commissioners
Dave Smith, Chief Executive and Managing Director
Commissioner
Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director of Housing Management and Development
Stephen Taylor, Head of Freeport
Luke Tyson, Chief Intervention Officer
Ian Wake, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
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.

216. Minutes

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 13 December 2023 were approved as a correct record.

217. Items of Urgent Business

Councillor Jefferies explained that he had agreed to an urgent item of business and that was the urgent report titled Update on Procurement of Housing Contracts for Works through a Partnership Model.

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and stated that the tendering process is underway. The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had sight of the report yesterday. The Committee raised questions around the

tender exercise timetable and the overall state of the construction contract market. There is a Housing Working Group already set up and they will be fully working through those questions with senior officers at those meetings. The report stems from a Cabinet report last November where it was agreed that the Council will go out to tender for a single delivery partner. This update report which will be presented to Cabinet regularly on a monthly basis outlines the progress made on the financial and legal processes. The financial and legal implications remain the same. The model still plans to go live on 1 March 2025.

RESOLVED:

1.1 Cabinet Members are requested to note and comment on the contents of the report.

218. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

219. Statements by the Leader

The Leader stated that he hoped everyone had a lovely Christmas and wished everyone a Happy New Year. The Leader thanked those that worked over Christmas and during Storm Henk. The Leader also thanked Mary Carter the sister of Councillor Carter who arranged a Christmas dinner for carer's in Thurrock. It was a great way of thanking those that care for the most vulnerable. Council teams and colleagues worked throughout the storm last week and their service was valued and appreciated by the whole borough. The Leader also confirmed that a new Christmas Tree Recycling service had been introduced and 1120 bookings have been made.

The Leader explained that the Council has adopted a position to go out to consultation on the Local Plan, the Leader stated that he looks forward to hearing resident's voices on the future of Thurrock and the consultation in the coming weeks and months. The Leader also noted that there had been some interest concerning the Ferry service between Tilbury and Gravesend. The Leader thanked Thurrock's Member of Parliament who asked questions today in Parliament and got the support of the Prime Minister. The Leader confirmed that he had spoken with Kent Council's Leader that evening and they have agreed that officers will work together on both sides to come up with a solution so that the ferry service continues without any redress to public funds. The consultation that Kent are completing will continue. Thurrock are not withdrawing the funding and want to find a working solution that provides people with a ferry service between Tilbury and Gravesend.

220. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor B Maney confirmed that the Planning Advisory Service Peer review was carried out last year between the 30 October and 2 November 2023.

Councillor B Maney explained that the review was thorough and both he and Councillor Jefferies had met with the inspection team. The review resulted in a final report which has a number of recommendations and issues identified for the Council to respond to. The Council is committed to making sure the peer review is a worthwhile exercise and is committed to acting on all of the recommendations. Councillor B Maney stated that there is a resource issue and it will take time to digest the report but it should be made public from today. A report will be prepared to explain how the Council will embed it in the planning service. Councillor B Maney thanked the inspection team for the work they completed.

Councillor Jefferies echoed what Councillor B Maney said and confirmed officers are working on an action plan as to when the recommendations can be implemented.

221. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

There were no Petitions submitted by Members of the Public.

222. Questions from Non-Executive Members

There were no Questions from Non-Executive Members.

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

There were no matters referred to Cabinet for consideration by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

224. Delegated Decisions taken since the last meeting

Councillor Jefferies confirmed that there has been two delegated decisions taken since the last Cabinet meeting which are listed on a separate document regarding substance misuse services and sexual health services dated 4.12.2023.

225. Gas Services Contract Modification Report (Decision: 110691)

The Leader decided to hear item 15 before item 11.

Councillor B Johnson introduced the report and explained that the current contract expires on 29 March 2024. The Council are proposing that the single delivery partner model will be in place by March 2025 and this leaves a period of time where support will need to be in place. The report looks to extend the current contract for 1 year with the potential to extend it for a further year.

The Leader commented that it is straightforward, and the Council needs to have a gas contract.

RESOLVED:

1.1 Approve the recommendation set out in the report to modify and extend the existing domestic and commercial gas servicing, breakdown, repair and installation contract for a further year to 1st March 2025 with the potential extension for a further year.

1.2 Approve delegated authority to implement the contract modification for the domestic and commercial gas servicing, breakdown and repair to the Executive Director of Adults, Housing and Health in consultation with the Leader, Portfolio Holder, Commissioners and Section 151 Officer.

