

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 27 June 2018

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

3 questions were submitted from members of the public.

1. **From Mr Atkins to Councillor Johnson:**

I understand as part of the Council's housing allocation process Thurrock Council uses NowMedical to assess tenants who may have an extra medical need. Can you let me know how this private contractor can override professional medical consultants and GPs reports who may see their patients on a more frequent basis?

Mayor:

Councillor Johnson can you please respond?

Councillor Johnson:

Thank you Mr Atkins. NowMedical were appointed in 2005 to this Council as an independent expert to provide specific medical advice on a case by case basis, to enable the council to continue with a robust fair and standardised assessment method, for households where the applicant or a member of the household has a medical need and maybe helped with alternative accommodation. The medical and healthcare teams used by NowMedical are all registered professional, and their advice to the council will consider all relevant information provided by the applicant and their medical healthcare professionals. NowMedical do not override any advice received from another medical or healthcare professional and they will base their recommendations on the on their assessment of the applicants housing needs only. To ensure the continued robustness the council will periodically review all arrangements it has with service suppliers including NowMedical, and regularly test the market to ensure Thurrock residents get value for money from these provided services. And as announce by myself at cabinet earlier this month, the council will be undertaking a wider review of the allocations process. And the procurement and application of independent medical advice will be included in this.

Mayor:

Thank you Councillor Johnson. Mr Atkins, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Atkins:

Thank you Madam Mayor, Thank you Councillor Johnson. Follow up questions is, I'll be careful how I word this. Can you tell me how much does Thurrock Council pay NowMedical for their expert opinions?

Mayor:

Councillor Johnson would you like to respond?

Councillor Johnson:

Yes please Madam Mayor, thank you Mr Atkins. What I can say to you is that over the financial year 2017/18 it was a figure of between 8 and 10 thousand pounds paid to NowMedical. This will obviously fluctuate because we pay for the service, so if there is more service needed obviously we will pay them a different amount. But off the top of my head 8 to ten thousand pound was the amount we paid for 17/18. I hope that answers your question.

Mayor:

Thank you. Good evening Mr Perrin, pleasure to see you as always. Mr Perrin your question has been redirected to Councillor Coxshall as the portfolio holder for Regeneration, can you please read out your question to Councillor Coxshall.

2. **From Mr Perrin to Councillor Coxshall:**

The Leader of the Thurrock Independents Party has recently made public six tests he insists must be met by the Conservative Administration running Thurrock Council regarding the building of 32,000 new homes in Thurrock. In the first of the six tests he says he expects the Council to negotiate with the Government to attempt to reduce the figure substantially. He also says other Councils across the country have already secured massive reductions so far. Councillor Gledhill are you inclined to meet with Councillor Spillman's expectations?

Mayor:

Councillor Coxshall can you please respond, thank you.

Councillor Coxshall:

Thank you Mr Perrin, I will gladly respond to you. There is a requirement the council deliver housing target numbers. Using the methodology that's prescribed by national decisions. What that means actually is that they have got to number, and we have got to have a sensible discussion about the number which is coming forward in the next few weeks based on the national numbers. But with the other instances that you say, the only reasons, the reasons why they reduced the number was because the developable land was not available. Here that is not the case. But what I must move on though, is if we do actually have decide arbitrary, and the 49 of us after the negotiations and after the consultations actually physically to reduce that number for no arbitrary reason without any proof, we would be at serious risk of an interventionist body and the future of this borough and its homes would be put at a clearly tenable position because someone else would be running this and not us 49 Councillors.

Mayor:

Thank you Councillor Coxshall. Mr Perrin, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Perrin:

I take it that the Council believes there is a demand for 32,00 new homes in Thurrock, indeed Thurrock's MP is on record supporting the building of more houses not less. The attitude of the Thurrock Independents has a touch of the

“I’m all right Jackie” about it. It is all very well for the Leader of the Thurrock of the Thurrock Independent Party, Cold Hand Luke, to advocate a reduction when, probably, he and his fellow party members are already owners of their own homes, or well on the way to paying off a mortgage, indeed some of them may even have a vested interest in their opposition in that they are landlords renting out properties of their own. Councillor Coxshall will you assure the Deputy Leader of the Thurrock Independents Party that if there is a demand for building more new homes in Thurrock the Council will do so?

