

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 31 January 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Susan Little (Mayor), Qaisar Abbas (Deputy Mayor), John Allen, Alex Anderson, Deborah Arnold, Paul Arnold, Gary Byrne, Adam Carter, Daniel Chukwu, George Coxshall, Tony Fish, Robert Gledhill, Aaron Green, James Halden, Vikki Hartstean, Mark Hooper, Mark Hurrell, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Ben Maney, Jacqui Maney, Cici Manwa, Fraser Massey, Valerie Morris-Cook, Sara Muldowney, Augustine Ononaji, Srikanth Panjala, Maureen Pearce, Terry Piccolo, Georgette Polley, Kairen Raper, Joycelyn Redsell, Elizabeth Rigby, Sue Sammons, Sue Shinnick, Graham Snell, Neil Speight, Luke Spillman, James Thandi, Lee Watson and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillors John Cecil and Gary Collins

In attendance: Dr Dave Smith, Chief Executive and Managing Director
Commissioner
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
Alix MacFarlane, Communications Advisor - Intervention and Improvement, Interim Director
Patrick McDermott, Chief of Staff to the Thurrock Commissioners
Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Alex Powell, Assistant Chief Executive
Kerry Thomas, Chief of Staff
Ian Wake, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Matthew Boulter, Head of Democratic, Scrutiny and Member Services
Jenny Shade, Principal Democratic Services Officer

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.

106. Minutes

Minutes of Council held on the 29 November 2023 were approved as a correct record.

Minutes of Extraordinary Council held on the 6 December 2023 were approved as a correct record.

107. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

108. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

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

The Mayor acknowledged the good work being undertaken by the Men's Health Charity, CHAPS, on prostate cancer screening and Men's health checks and asked Members to spread the word of an event planned on Thursday 7 March from 2pm to 6pm, at Blackshots Impulse Leisure.

The Mayor congratulated Thurrock MP Jackie Doyle-Price for becoming a dame in recognition of her public and political services.

The Leader made the following announcements:

- A consultation on the Local Plan had been launched, where a range of community events had been planned as part of this and hoped as many residents as possible would engage.
- The consultation on the proposed relocation of Grays Library and Museum into a new building had commenced and again encouraged residents to engage with the consultation.
- Following recent storms, thanked all the emergency services and the council teams who had worked hard to ensure resident's safety.
- The sale of Toucan Energy Holdings had reduced the council's debt position by more than half a billion pounds had been announced which had been the biggest contributor to the council's financial recovery and an important step on the improvement journey.
- That since April 2023, there had been 1855 fly tips cleared, 1876 tonnes of litter cleared from streets and 2941 potholes filled which was more than 98% in the agreed time frame.
- Clarified the Council's position on the Lower Thames Crossing in that the council had consistently opposed National Highway's current proposals for the crossing, fought hard for changes to the proposals, acknowledged the hard work undertaken by the Council's Lower Thames Crossing team in negotiating with the National Highways last year. Currently the decision was now with the Secretary of State and despite what some in the media have said the Council had not caved in. The Council had not given up in our efforts to secure improvements and mitigations nor had it agreed a secret deal to allow the scheme to proceed. The Leader confirmed that in the event that the Secretary of State approved the proposals, National Highway would meet the cost of Thurrock Council officer time in managing any conditions imposed by the consent, so that the Council and local Council taxpayers would not meet that cost.

110. Questions from Members of the Public

The Mayor informed the chamber that four questions had been received from members of public.

From	To	Subject
Mr Perrin	Leader	Thurrock Council's investments and acceptance of shared responsibility.
Ms Ramdenee	Councillor B Maney	East Tilbury "a new purpose-built community hub alongside enhancements/expansion to Gobions Park".
Ms Byrne	Councillor B Maney	Originally funding from the Grays Town Fund for the Thameside Complex.
Ms Hattle	Councillor B Maney	This question fell due to Ms Hattle being unable to attend.

111. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

Councillor J Maney presented a petition in respect of Save Aveley's Pre-School. The Leader provided a response.

112. Petitions Update Report

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

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

The Mayor asked whether there were any changes to be made to the appointments previously made by committees and outside bodies, statutory and other panels.

The Leader made the following change:

To remove Councillor Redsell from the Impulse Leisure Outside Body.

To appoint Councillor Pearce as a substitute on the Standard and Audit Committee.

The Leader of the Labour group, Councillor J Kent, made no changes.

Councillor Speight as spokesman for the Non-Political Alliance of Independent made no changes.

114. Revised Political Balance

The report presented requested the Council to confirm the calculations relating to the allocation of seats on committees following the creation of the Non-Political Alliance of Independent Councillors (NPAIC).