226. Progress on Thurrock Council's Improvement and Recovery (Decision: 110687)

The Leader introduced the report and welcomed the progress Thurrock has made on improvement and recovery. The Council has taken its situation and challenges seriously and implemented measures to improve. The Leader highlighted that there is always more work to be done but they should be proud of what has been done in a relatively short period of time. The Leader thanked the Senior Leadership Team for their support in delivering the changes the Council needs. The Leader stated that it is his strong belief that the Council will overcome its challenges and where there aren't plans in place to tackle these challenges they have started work on creating these plans. The Leader assured everyone that the challenges are being monitored and tackled. They are in the process of setting the budget for 2024/25 and in the process of embedding a new Senior Leadership Team.

The Leader highlighted the following achievements: -

- A Working Group is in place to develop a new operating model stream
- Started development on a corporate plan
- Made Appointments to senior posts
- Delivering a new arrangement for Overview and Scrutiny and the Standards and Audit Committee to encourage more member engagement and scrutiny of decisions.

Councillor D Arnold confirmed that culture change may take a number of years. In the new quarter of the next municipal year measurements and controls over the improvement plan will be introduced. Councillor D Arnold queried how important is it that the 12 key outcomes are used as a test in seeing if the improvement and recovery plan is working.

The Leader responded that to see if anything is working, you have to test it against something. It is therefore that we have something tangible to test the implementation of the Improvement and Recovery Plan against. I believe that it is important that we have a test for the Improvement and Recovery Plan so that we can continue making tweaks and adjustments to continue improving Thurrock Council. The Leader agreed the 12 key points needed to be

monitored and reported back on a regular basis to ensure the Council is making the improvements needed.

Councillor Carter queried how the improvement and recovery plan helps to improve the quality of officers.

The Leader responded that there is a new range of training being offered to officers so that they can be better prepared and equipped in carrying out their roles in the council and supporting and implementing member's decisions. One of the outcomes of going into special measures was that we needed to support out officers and ensure they get the support they need. The feedback we are getting from officers at various roadshows is promising.

Councillor Coxshall queried whether the Leader could provide an update on the divestment strategy.

The Leader stated that the Council has made good progress on divestment. The aim is to have 90% of investments divested or underway by the end of March. The Leader confirmed that he could not comment on individual investments but he hoped that there will be more news in the next few weeks and months to share.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

- 1.1 Note the progress made on the Council's improvement and recovery.**
- 1.2 Refer this report to Full Council for all Members to consider and comment on the progress to date.**

227. 2024/25 Revenue Budget Savings Proposals (Decision: 110688)

The Leader explained that the next 3 reports have some exempt appendices and therefore reminded members and officers not to discuss the exempt appendices whilst the meeting is being live streamed. If anyone does wish to discuss the contents of the exempt appendices the meeting will go into a closed session and members of the press and public will be asked to leave the meeting.

Councillor Snell introduced the report and confirmed that the report sets out the revenue budget saving proposals for 2024/25. The savings total 18.2 million and there are 53 proposals considered deliverable in 2024/25. Some of the proposals require further investigation before outcomes can be fully established. Cabinet is being asked to note and not agree the proposals tonight. Some savings have gone out to public consultation which are still open and some are yet to go through the scrutiny process. Councillor Snell stated that they wanted to be open and transparent and there will be a

scrutiny meeting on the 14 February 2023. Cabinet is also being asked to approve the transformation expenditure in para 3.10 which will be met from transformation budget of 11.3 million.

Councillor Snell confirmed that they are not considering a 10% rise in Council Tax this year.

The Leader commented that it is important that the budget savings proposals go through scrutiny and he welcomes suggestions from the council and public consultations.

Councillor Coxshall highlighted how important the budget meeting was with all 49 councillors present. It was very different from how they had dealt it previously, the meeting was a marathon and they went line by line through the proposals. Councillor Coxshall thanked members and officers.

Councillor D Arnold stated that for the first time fully worked business cases were sitting around the proposals and the best work has been done to realise the proposals. The budget savings proposals have been presented to all 49 councillors and subject to 5 hours of scrutiny. The budget has been given a greater level of due diligence than she has seen in her time as a councillor.

Councillor Carter agreed the scrutiny of the budget has improved and he welcomed it.