Mayor:

Thank you. Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall:

I think I concur with everything there. What I would say is if we want to deliver a third good quality low cost houses to rent and buy, at a reasonable for the people, the children’s future, my child’s future is 18 now, then we have got to build a third, I say a third I’m not going to decide the number but say a third is a good number to get to, that means there’s 10,000 homes we can build that are actually to rent or to sell that are below the market value. And then the others will actually reduce the cost of this housing. We cannot go on, it’s an untenable position where we have, not enough housing and people are going with house price inflation going up, rents are going through the roof in Thurrock. We’ve got to build that, otherwise people will be living at home when they are 40 and not able to in their 30s, 20s get a home. And that is exactly what we should be doing here. And we are negating our responsibilities all 49 of us if we do anything different on that. What I can be clear, let’s be clear that the problem Thurrock here is poor and expensive housing, for too long. And I’m not going to put that responsibility or put that on the next generation. What I have done in place in the short term to the gallery, each week in week out, dog whistle politics and I’m not going to do that.

3. **From Mr Healy to Councillor Halden:**

There has been much disquiet in the local media recently over the proposed transfer of council land currently leased by Thurrock rugby club to South west Essex community education trust for a much needed secondary school. When and with whom at Thurrock rugby club did Thurrock Council consult on this matter please?

Mayor:

Councillor Halden, would you like to respond please?

Councillor Halden:

Thank you Madam Mayor. Firstly may I say what a pleasure it is to see former Councillor Healey again. It’s always nice to see that after you have retired you decide to come back and spend time with us, and the fact that I am the cause of that is a great pleasure for me.

There have been informal conversations between the Chief Executive Officer of the Education Trust and with the Chairman of the Rugby Club where they have been working on what the future can look like together. In terms of what

the council have done by approving the cabinet paper that we took earlier this month we are now beginning the consultation with the public which includes the Rugby Club on the disposal of the land. Those consultation responses will then be analysed and a decision is made. And then if a decision is made in that direction there will be further consultations with the public at large when it comes to the planning process. So there is a formal two stage consultation procedure that can happen now. But what I would say is that not only am I very optimistic and hopeful about the future, because we are not talking about a fly by night academy trust we are talking about William Edwards with long established roots in our community, outstanding rated by OFSTED a specialist sports college, I believe they will be able to create a terrific future working with the Thurrock Rugby Club. I think this is an incredibly positive piece of work and I am optimistic about what we can get out of it going forward, both for the school for local students for the local community and sports people.

Mayor:

Thank you Councillor Halden. Mr Healy, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Healy:

Thank you Councillor Halden, I think actually there might be some learnings from this as Councillor Hebb would say. In terms of the committee, probably as a sitting tenant we discovered from Thurrock Independent, you know who have been keeping their beady eyes on the political scene here, that this was happening. We had no, I think you've obviously now said it, there has been no direct contact between the Council and the Committee. I will remind members, and there is a question Madam Mayor sorry, I will remind members of the council that we have leased this land since in the mid-1970s, we have about 300 youths active in the youth teams at the minute. They're the lifeblood of our organisations. We have many adult teams, and we are shocked as an organisation when this happened. There are a lot of very big men at the club that are probably very angry at the minute that this has happened. But I don't think the met are too bad, I think there are some women as well that are a whole lot better at rugby anyway up there. But the question is, what we do need now, the question Madam Mayor is no point having these informal conversations. This is a business event the South West Education Trust is a Business. Its, you know, public benefit. We are a community interest organisation, we have a wide reach in this community. We want to formally get a binding agreement whatever the outcome here, and I even looked at the Thurrock Independent.

Mayor:

Thank you. Councillor Halden

Councillor Halden:

Thank you Madam Mayor, flashback to the length of questions of the length of questions from the period 2010-2014, threats of big angry men aside. I think what I would point out is, you say you want a formal proper conversation that is what we have enabled by taking forward the Cabinet paper indicating the

council wishes to dispose of the land. That has kicked off a formal conversation, and in terms of precisely what community access will look like, these are issues that the Planning Committee can actually adjudicate and actually vote on and actually make binding through the planning process. So actually by taking these steps forward, we are actually enabling those formal conversations that you want to have.

I'm not going to get drawn onto the specifics of what the relationship should look like. The council has got a statutory obligation to provide school places. It is not our role to attempt run a rugby club. I am relaxed that the dialogue between an outstanding sports college and between the rugby club is something that is going to yield incredibly positive results. And we can't take our eyes off the ball for what it is we are trying to achieve here. Circa 20million pounds worth of investment creating 1200 outstanding school places to serve the local population, and to enhance the sports offer. This is a massive opportunity because former councillor Healy will know that the plan for the Harris Riverside free school in Purfleet, that was an announced plan when he was still an elected member here and the school is still not built. It took myself and Councillor Coxshall intervening to ensure it would be built. So we cannot allow the delays, we cannot dither around, formal conversations will now happen with the club and the community but we are getting on with this fantastic good news story and I am optimistic about what it's going to do for the community for the students and for sportspeople in the area.

