

Minutes of the Meeting of the Extraordinary Cabinet held on 18 March 2024 at 6.00 pm

The deadline for call-ins is Thursday 28 March 2024 at 5pm.

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

Apologies: Councillor Barry Johnson

In attendance: Dr Dave Smith, Chief Executive and Managing Director
Commissioner
Andrew Brittain, Head of Revenue Services
Claire Demmel, Executive Director Place
Daniel Fenwick, Executive Director Corporate
Services/Monitoring Officer
Rob Large
Alix MacFarlane, Communications Advisor - Intervention and Improvement, Interim Director
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.

288. Items of Urgent Business

The chair agreed to one urgent item of business.

A report titled "St. Chads Property Asset Disposal, Thurrock Regeneration Limited (TRL) and Thurrock Regeneration Home Limited (TRHL)" was presented to members by Councillor Jefferies. The report asked for Cabinet to note the urgent decision taken by the Commissioners on Thursday 14 March 2024 where they approved the release of a legal charge in respect of the St. Chads property and TRL and TRHL in order to facilitate the exchange of contracts in respect of the sale of this asset. The sale figure was £25.5 million with the write off approximately £3.9 million. The decision was urgent because it enabled the capital receipt to fall within the 2023/24 financial year and avoid cost disadvantages in respect of MRP and interest calculations. Negotiations were on-going to point of exchange and there was insufficient time to seek Cabinet approval for this decision. Councillor Snell agreed to the report and reiterated this had to be done this year as it would have had a negative impact on MRP for the following years.

RESOLVED

Cabinet noted the urgent decision taken by the Commissioners on 14 March 2024 to allow the release of the legal charge on the St Chads property asset to facilitate the sale

289. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

290. Statements by the Leader

The Leader expressed his condolences to the sad passing of Basildon Mayor, Councillor Luke Mackenzie. The Leader and the Mayor had issued a statement offering their condolences, with the council's flag flown at half-mast over the weekend as respect of this sad loss.

291. Briefings on Policy, Budget and Other Issues

Councillor Coxshall briefed members that work had begun on the site for the new Community Diagnostic Centre in Thurrock with the first services being available from December. Further plans for Phase 2 would start from spring 2025.

292. Petitions submitted by Members of the Public

There were no petitions submitted by members of the public.

293. Questions from Non-Executive Members

There were no questions from Non-Executive Members.

294. 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.

295. Divestment Programme Professional Fees (Decision: 110720)

Councillor Snell presented the report that set out the Council's contractual arrangements with its advisors, professional fees to date and an estimate of future costs to deliver the Divestment Strategy and support the administration processes. The report did not seek to provide a comprehensive update on the status of the divestment programme, ongoing investigations and litigation, although some commentary was included to provide context to current and future estimates for professional fees to deliver the Divestment Strategy. Councillor Jefferies endorsed the comments made by Councillor Snell and stated the report had detailed the council's lack the expertise, experience and capacity to undertake this and was therefore pursuing the best advice from experts.

RESOLVED, Cabinet

- 1. Approved the extension of advisor contracts for those professional advisors as stated in this paper to provide continuity of advice to support the final phase of the Divestment Strategy and agrees that these are met from the Transformation Reserve.**
- 2. Noted the Council's direct professional fees incurred to date and future cost estimates to implement its Divestment Strategy including potential litigation proceedings.**
- 3. Endorsed the third-party administration costs associated with two companies within the Council's investment portfolio that have been placed into administration (Toucan and JLG/JCF) and the arrangements that are in place to review and challenge these costs.**
- 4. Noted that a separate paper on the sale of the Toucan assets will be provided to Cabinet following sale completion and resolution of a number of outstanding matters associated with the transaction/sale.**
- 5. Noted the programme management arrangements in place to provide oversight of the Divestment Strategy, including the administrations and the criteria used to consider litigation proceedings.**
- 6. Updated Council on the above decisions in appropriate feedback sessions.**

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report.

This decision is subject to call-in.

296. Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Review actions (Decision: 110721)

Councillor Jefferies presented the report that in October and November 2023, the Local Government Association's (LGA) Planning Advisory Service (PAS) undertook a Peer Review of the Council's Planning Service. Their report on the review was published by the Council in January 2024. PAS was an LGA programme funded primarily by a grant from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The principal mission was to ensure that local planning authorities were continuously improving in their execution and delivery of planning services. The aims of the review were developed following initial conversations and correspondence with Thurrock Council as well as consideration of background documents. The report sought cabinet to commit to implement each of the recommendations within the report and to agree a draft action plan for their implementation. Councillor Coxshall endorsed the report, with the action plan showing a good direction of travel. Councillor Jefferies stated that some of the changes made were already having a positive impact and it was important the right resources were in place in the Planning Department to allow the Planning Committee to be able to make decisions.

RESOLVED

- 1. That Cabinet noted the recommendations from the LGA Planning Advisory Service Peer Review of the planning service; committed to implement them and delegated authority to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Leader of the Council to take actions necessary to develop and assess options for implementation and to approve and implement the chosen options.**
- 2. That Cabinet approved the draft action plan for implementation of the recommendations in the LGA Planning Advisory Service Peer Review of the planning service, set out in Appendix 1 of this report, and asked that updates on the implementation are provided to Place Overview & Scrutiny and Cabinet quarterly.**

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report.

This decision is subject to call-in.

297. Procurement of Voice Automation system and Strategic Partner/CRM: Contact Management System (Decision: 110722)

Councillor D Arnold presented the report that stated the Contact Management Operating Model full business case was approved at Cabinet on 21 February 2024 as part of the report on 2024/25 savings. The benefits detailed in the business case were significant and to be achieved, required the implementation of multiple new systems/software solutions (namely, enhanced voice automation technology to interface with our current telephony systems, and an at-scale Customer Relationship Management system implementation). To deliver these new technologies, the Council had to undertake a comprehensive procurement exercise for each system/ implementation partner. This paper sought delegated authority to undertake those procurement exercises and award the contracts, in a manner appropriate to the elements being procured and to our obligations and requirements as a public authority. Councillor Arnold stated she would like social value added into the procurement contract which should be linked to the council's priorities within the communities. Councillor Carter welcomed the report and the streamlining of the process for residents.

RESOLVED

- 1. Approved the commencement of the best value procurement of Voice Automation software using the GCloud-13 Framework.**
- 2. Approved delegation to the Executive Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Portfolio holder to award the Voice Automation contract up to (and not above) the value specified in the business case, articulated in appendix 1 tables 1-3 (figures are exempt from publication as they are commercially sensitive).**

3. **Approved the commencement of the procurement of an Implementation Partner to supply and implement a CRM system using best value procurement and contract value protocols.**
4. **Approved delegation to the Executive Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Portfolio Holder to award the CRM/Implementation Partner contract(s), up to (and not above) the values specified in the business case, articulated in appendix 1, tables 1-3 (these figures are exempt from publication as they are commercially sensitive).**

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report.

This decision is subject to call-in.

298. Council Tax - 'Second Homes Premium' (Decision: 110723)

Councillor Snell presented the report that was a follow up to the Council Tax Premium report that was considered previously by Council on the 28 February 2024. The Leader agreed the paper would give the council options later in the year before it came into force.

RESOLVED

1. **That Cabinet recommend Council approve the introduction of a 100% council tax premium (in addition to normal council tax) on properties classed as Second Homes from 1 April 2025.**
2. **That Cabinet ask Council to note that in approving 1.1, that Council retain the option to amend or revoke the decision before it comes into force on 1 April 2025.**
3. **In line with 1.2, that Cabinet recommend to Council that if 1.1 was approved, the decision would be returned to Council for review, within budget setting reports for 2025/26.**

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report.

This decision is subject to call-in.

The Leader thanked the Council's Press Officer, Alix MacFarlane, for all her hard work over the last 12 months in the communications department. This would be Alix's last cabinet meeting before leaving the council and wished her well in her new endeavours.

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

[Cabinet - Monday 18 March 2024, 6:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

The meeting finished at 6.22 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**