RESOLVED

- 1. That the political balance and allocation of seats, as set out in Appendix 1 was approved.**
- 2. That Council noted any subsequent changes to political balance on committees do not take effect by agreement of all group leaders.**

115. Debate on a petition containing over 1500 verified signatures - Public Inquiry into financial collapse of Thurrock Council

The report followed a petition that had been presented at Cabinet on the 8 November 2023 by Mr Sandu, relating to a public inquiry into the financial collapse of Thurrock Council. The petition exceeded the threshold of 1500 verified signatures and in accordance with Chapter 1, Part 2, Article 3 of the Constitution qualified for debated by Full Council.

Mr Sandu was given the opportunity to present his petition.

The Leader in his response reassured residents that there had been changes on how the council operated and learnings were being made from those errors of the past. A public inquiry would help understand more about the financial collapse and the errors that took place. The Leader read out a statement received from Essex Police in regard to specialist police officers liaising with the council, the best value inspection team and insolvency practitioners and wider enforcement partners about the sufficiency for a potential criminal investigation, a decision which had not been made on. The Leader stated he agreed with the Member of Parliament for Thurrock that by holding a public inquiry would not produce anything new and that public money could be better spent.

The Leader recommended a letter from himself, and the Leader of the opposition be sent to the Secretary of State to request holding a public inquiry, the Leader reminded residents that the council did not have the power to call for or set up a public inquiry.

The following points were made:

- Leader of Opposition agreed that a letter should be sent to the Secretary of State with the caveat that Councillor Speight's signed the letter also.
- Referred to a motion that had been raised six months ago asking for a public inquiry which had been rejected, in that this evening's meeting could

have been spent looking at the outcome of that inquiry rather than just now accepting that one was required in asking for that inquiry.

- Referenced the motion above by stating this was not Thurrock specific, that motion was about local government on a wider scale.
- Welcomed Alex Powell the new Assistant Chief Executive to the council.
- Praised the work of officers to members and residents.
- Genuine leadership was required in rebuilding the trust that had been lost.
- It had taken the steadfast of residents of the borough to do what the leadership within the council should have done some time ago.

At 8.00pm the Mayor extended this item by 15 minutes.

- A public inquiry needed to be heard in public and for the results to be made public, no accountability had been made of specific officers, members, services, or processes that were in place and this was what the public inquiry should deliver.
- A full public inquiry needed to be undertaken to ensure the council had undertaken everything it could to ensure those culpable were held to account.
- A detailed analysis of account was required to ensure this did not happen again.
- Referenced the limitations of the Best Value Inspection report and whether Thurrock had met and able to demonstrate its duty to deliver best value and how it would continue to carry out its work.
- The inquiry needed to establish the facts, find out what happened, why, who was accountable and to learn lessons.
- Gratitude was made to the Corringham Fobbing and Homestead forum in their help in getting this item debated this evening.
- A full enquiry would satisfy resident's hunger for justice.
- With the council meeting in February to discuss the budget, those budgets could not be balanced this year or subsequent years without borrowing millions of pounds.
- The public enquiry needed to go further than what the best value inspection had carried out.
- This was a very motive debate and residents wanted accountability and all 49 members needed to accept their responsibility.

Actions:

- Letter to be written to the Secretary of State regarding Public Inquiry.

RESOLVED

That Full Council considered the petition and made any recommendations it felt appropriate as a response to the petition. A letter to be sent to the Secretary of State from the Leader, Leader of the Opposite and from Councillor Neil Speight requesting to hold a public inquiry.

116. Progress on Thurrock Council's Improvement and Recovery

The report presented provided Members with a progress update on the work to date to deliver the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan. This was the second report following Members' agreement to receive quarterly updates and allowed for scrutiny and constructive challenge to the delivery of the Plan and Council's recovery overall.

The following points were made:

- The report was welcomed and that all members were given the opportunity to have a say on the progress being made.
- The report needed to include and be recognised what was taking place in the wider Thurrock, more of an outward look.
- The majority of officers and staff who worked for the authority were recognised for the fantastic job they had undertaken.
- Recognised that progress had been made but also acknowledged the council was still at the beginning of the journey to recovery.
- Stated that the journey of recovery and the budget setting had stalled.
- To enable the setting of the budgets, conversations should need to take place with Government.
- The report lacked data to support the findings.
- On page 46/47 of the agenda, aspect of the plans to include what the risk was and the current RAG status.
- Would be beneficial for this information to be made available on the web site for residents to view what progress had been made.
- The report did not highlight any tangible progress.
- Highlighted inaccuracies within the report and questioned how many more were there.
- Concern was raised at the pace of the recovery.
- Following the advice of the Best Value Inspection report, the council still needed to question itself on how it went about its business and get better at what it did.
- The Leader and his cabinet, the chief executive and the senior leadership team were praised on the considerable progress that had been made.
- There needed to be more focus on the set of issues that resulted in the need for an investment strategy in the first place.
- This was an opportunity for Thurrock Council to advocate, not only on internal specific problems, but on how the council had dealt with the root causes of how the council had got into these circumstances.
- There was a need to look at legislative change to how local government was structured.
- Recognised the new recruitment of senior officers meant new talent was coming into the council which in turn would make a difference going forward.
- There was not a long-term plan in place, not just for Thurrock but for all local authorities and that the Government needed to look at local government funding in its entirety.