Item 14 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 4 questions had been received to the Leader of the Council and 8 questions had been received to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee had been received.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

1. From Councillor Cherry to Councillor Hebb:

What are you and Thurrock Council going to do about the increase in drug use, gang activity and associated anti-social behaviour in Grays Town Park and elsewhere across Thurrock?

Mayor:

Councillor Hebb

Councillor Hebb:

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Cherry, an important question that absolutely needs to be discussed. We are going to talk a bit later about the wider Anti-Social Behaviour role that Councillor Gledhill has taken, but I'm going to take you through some of the stuff that we've talked about. Now we know that ASB and gang related problems and a degree of some drug taking issues. They are not just happening in Grays as you have said Councillor Cherry, they are also happening elsewhere across the borough, and we will talk a little bit about that now. The Leader informed me that a recent meeting with the Superintendent Craig Saunders that there are reassurances from Essex Police, because we must remember that it is Essex Police which are the principle enforcement authority. Our role is to very much engage and mobilise and direct them to the right places. Also do what we can in our own span of control as well, and I will come on to that shortly. There is some work going on that's going to get coordinated activity, certainly around Grays Town Park, Certainly around Grays. You'll understand that I don't want to say too much more because I'm not going to let any cats out of the bag. But obviously were anticipating the effectiveness of that.

One thing police have stressed to us in dialogues with the police an interesting enough at the weekend when I was having a discussion with a couple of the police officers in Stanford le Hope the subject are around data and intelligence, or indeed the degree of a lack of it is also part of the problem. So the police are encouraging resident's councillors you know community groups, or whoever's involved to report, whether it be through the councils reporting system of Essex polices reporting system to report into them. So they can build up the data. Because the more data they have the bigger the picture they have. And the bigger picture they have the more they can do about it. And there are a whole suite of ways you can do that. The one thing I would always say for myself and Councillor Halden recently discussing the success of the Youth Offending Service, which is something you know, one of the best in England. Councillor Halden, its something that council and everyone on it it, all 49 of us, need to be very proud of. And we need to

understand how much further the scope of that can go. Because often things like gang issues and drug taking can start at a young onset age, and it is critical that we look at that James. And I know James has already asked for that to happen. So we can build up a bigger scope our youth offending service can have. The community safety partnership clearly has a very big role in this. They are also looking to extend the current Public Spaces Protection Order, so as to not just include the Grays Town Centre, but also further out to Grays Park. There's also joint tasking operations. There is a number of other initiatives going on. One called gangs line. Obviously crucial to stuff that's happening in the schools. That's all to get into the education system where young people are coming through when there emerging, when they are potentially exposed to some of the things that we have talked about today. There is a lot more to do. I dare say you have a few suggestions for me. But hopefully that gives you a flavour on behalf of the leader as to what the current plan is around Anti-Social Behaviour.

Mayor:

Councillor Cherry do you have a supplementary question?

Councillor Cherry:

Yes I do thank you madam mayor. So I brought this, I received this complaint with regards to the park from council employees who for ages have been feeding this information back into the council about the things they were seeing in the park when they were sometimes in there cleaning up. Now I visited it last full council, a month ago, to see for myself, and, I saw 15 to 20 youths openly smoking drugs. There were people dealing cannabis in front of me, beer cans around, drug paraphernalia, rubbish everywhere. I informed Councillor Gledhill of that last month, I want to know what the councillor has done in that last month because I have walked through there again this evening, the place is filthy, there's beer cans littering everywhere, it is a PSPO and it's the totally wrong atmosphere for what is our premier park. You know, it's used by children and their parents alike. And the place is an absolute, and I won't swear, it begins with S and ends in hole. What have you done in this last month to solve this problem, which needs to be designed out. If it's filthy, if it's more of an attraction to the youth that were hanging around there, they will take command of that park, they will take it from us. So what have you done in the last month to deal with it, because the PSPO notices have been vandalised, the place is a mess. Thank you.

Mayor:

Councillor Hebb do you wish to respond?

Councillor Hebb:

I absolutely shall. I've been slightly disingenuous and taken the leaders credit because obviously the leader has done most of the work. As I was saying already the discussions with the Superintendent and the campaigns that are emerging are specifically aimed to target that.