Councillor B Maney responded to Councillor Snell's comments that they are not considering a 10% rise in Council Tax this year. He welcomed it but made clear that they are not ignoring the fact that Thurrock has a very difficult job to do and they need to address the deficiency in their base budget.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That Cabinet note the savings proposals at paragraphs 3.2.3 and 3.2.4 and 3.6.2, for which consultation started on the 29th November 2023 and ends on the 19th January 2024 and 7th January 2024, respectively.**
- 1.2 That Cabinet note that the remainder of the savings proposal at paragraph 3.9.7 will be reported as noted as a separate item to the Overview and Scrutiny meeting on the 14th February 2024 for final consideration.**
- 1.3 That Cabinet note that the Outline Business Case savings reported to Overview and Scrutiny on 28th November 2023, are to be re-presented when at the Full Business Case stage on the 14th February 2024 for final consideration, these are at listed at paragraphs 3.3.5 and 3.9.1, 2 and 3.**

- 1.4 That Cabinet approve the estimated expenditure as set out in paragraph 3.10, which will be met from the Transformation budget.**
- 1.5 That Cabinet note that those proposals presented at Overview and Scrutiny on the 28th November 2023 and noted as needing a CEIA (Appendix B) at the second stage will be reported to Overview and Scrutiny on the 14th February 2024 for final consideration.**
- 1.6 That Cabinet approve all proposals totalling £11.3m as listed in Appendix C that are able to progress to implementation and maximise achievable benefit in 2024/25.**
- 1.7 That Cabinet note that there are a number of proposals that are being consulted on, have outstanding CEIA's or require further development; these total £6.9m. Details are at Appendix C.**
- 1.8 That Cabinet note the savings form part of the wider budget setting process and that the overall 2024/25 budget will be reported for Full Council Approval in February 2024.**

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

228. Thames Freeport Accountable Body Decisions (Decision: 110689)

Councillor D Arnold introduced the report and stated that Thurrock Council is the accountable body for Thames Freeport and is responsible for overseeing the management of public money within the Freeport programme. The Thames Freeport prepared a 2023/24 business and financial plan which is annexed to the report at Appendix 1. The plan was approved by the Thames Freeport Governing body in September 2023. The Council as accountable body carried out the due diligence on the plan to ensure best value spend of public purse and this is summarised at Appendix 2. Councillor D Arnold explained that as it is a new organisation, the spend is primarily set up costs and staffing. The Public funding of the Thames freeport operating costs is via retained business rates via a s31 grant to the value of rates forecast for 2023/ 24 meaning the council receive 2.275 million of grant funding. The report asks for approval to release funding of 1.165 million to the Freeport Operating Company in line with the approved business plan and for the remaining 0.606 million to the Director of Legal and Governance to meet the costs the council will incur as the Accountable body. A Cabinet Sub-Committee will be introduced to provide better oversight and support. Cabinet is being asked to approve the Terms of Reference for the Sub-Committee set out in Appendix 3.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet is asked to:

- 1.1 subject to establishing the subsidy control position approve funding of £1,651,275 to enable the Thames Freeport Operating Company to deliver the Thames Freeport Business Plan 2023/4. Funding to be taken from the £2.257m s31 grant relating to Thames Freeport held by the Council**

- 1.2 delegate authority to the S151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader, Portfolio Holder for Governance, Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer to**
 - (a) to take all necessary action to establish the subsidy control position in relation to recommendation 1.1**

 - (b) subject to subsidy control requirements release funding to the Freeport Operating Company and once the appropriate legally binding agreements are in place between all parties to allow the Council to discharge its obligations as Accountable Body including a signed funding agreement between the Council and the Freeport Operating Company.**

- 1.3 delegate authority to the Director of Legal and Governance or Executive Director Corporate Services as appointment, in consultation with the Leader, Portfolio Holder for Governance, Chief Executive and S151 Officer to release the balance of funding from the remainder of the s31 grant of £0.606m to deliver the Accountable Body functions and to use on projects that support delivery of the Freeport.**

- 1.4 approve the Terms of Reference for the Thames Freeport Cabinet sub-committee established by Cabinet in September 2023.**

Reason for the decision: as outlined in the report

This decision is subject to call-in

229. Re-Commissioning of Public Health Contract - Healthy Families Service (Decision: 110690)

Councillor G Coxshall introduced the report and explained that the report was presented back in January. There has been a slight change to what was previously agreed as the tender process previously did not include an annual uplift and the contract length has changed from 5 + 1 + 1 to 3 + 2. It is an important statutory service.

The Leader queried the reason for the change in length of the contract.

Councillor Coxshall responded that it is to ensure the Council is not being exposed.

RESOLVED:

1.1. Further to the recommendations agreed by Cabinet on 11th January 2023, that Cabinet agrees:

1.1.1. to commence the procurement of the Healthy Families Service Contract in line with the revised financial envelope detailed in this paper;

1.1.2. that the power to award the Healthy Families Service Contract be delegated to the Director of Public Health in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Education, Portfolio Holder for Health, Adult Social Care, Community and Public Protection, and the s.151 Officer.

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

The meeting finished at 7.36 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**