RESOLVED

That Full Council noted and commented the progress made on the Council's improvement and recovery.

117. Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places / Polling Stations 2023/2024

The report presented set out the consultation regarding the polling districts and polling places and the recommendations of the Returning Officer in respect of the responses received. The report requested Council to consider and approve the recommendations of the Returning Officer and Chief Executive.

The Leader proposed the following three amendments:

- South Chafford, North – Polling District AL
The amendment is to retain the polling place within polling district AL, with the Returning Officer to provide a temporary structure and associated facilities at either of the following locations (A) Sainsbury car park or (B) Bannatyne Health Spa
- The Homesteads, Balstonia - Polling District AW
The amendment is for No Change to Polling District AW. Retain the temporary structure within polling district AW, at Balstonia Recreation ground.
- Grays Riverside – Polling District W
The amendment is to for No Change to Polling District W. Retain the use of the Town Hall as the polling place.

There were no member comments.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the changes tabled on Page 3 of Appendix 2 were approved including those amendments proposed by the leader.**
- 2. That the existing arrangements for polling places also set out in Appendix 2 were confirmed, excluding those amendments proposed by the leader.**

118. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the chamber of the questions received to the Leader and to cabinet members and committee chairs:

From	To	Subject
Councillor Redsell	Leader	Changes to bin collections.
Councillor J Maney	Leader	Success of the collection of Christmas trees.
Councillor Speight	Leader	Current working facilities and conditions of CO1 building.
Councillor Fish	Leader	Improve access to CO3 for disabled people.
Councillor Morris-Cook	Leader	Confirm all available funding from Government had been applied for.
Councillor J Kent	Leader	Progress on Greater Essex Devolution.
Councillor J Kent	Leader	Timescale for implementing recommendations of PAS review.
Councillor Panjala	Leader	Overall strategy to tackle crimes in the Thurrock region.
Councillor Morris-Cook	Leader	Roundabout sponsorship programme.
Councillor Byrne	Councillor Snell	Requested the portfolio holder shared all the paid for recommendations from PwC.
Councillor P Arnold	Councillor B Maney	Future of the Ferry Service between Gravesend and Tilbury.
Councillor Speight	Councillor Johnson	Progress made on decant of the three Blackshots tower blocks.
Councillor Polley	Councillor B Maney	Importance of delivering the Local Plan for people of Thurrock.
Councillor Polley	Councillor Coxshall	Integrated Medical Centres.
Councillor Byrne	Councillor Snell	Justification of spending on advertising Totem.

At 9.01pm, Councillor Rigby left the meeting.

At 9.27pm, following a point of order from Councillor J Kent, the Mayor agreed to extend the meeting to close of business.

119. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

Councillor Speight spoke on behalf of the East Thurrock Community Association by thanking officers for the work they had undertaken to move a matter forward. The club was situated in a council building which was now up for sale. He stated this was a successful community organisation being run in Thurrock, being run by a committed group of people who had put their own money and time into the building. He asked the council and the senior leadership of the council when making the decisions on the future of the building was that they took the humanity of the community into account.

120. Minutes of Committees

The minutes of committees as set out in the agenda were received.

Councillor Carter raised a concern on the minutes recorded at the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 16 November 2023. The Mayor stated those comments had been noted and would be dealt with at the next Children's Services committee.

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

Members received an information report updating the progress in respect of motions received at Council.

122. Motion submitted by Councillor Speight

The Motion, as printed in the agenda was proposed by Councillor Speight and seconded by Councillor Byrne. The Motion read as follows:

"This council acknowledges the tremendous contributions to community and sport by Margaret Whitbread and Fatima Whitbread and in doing so puts in motion the relevant process to offer both the freedom of the borough of Thurrock."

Members of the chamber agreed the Freedom of the Borough was well deserved for Margaret Whitbread and Fatima Whitbread for the inspirational work and for their life achievements. Members agreed this was a testament to the work they had undertaken within the borough.

Councillor Speight summed up stating it was an honour to put this motion forward this evening and thanked Members for their kind words. The recognition was long overdue and encouraged all members to support.

The Mayor called a vote on the motion, to which members voted unanimously in favour. The Mayor announced the motion carried.

A full recording of this meeting can be viewed from the following link:

[Council - Wednesday 31 January 2024, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

The meeting finished at 10.15 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**