You asked what the council have been doing and it's a very good question. You'll know at a recent Cabinet meeting last year we announced £250.000 into our anti-social behaviour campaign fund, the Stop It campaign fund. We will talk a little about

that later. We have also announced up to £750K extra into that fund, so as to deliver a key Stop It campaign. Public Space Protection Orders absolutely are a critical role. We do need to widen it out, we do need to encapsulate the all the areas where there are problems. Furthermore we have all been vocal at one time or another, any member in and out of this chamber now have all called for more policing, and that is what our Police Commissioner has given us. When we get 12 new police officers here in September this year, I think it's around September when they are fully recruited trained and on the beat. They are the people that are going to be able to help us with this problem. You are right, what are the Council doing, I absolutely agree with you. This is one of those things where we have to make sure we have that partnership working because the police are the principle enforcement authority. Let me assure you we are at the table because we see this problem everywhere. It's not just Grays Town Park, and while I say it's out Lynch Pin Park, as a Sanford-Le-Hope ward councillor I don't know if I can totally agree with that. But we do have this problem everywhere, and that is where we are with it.

Mayor:

Councillor Cherry do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Cherry:

I agree the problems everywhere. But I must say that I was absolutely disgusted on that evening what I saw. And how they get away with it, I don't know. What I've said before is, what are the Council doing about it, what have you done about it, because I walked through there this evening and the place is a mess. You've done nothing in that last month I would tend to suggest. You've done a lot of talking, a lot of hot air, a lot of excuses. What we need is that park cleaned up, tidied up and owned by the Council. Owned by the people of Thurrock, and not owned by the drug dealing gangs that are associating there. Thank you.

Mayor

Do you wish to respond Councillor Hebb?

Councillor Hebb:

Well of course I do, because it's nonsense to suggest that we disagree. On this matter. We absolutely agree on nearly everything you just said. Nobody wants a park where it's owned by gangs or people that are taking drugs. I mean good lord I'm a father to a 7 year old, I don't want to go to Hardy Park, Ruskin Park, Runnymede park and have those discussions with her. No way. And we will all be the same, there's parents here and out there and we all want to make sure those parks are free and available to everyone. Councillor Watkins I can see has made some notes, I'm sure we will be looking at the cleanliness of that. We have to get to a point where enforcement matters and enforcement are happening. Those are the plans we have set out, you can call it hot air, we are calling it deliver. It will deliver. It hasn't got the results that we want yet. It will do. But I look forward to working with you in the coming months, and I'm sure the leader will as well by extension through his portfolio. We want this dealt with, absolutely. You and I are of no different mind. You've got that undertaking, keep challenging us, but let's talk out of here as well. Thank you Madam Mayor.

Mayor:

Councillors, we have had one question in eight and a half minutes. There is 11 questions on here tonight. May I suggest, as I've already done so this evening that we have succinct replies to specific questions. So that as many people can have their questions answered in this council chamber, because after 30minutes the questioning will cease. So can I please move on now to question 2. Councillor Fletcher please read out your question to Councillor Hebb.

2. From Councillor Fletcher to Councillor Gledhill

Our borough has recently seen frequent and sustained incursions by travellers on our open spaces. Redbridge has just successfully applied for a borough-wide injunction - is there any reason why Thurrock has not taken the same approach?

A WRITTEN RESPONSE WILL BE PROVIDED.

3. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

Can the Leader outline his priorities for his new portfolio?

Councillor Hebb

In my head when I said that I knew it didn't sound as weird, but it does now. Councillor Gerrish, thank you for rising what is clearly an important point. You don't have to knock on doors at election time to know this is a problem, we all live here we all know what the problem is. I am trying to be concise madam mayor. Councillor Gledhill's new ASB role is absolutely one of two hats. Its part going on what I was saying to Councillor Cherry earlier. Thurrock absolutely has a role at the table on the street doing something. And that is encapsulated in what is going to be called out stop it campaign. I will come onto that in a moment. But there is absolute necessity for that partnership working. If you look at Councillor Halden's role, who you know, Councillor Halden doesn't manage the NHS, he doesn't manage the Schools as such, but he has that absolute bond and partnership working, where we've gone from single digits of good rates schools to double digits in the 90s. This is where we've got to get to. You asked about the specific plans in Thurrock. We just talked about the cash value we are going to be injecting into the system. We are going to be increasing up to 1 million by the end of this financial year to enforce a number of things. But the point I want to specifically make now is around our enforcement team. We have to increase the capacity and operating hours of the enforcement team. I don't think anyone would disagree with that. The Monday to Friday 8-8 it whatever it currently is useless to man and beast, so I think it's appropriate to look to go to an out of hours operation. That's absolutely got to happen. We've talked about the youth offending service and that's absolutely part of the puzzle and we've got that synergy there. Councillor Gledhill has got a very specific focus on what some people see as minor, when they are looking at it from afar. But to them it means a lot. Things like graffiti, littering, vehicle racing, anti-social behavior and dog fouling. Some of his other priorities include tackling pollution in terms of noise and dust, preventing consumers from awful practices where they are being short changed through scams. Protecting individuals through adequate licensing, protecting people in food premises in terms of quality of food and so forth. One thing I would say is that the key collaboration that's critical is that

