

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 25 October 2017 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Tunde Ojetola (Mayor), John Allen, Clare Baldwin, Russell Cherry, Gary Collins, Mark Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Leslie Gamester, Oliver Gerrish, Robert Gledhill, James Halden, Graham Hamilton, Shane Hebb, Clifford Holloway, Victoria Holloway, Deborah Huelin, Roy Jones, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Steve Liddiard, Brian Little, Susan Little, Sue MacPherson, Ben Maney, Bukky Okunade (*arrived 7.02pm*), Terry Piccolo, Jane Potheary, David Potter, Joycelyn Redsell, Barbara Rice, Gerard Rice, Peter Smith, Graham Snell, Luke Spillman, Pauline Tolson and Aaron Watkins (*arrived 7.58pm*)

Apologies: Councillors Michael Stone (Deputy Mayor), Tim Aker, Chris Baker, James Baker, Jan Baker, Colin Churchman, Garry Hague, Martin Kerin, Sue Sammons, Angela Sheridan and Kevin Wheeler

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Sharon Bayliss, Director of Commercial Services
Sean Clark, Director of Finance & IT
Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Environment and Place
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
David Lawson, Deputy Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer
Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Service
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

The Mayor invited Reverend Canon Darren Barlow to lead those present in Prayer and a one minute's silence was held as a mark of respect to reflect the recent passing away of former Councillor Ken Barrett.

64. Minutes

The Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Council held on the 27 September 2017 were approved as a correct record.

The Minutes of the Meeting of Council held on the 27 September 2017 were approved as a correct record. Councillor Duffin questioned why on Page 71 of Appendix A to the Council Minutes, Question 8, had the Members of the Public been attributed for the disruption rather than Members and asked whether this was an opportunity for the Conservative Members to apologise to the Public.

65. Items of Urgent Business

The Mayor informed the Chamber that he had not agreed to the consideration of any items of urgent business.

66. Declaration of Interests

Councillor C Kent declared a non-pecuniary interest with regard to Motion 1 as she worked in a school in Thurrock.

Councillor Cherry declared a non-pecuniary interest with regard to Motion 2 as he worked for the 101 Police Service.

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

The Mayor invited all those present to reflect on and remember Thurrock's fallen of World War One.

The Mayor invited Members and members of the public to the "Best of Thurrock Variety Night" which would take place on the 16 November that promised to be a good display of the best of Thurrock.

The Mayor thanked the Thurrock artists for beautifying the Mayor's parlour with their work which featured this month the work of Skylark Collective; he thanked the Well House Gallery for the display.

October had been universally marked as Black History Month, an occasion to mark the strength of community in diversity with 2017 marking 30 years of the United Kingdom celebrating the event. The Mayor attended the Black History Month reception at No 10 Downing Street and stated that it had been good to see the Prime Minister, Members of Parliament and Ministers mix with a wide variety of people representing the diversity of the United Kingdom.

Thurrock schools had celebrated the event with a memorable occasion at Thameside Library where parents, teachers and children from all backgrounds celebrated. In a show of cooperation, six schools had worked together in conjunction with Learning Workz to mark the occasion.

Councillor Bukky Okunade would like to invite Members to the "Ankara" event on Friday and for Members to contact her directly for tickets.

That the Thurrock Civic Awards 2018 was now open for nominations and the Mayor encouraged everyone to nominate someone who deserved to be

recognised for the good that they did in the community and that nominations could be made online via the Council's website until Monday 27 November with the winners being announced at the Awards Dinner in February.

The Mayor invited Councillor S Little to announce the launch of Give a Gift at Christmas. Councillor S Little stated that following the huge success last year the Give a Gift would run again this year starting on the 21 November until the 21 December and encouraged all Members, Officers and members of the public to donate some of their free time.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Gledhill, updated Members on the following:

Councillor Gledhill echoed the tribute made by Reverend Barlow to former Councillor Ken Barrett who had been an excellent Councillor, who had been extremely dedicated to helping residents and he would be sorely missed.

An update on Clean It, Cut It, Fill It showed that since April 2017, over 1000 tonnes of rubbish had been collected, 9200 acres of grass had been cut and 4100 potholes had been filled.

That the pilot of the Potholer Spotter had received an award at the Highways Awards for Best Use of New Technology and that Thurrock Council had been asked to speak at a national conference following Thurrock being recognised as the most improved local authority in highways maintenance by the National Highways and Transport Network.