work and engagement with the safety partnership. We've got that investment going in. I've talked to you about one for the schemes that we will be going after during the bolstering of the enforcement team will add to a wide scope of activity in terms of enforcing. We are looking at the conversation around licensing and so forth. Hopefully that gives you a bit of a flavor but I dare say you have a few more questions for me.

Mayor:

Councillor Gerrish do you have a supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish:

Thank you madam mayor yes I do. I think, we would all acknowledge that with any addition work to be done it's important to understand the impact of that work and the impact of any additional budget. What new KPI's were considering to set or have set so residents will be able to judge whether or not we have been successful.

Councillor Hebb:

Good question Councillor Gerrish. As you know when we entered into administration we did a full deck review of the KPIs, it is something we seek to do on an annual basis. And it is a conversation we are about to have about the corporate KPIs internally as a Cabinet so we will be looking at that. I think what would be appropriate is actually if we get a bit of engagement, I'm not quite sure who the shadows are anymore across both parties, but we would like you to be involved with that potentially.

Mayor:

Councillor Gerrish a second supplementary quest?

Councillor Gerrish:

Thank you Madam Mayor. One thing that Councillor Gledhill said at his new cabinet meeting that he was not the new Sherif in town, I wonder if the deputy leader would agree with me that to some extent actually he does need to take on that very visible and high profile role of passing our concerns about law and order and crime in Thurrock to the police and making sure that he does act as a champion to draw the attention of the police to those issues

Councillor Hebb:

For me it's a dual pronged role, one is leading from the front doing what's in our span of control. I've talked a little bit about the up to 1 million the enforced enhancement team, youth offender service, the police coming- the 12 of them by September. They are things that have happened through either from lobbying or direct action by this council which have obviously secure and achieved that. There is partnership working, were not going to walk away from that, however we are going to imagine the portfolio. We have to have that partnership working. The police are the principle enforcement authority. We want to have more police unfortunately back in 2011 when we passed our alternative budget about having PCSOs and unfortunately that was never fulfilled by the previous administration. Perhaps we would be slightly better off with people on the streets in terms of police. But we are where we are, the

Conservatives are delivering, not just in this chamber but in Essex County Hall with our Police and Fire Commissioner who is bringing 12 more policemen to the streets of this borough and that is through the connections made by the leader of this council and its party here in Thurrock.

Mayor:

Thank you very much, moving on to question 4, Councillor Redsell can you please read out your question.

4. From Councillor Redsell to Councillor Gledhill

In the light of recent traveller incursions on Blackshots playing field, which you will be aware is a major civic site. Would the portfolio holder advise what action the council proposes in order to deter further encampments?

Councillor Hebb:

Thank you Madam Mayor. There are a number of actions and most specifically, and I think this is what you are looking for Councillor Redsell, is there is going to be a degree of hardening and bollards put around the particular site that you refer to. We have seen that used very effectively in the rest of the borough, so that's coming. You will have seen the discussion around the Borough Wide injunction which the council was asked to begin preparations for last year. This "harlowesque" model if we want to call it that will give us genuine ability to enforce and manage that at a far more rapid speed of execution than historically. There is things coming and they are coming in the next couple of weeks.

Councillor Redsell:

The Injunction will hopefully be put in place which is already running in Bexhill and Harlow. Does he think that this will now deter Travellers from parking on fields and causing residents and surrounding areas mayhem that they have caused in the last five to six weeks.

Councillor Hebb:

I won't lie, I haven't knocked on the door and asked if they think it will deter them but I can assure you that our council and our council departments ie. legal and enforcement team and I think there is probably a wide ranging support for a similar action will have a significant impact. We've done 10 section 61 notices in 2 years, and that has been an important tool. In SLH West I can say when there was an incursion, by the time that the notice was served at 10 at night, by 9 am the next morning they had all been moved on. The problem obviously is migration to another location, so what's Stanford Wests gain is unfortunately might be somewhere else to suffer. The borough wide injunction is the right thing for Thurrock. I think there is probably significant public endorsement for the powers that it will enable us to levy and again that collaboration between the police and council will be absolutely critical Madam Mayor.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO CABINET MEMBERS, COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND MEMBERS APPOINTED TO REPRESENT THE COUNCIL ON A JOINT COMMITTEE

1. From Councillor Pothecary to Councillor Watkins:

Thank you Madam Mayor, could the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the proposed changes to Grays Town Centre traffic flow?

Mayor:

Councillor Watkins please.

Councillor Watkins:

Thank you Madam Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. Work has been carried out this year, which is on the modelling work, and traffic work, and data that has already been accumulated for that. There is more work to be done this year. There will be a report coming to Planning, Transport and Regeneration Committee in September for all the members to have a look over, so please have a read over. I think fundamentally and most importantly, now I've obviously got this department, from the former Councillor Brian Little. Obviously there have been a lot of talk I believe, changes from before I was even a Councillor. I've heard it's been many, many years. I think it's about time we actually got something done on the ground, talk is cheap and actually actions mean more than words, so let's get something done.

Mayor:

Councillor Pothecary, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Pothecary:

Yes, thank you Madam Mayor. I think Cllr Watkins may have had a bit of an idea of where I was going with this. So you talked about some delay, this is something we signed off as Cabinet in September 2015 with the funding allocated, the growth they'd put in. We won that and the first phase was put into the Works Programme and was completed. Since this administration has come to power, unfortunately nothing has happened. In July 2017 the Portfolio Holder told me that Phase 1 was complete, it wasn't, and it still isn't. The Portfolio Holder also said on that occasion that Phase 2A would be implemented in November 2017, not a sausage. I was assured this was a top priority and the Portfolio Holder said we were looking at a quick implementation, and I quote "not in two to three years' time". We're getting to that point now. In January 2018 he stated that over the next few months this will move into the final phase. We're now at the end of June and still nothing has happened. Can the new Portfolio Holder please explain why these plans, which were signed off by Cabinet in 2015 with funding in place, aren't even remotely anywhere near finished?

Mayor:

Councillor Watkins

Councillor Watkins:

Thank you Madam Mayor, thank you Councillor for your supplementary. Obviously I can't speak about the conversations and what former Councillor Brian Little has said

in this Chamber, and obviously to yourself as well. All I can say is what I'm going to be going forward with this. As already stated, work has already been carried out this year behind the scenes. That work will be coming forward to Planning, Transport and Regeneration, as well as the work which continues to go on. I've already stated in my first response that, you know, talk is cheap, and I don't just want to stand here and waffle on about what may have happened in the past, you know. It's about time we actually got something done about it, so let's not talk about what happened in the past, let's talk about getting this done this year, and early next year, and actually get something done about it.

Mayor:

Councillor Potheary, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Potheary:

Yes, thank you Madam Mayor, I'm sure some of your colleagues, Cllr Watkins, would love to take that piece of advice. So, this is my problem. I have received repeated assurances throughout the time of this administration that this project is in hand and implementation is just around the corner, but for two years nothing has happened, literally nothing. Can I have a commitment here and now that firstly the funding is secure, because these things do tend to be time limited and I'd hate for us to have lost that amazing funding bid through inaction. And also, can I have a commitment that the first phase will be fully completed, and Phase 2A implemented by the end of 2018, so that we can end the misery that is Grays one-way system.

Mayor:

Councillor Watkins

Councillor Watkins:

Thank you very much Madam Mayor, thank you Councillor for your questions. Again yes, as I've already stated, the implementations will go ahead. I don't just want to be receiving reports from officers, or from anyone, saying "we've done data, but we need to change what's happened etc." Obviously whatever comes forward, they are experts who do this work, need to ensure that any future models are safe and secure for people who drive through Grays, for people who use Grays, and obviously fundamentally the residents of Grays as well. We do know the traffic levels. But again, I've already said: yes the funding is there, so it can be there. If there's obviously any changes which do need to be made to the implementation of it going forward, then the Council will go back and obviously have these discussions. But the funding is there, and yes the phases will move forward very quickly.

2. From Councillor Duffin to Councillor Holloway

Can you lay out the influence you have as Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to prevent the closure of Orsett Hospital?

This question would be resubmitted for next Council meeting.

3. From Councillor Duffin to Councillor Hebb

While the Council has made some progress in its short term and medium term investments please can you announce how many long term investments of over 5 years the Council has made since you took over the administration?