Thurrock also received the Society for IT Professionals in the Public Sector 2017 Award for Citizen Engagement.

Lisa Holliday had been shortlisted for the Newly Qualified Adult Social Worker of the Year and the National Social Award.

Councillor Gledhill confirmed that the Fly Tipping in Alleyways Consultation was now open and available on the web-site until the 27 November.

That the expansion and improvement to Corringham Primary School will be made to support plans to increase their intake by 210 pupils.

The Council will continue to crackdown on business waste, unlicensed home and counterfeit tobacco and that 2800 fixed penalty notices had been issued since December 2016. Councillor Gledhill encouraged residents to stop dropping rubbish on the floor and to put it in the bin.

Councillor Gledhill stated that both the external cladding surveys and the comprehensive fire risk assessments have been completed and that the assessments had now moved onto the sheltered housing accommodation with all low rise blocks to follow. The fire risk notices and bulletins had been issued to all tower block residents but urged residents to have an emergency exit plan in place in the unlikely event of a fire.

68. Questions from Members of the Public

A copy of the transcript of questions and answers can be viewed under the relevant meeting date at <http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/thurrock> and are attached at Appendix A at these minutes.

69. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

The Mayor informed Members that in accordance with the Council's petition scheme no notices of petitions had been received.

70. Petitions Update Report

Members received a report on the status of those petitions handed in at Council Meetings and Council Offices over the past six months.

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

The Mayor enquired whether Group Leaders wished for any changes to be made to the appointments previously made to Committees and outside bodies, statutory and other panels.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Gledhill, informed the Chamber he had no further changes to make.

Councillor Snell, Leader of the UKIP Group, informed the Council Chamber he had no further changes to make.

Councillor Gerrish, Leader of the Labour Group, informed the Chamber that he wished to make the following changes:

For Councillor Fish to replace Councillor Stone on the Licensing Committee.

For Councillor Baldwin to replace Councillor Stone on the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Councillor Fish be appointed as member of the Licensing Committee.**
- 2. That Councillor Baldwin be appointed as member of the Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

72. Debate of a Petition containing over 1500 verified signatures - Kings Street Car Park, Stanford Le Hope

The Mayor informed the Chamber that a petition had been submitted to Full Council titled 'King Street Car Park in Stanford Le Hope' and that as the petition had reached the threshold of 1,500 verified signatures, it had qualified to be debated by the Council.

Members were informed that the signatures had been checked and verified by Democratic Services using the electoral register.

The Mayor invited Councillor Piccolo, the Lead Petitioner to speak on the petition.

Councillor Piccolo stated that the limited free parking had a detrimental effect on shops in Stanford Le Hope in comparison to the 450 free parking spaces available in Corringham. That with modern day living people used cars to go shopping and that the air quality and pollution levels had increased with cars sitting idling waiting for a space. That this was the time for Thurrock Council to put right for the future because if the lack of parking in Stanford Le Hope was not sorted it will shortly not be open for business.

Councillor Piccolo suggested 3 options:

- Owners of the car park charge commuters in exchange for some free car parking spaces
- Clean the car park in exchange for some free car parking spaces
- Make a compulsory purchase order

Councillor Piccolo urged all Members to support to reinstate free parking back into Stanford Le Hope.

Councillor Jones stated his full support with the report as parking in Stanford Le Hope had been a bone of contention with residents and that the current owners had not acted appropriately.

Councillor Gerrish thanked residents and the ward Councillors for the petition and the good work undertaken. That all Members should stand united to bring effective benefits to the residents and shops in Stanford Le Hope. Councillor Gerrish asked for continued updates on this petition through the Petitions Update Report.

Councillor Hebb stated that the plans were flawed from the beginning and had pushed shoppers away from Stanford Le Hope. That the Council had tried to have discussions with the current owner but the Council now had to move forward and bring shoppers back to Stanford Le Hope. Councillor Hebb suggested 3 options:

- Shopper Scheme – spend so much in a shop and get your parking paid for
- Launch a review of single yellow lines
- Apply for a local land charge

Councillor Hebb stated that this decision had to be a cross party one that would ensure Stanford Le Hope become a restored town once again.