Councillor Hebb:

Madam Mayor this question did make smile. Never given it would be easy. When we talk about some investment, sorry some progress, I think we need some texture a bit. A child that is born today, will be in nursery before this Council hasn't got the surplus and the balanced budget that this Conservative administration achieved last year. Furthermore, every member of the Council who was elected in May this year, will not have a year where they're going into the next year without a concern of where we're funding next year's services. A four year balanced budget, let's be blunt, is unheard of for any unitary authority, but the investment and approach and strategy has delivered. What does that mean? Translated for people out in Thurrock, it means that the services you use and depend are safe for the next four years.

Mayor:

Councillor Hebb, thank you for being very brief with answering the question. There are many other people that want to ask questions this evening and time is running out.

Councillor Hebb:

So the simple answer, I can get there, is that there has been an investment for a period over five years, which you were all privy too, which was the Belmont Road TRL application. There is going to be a further increase of focus on TRL, we talked about that last year, and also we've done some work around the CCLA which is another route that we've used before. But yes that's where we are, we have taken out investments over five years. Been very successful, under five years as well, but yes we have made progress, what you call some, most of us call much. Thank you Madam Mayor.

Mayor:

Councillor Duffin, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Duffin:

Come on Shane, I stood here last year and said nice things about what you've done and you've let us all down. Since elected you've made passionate speeches about how you want to plan for the long term but so far you're failing to deliver, and the answer you've given us is you've made zero long term investments, outside Thurrock Regeneration Limited. How can you be the party that spends so long banging on about the long term economic plan, when you've got no long term plan. When will we start seeing long term investments, there's other opportunities, in Grays, there's other opportunities. When will you start delivering, we can't have a borough that plans for the long term when you're scared to make long term investments.

Mayor:

Councillor Hebb.

Councillor Hebb:

Madam Mayor, Councillor Duffin, I love Councillor Duffin and he's a brilliant chap. Frankly, Jack hasn't been round long enough to remember what budgets were like once upon a time. When every year we were going into the next year having no...

Mayor:

Can we have an answer to the question.

Councillor Hebb:

The one thing I would say Madam Mayor, on the very specific point, is that there was a Council Review Spending meeting. At Cabinet, Madam Mayor, I gave a firm undertaking that each political party had a place at that table, and where we talked about long term investments, no one turned up apart from the Conservative Party. Madam Mayor, the olive branch is there, get to the table, get in the discussion and you can join us on our long term economic plan.

Mayor:

Councillor Duffin do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Duffin:

You know I was on holiday, and I had my apologies, so it was fair at the meeting. But the point is we all made the agreement in the last Council, we put forward motions. I put forward motions, everyone supported it, to build a long term plan so we can see a reduction in getting rid of Council tax in Thurrock. Everyone supported it and yet now we're seeing no long term investments. You can bang on however you want, when will you get over blaming Gordon Brown and the Labour administration for your own failings. You need to move with the times, so can you just get on with it and by the end of this year bring forward several long term plans because the current NTFS study show once we move past three, four years there's massive £5 million black holes that you can't just hope renew every three years. Let's have a long term strategy, rather than just keep sticking over plasters. Yeah they made mistakes, get over it. You've been in administration, start delivering.

Mayor:

Councillor Hebb, briefly.

Councillor Hebb:

I suggest at least this party has a chance of being able to deliver, Madam Mayor. We've just seen the Thurrock Independents political performance at the last May election. Madam Mayor, the olive branch is there, it remains. The Labour Party and Thurrock Independents will absolutely have a place at that CSR meeting. I want you there, we did that motion. You and I talked about far more than just in that motion. We all have that objective in mind, we did have discussions to talk about. I didn't realise you were on holiday, I put my hands up to that. You could have had a Deputy. There are a lot of capable people.

Mayor:

Councillor, can we please have the answer to the question. It's a question and answer.

Councillor Hebb:

You've got the answer to the question Madam Mayor. Simply, we are at the table and we want everyone to be at that table with us.

Mayor:

Thank you Councillor Hebb. We move onto question 4, Councillor Worrall can you please read out your question.

4. From Councillor Worrall to Councillor Watkins:

Thank you Madam Mayor. Following the recent media coverage on the poor upkeep of the cemeteries could the Portfolio Holder advise us what steps he has taken to put this right and what he intends to do to keep them maintained to the expected standard?

Mayor:

Councillor Watkins

Councillor Watkins:

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor for your question, which I know is something we spoke about, back about a month ago, May Annual Council. Which is why I'm a little bit confused, to a degree, why this question has managed to make it here this evening. When as Chair of Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee, you had the opportunity to ask a question, but that got cancelled. And why it's not in the agenda which has been published for next week's Cleaner, Greener Overview and Scrutiny Committee. If it was so much of an issue, why isn't it being raised where you're the Chair, and you have the ability to ask those questions.

Mayor:

Councillor, could you answer the question please. Would you like to pose a secondary question?

Councillor Worrall:

Well I'd like to ask that question, as I've only got one more so if he answers that question as the first one, please tell me what you've done as part of it, as it's obviously not a lot. I don't want to argue with you about it, I just want you to tell me what you've done to put it straight, and then I'll ask my second question as my third question which I wasn't going to ask.

Mayor:

Councillor Watkins, can you answer the question.

Councillor Watkins:

Thank you Madam Mayor, thank you Councillor for your supplementary. Meetings I've obviously been heavily engaged in, doing the job of the Portfolio Holder over the last six weeks, that's why I can safely say this evening we have received compliments about our cemeteries and our open spaces over the last few weeks. So, quite clearly, obviously the work I'm doing is the work the Portfolio Holder should be doing. Perhaps you need to get off Twitter and start doing your job as Chair.

Mayor:

Please keep to answering the questions and not to be rude across the Chamber. Would you like to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Worrall:

Absolutely Madam Mayor, and I shan't be trading insults with the Councillors. I've got a job to do, and that is we have a duty of care that when somebody dies and goes to our cemeteries, and we go to our cemeteries and we go and visit them, we shouldn't face piles of dirty brown grass, people standing around, and bins full. So I regularly go to the cemetery to visit my own father, and I find that the bins are overflowing. We've got these basket bins that you put two of these memorials in.

Mayor:

Councillor Worrall will you ask your question please.

Councillor Worrall:

I am going to thank you. But I bring mine home, so the questions are, it's got two parts: why are we using bins that once they've got a couple of memorials in them they are full up, and visitors have nowhere to put their flowers, so they have to pile them at the side or take them home. And why do we not have large bins so that residents can simply place plastic and silk flowers in regular bins and then add the compost and plants to the brown bins. This, I'm trying to help you here, this would solve problems to your recycling at target, and there's plenty of areas in these big cemeteries for you to have binned areas. Residents want to help you, and I want to help you, I don't want to trade insults with you.

Councillor Watkins:

Thank you Madam Mayor. I will obviously say that I share your sentiments. I have loved ones, loved ones that have sadly passed, in Corringham cemetery, grandparents and former friends so I obviously share your sentiments in regards to that. We've spoken in the past, over the last few weeks, of some of those isolated incidents where obviously bins were overflowing and we've managed to get that quickly on case. Hence the reason why, you're fully aware as well, we've got the dedicated resources in our larger cemeteries as well, Chadwell and Corringham being those two ones in particular. And obviously the cemeteries over the last few weeks, in particular in the run up to Father's Day, I hope you do share my sentiments that we're back to the standards which we expect it to be. As part of the Clean It, Cut It, Fill It strategy, which I'm very proud that this administration has continued to do. We are instigating some extra work in regards to the standards of which expect our cemeteries to be looking at, as well as the other work that's just kind of continuing the Clean It, Cut It, Fill It. In regards to the bins, absolutely, which is why last year I implemented the bin review, I know people found it the most boring thing in the entire world, but the reason I thought it was important is so it was easier to ensure we had the right bins, in the right places, in the right areas across the borough, including our cemeteries. That is one of the focal points of the bin review looking at what needs to be extra in our cemeteries. So thank you very much, and obviously as the Chair, which I will say, feed in to that review. Reports and updates will be coming back to you and you're more than welcome to feed in to it, so thank you.

Councillor Worrall:

Thank you, it'll be on Scrutiny, don't you worry.

Mayor:

Thank you very much. That brings us to the end of our question time and I hope that in our future meetings our questions are going to be a lot more concise, direct, and our answers the same, that we can get the full range of questions and answers in and do them justice. If I can just run through the questions that are remaining to ask if you'd like a written response, withdraw it or resubmit. Number five Councillor Gerrish.

5. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Coxshall

What preparations has the council made for the potential impact of Brexit?

A WRITTEN RESPONSE WILL BE PROVIDED.

6. From Councillor Spillman to Councillor Johnson

Is the portfolio holder concerned that the cuts to warden services in sheltered accommodation for older people has put the welfare, and indeed lives, of older residents at risk?

A WRITTEN RESPONSE WILL BE PROVIDED.

7. From Councillor Spillman to Councillor Johnson

Have the council cut keep fit services from sheltered accommodation for older people?

A WRITTEN RESPONSE WILL BE PROVIDED.

8. From Councillor Baldwin to Councillor Coxshall

Have the council cut keep fit services from sheltered accommodation for older people?

THIS QUESTION FELL IN THE ABSENCE OF COUNCILLOR BALDWIN