Councillor Gledhill stated from a personal view the planning laws were out of date and restrictions should be put in place for applications being resubmitted. Councillor Gledhill stated that a review would be brought forward to address the single yellow lines.

Councillor Halden stated that the business model for Stanford Le Hope was based on the need to support local people, support convenience stores and support customer parking so that these local services could be used. Councillor Halden stated that the review should be launched with action points that would help small businesses, shop owners and residents.

Councillor Tolson had concerns that if the present owners had not dealt efficiently with fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour how it would manage with any private prosecutions due to an incident or injury of a resident.

Councillor B Little showed his frustrations that the Council were readdressing issues that he was initially against when the application was first presented to the Planning Committee. Councillor B Little stated that a review of the Stanford Le Hope town centre, particularly the single yellow lines that would give the opportunity for cars to be parked elsewhere, would be undertaken. Although this may alleviate some of the problems it may not fix them all.

The Mayor thanked Members for the cross party debate and decision and thanked all residents who had signed the petition and that the Portfolio Holder for Highways and the Leader would now put forward a review.

RESOLVED

That the petition was considered by Full Council.

73. Investment and Treasury Management Strategy

Councillor Hebb presented the report that sought Members approval of the investment strategy approach and the subsequent related amendments to the Treasury Management Indicators that was based on 6 key principles which was presented to Cabinet on the 11 October 2017. Councillor Hebb stated it was important to remember that Thurrock Council had the third lowest net budget of all English Unitary Authorities, whilst having to deliver a large suite of services. That it was vital that front line services and other statutory services were not affected and investment had to be made. That a review will be undertaken of all Council services with becoming self-sufficient by 2020.

Councillor Duffin thanked and congratulated Councillor Hebb and Officers for the work undertaken and the direction that the Council was going. Councillor Duffin stated that some other Councils had already reached self-sufficiency and hoped Thurrock would be there in the future.

Councillor Gerrish supported the measures presented this evening and that it was important that the Council used sound measurements and treasury management to bolster up the Council's finances. That Members would need reassurances to ensure there was adequate control over the exposure of risk and that the performance and risk are regularly audited by the Committee and the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure details can be reviewed.

Councillor B Rice thanked Councillor Hebb for the report and asked for clarification on the estimated increase on page 93 of Appendix 1, A3 of £10.48 in 2019/20 and to point out the error on page 95 of Appendix 1, D1 total for 2017/18 should have read £989,321.

Councillor J Kent stated that flexibility was important to cover for any opportunities that may arise and could Councillor Hebb confirm whether the Council Tax would go up by 5% in 2019/20.

Councillor Gledhill thanked Councillor Hebb for the report and stated that it was vital that the Council received monies and replied on grants from Government, otherwise the Council would fail. Councillor Gledhill would be supporting and endorsing the recommendations.

Councillor Hebb thanked Councillor Duffin for his kind words and for the recognition.

Councillor Hebb stated that there would be no impact on Council Tax or the Housing Revenue Account.

Upon being put to the vote, the majority of Members voted in favour of the recommendations, whereupon the Mayor declared the recommendations carried.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Council agreed the revised Treasury Management Indicators as set out in the Appendix 1.**
- 2. That the Council agreed that cash investment decisions that fall under a capital definition be treated as capital expenditure and the Treasury Management Indicators amended as necessary.**

74. Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's and Adult Social Care

Councillor S Little, Cabinet Member for Children's and Adult Social Care, introduced the report and stated how pleased she was to be presenting her second report as Portfolio Holder. Councillor S Little publicly thanked all officers for their continued support and all the hard work and effort put in.

Councillor S Little updated Members firstly on the following Adult Social Care services:

Thurrock First – Now based at the Thurrock Hospital and had brought staff from all three providers to work together under one service.

Shared Lives – Where adults with complex long term needs can live in a family setting in the community and hoped to have 5 placements by April 2018.

Local Co-ordinators – Continued feedback received from residents across the borough on what excellent work had been carried out by the local co-ordinators.

Chichester Close - in November 2016 the Council, with the support of the Clinical Commissioning Group, was awarded approximately £500k from the Housing and Technology for People with Learning Disabilities Local Authority Capital Fund to develop 8 homes for young people with learning disabilities who may otherwise have to live in residential care outside the Borough.

Councillor S Little stated that significant progress in Thurrock Children's Social Care Services had been made over the past year with the service continuing to make improvements following the 2016 Ofsted Inspection and on its way to outstanding.

That Thurrock families deserved the best and that Councillor S Little was passionate to ensure that Thurrock Council delivered the best possible services to vulnerable children and their families.

The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children had dropped considerably to 35 following the work undertaken with colleagues in the Eastern Region authorities to establish a transfer protocol.

That a further 20 applications from potential new foster carers had been received and commended the good service undertaken by the Youth Offending Service.

Councillor Snell thanked the Portfolio Holder for her report and commended her on the good work that had come out of such a large portfolio. Councillor Snell requested further information on the Home from Hospital Initiative and asked whether the processes in place for domiciliary care were robust enough. Councillor S Little stated that problems with domiciliary care had been inherited from the previous administration and that some services had to be taken back in-house. That a new initiative was planned to be introduced on the basis of what people actually want and that panel would consist of 2 residents who already received domiciliary care.

Councillor Gerrish questioned the overspend in Children's Social Care and how confident the portfolio was in delivering the services. Councillor S Little stated that the service was £1,885 million overspent but Members must understand the challenges and the complex cases with children in care and that it was a statutory duty of the Council to look after them. Reductions elsewhere in budgets had been made such as the cost of agency staff.

Councillor Okunade thanked the Portfolio Holder for the report and asked what the Portfolio's retention strategy was. Councillor S Little stated that her strategy was to keep people happy in a stable environment with a good network of staff and employing more staff as required.

Councillor Spillman stated his concern on those social workers working with the homelessness families with children rather than with looked after children and that changes should be made to the Social Act to ensure that these cases are dealt with by the homelessness team and he would support this as his role of Chair to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor S Little stated that this was being looked into and to be assured as a duty of care this was being addressed.

Councillor S Little summed up by thanking all in Adult and Children's Social Care for all the fabulous work undertaken.

75. Report of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration

Councillor Coxshall, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, introduced the report and was delighted to be doing so on behalf of residents and businesses in Thurrock.

Councillor Coxshall updated Members on the following:

That 80% of working age residents were in employment which was up by 6.4% on the same period last year which was a fantastic result.

That the Tilbury Masterplan had been launched based on what residents want.

Development on the Integrated Medical Centre on Civic Square had continued.

That a £10.8 million grant from the Local Growth Fund (Round 3) to complete the funding package for a new foot crossing under the rail line in High Street in Grays with a new public square and shops, had been secured.

Purfleet Centre will deliver new homes and a new town centre in Spring 2018 and a new health centre by 2020.

That consultation continued with stakeholders on the Local Plan and that the forums met regularly.

Councillor Snell stated that there were lots in the report that had to be commended and that residents of Thurrock need to be reminded that all the regeneration was right and proper. That there may be a fear that regeneration was going too far and how much green belt would actually be left. Councillor Snell asked what regeneration work would be planned for old estates.

Councillor Coxshall stated that at this time the Council were not in a position to confirm what green belt would be used.

Councillor Gerrish welcomed the progress made but that the biggest decisions would need to be made by the Council were on the Local Plan. Councillor Gerrish asked the Portfolio Holder for reassurance that all public consultations would be listened to and that all parties would be given the opportunity to comment and contribute to the plans going forward. Councillor Coxshall stated that he would give his guarantee that consultations would take place and that engagement would continue on the Local Plan right up to the voting of Stage 2.

Due to the time of debate running out Councillor Coxshall would provide written responses to the following questions:

Councillor B Rice stated that the Portfolio Holder did not realise that the uncertainty of the amount of planned regeneration will impact on residents of Thurrock. Councillor B Rice asked the Portfolio Holder whether all Tilbury and Chadwell residents, regardless of what general practitioner they use now, would be able to access the services offered at the new Integrated Medical Centre in Tilbury.

Councillor Duffin questioned what work had the Portfolio Holder and the Council done to lower the target of 32,000 homes set by the Government.

Councillor Baldwin asked the Portfolio Holder to reassure community groups and charities that as part of the regeneration of Civic Square that they would not find themselves homeless or be forced to close will be met as part of the overall plan.

Councillor J Kent stated that there were challenges ahead and asked the Portfolio Holder how these challenges and opportunities would be addressed following Brexit.

Councillor G Rice asked the Portfolio Holder about the east face slip road into Lakeside from the A13.

Councillor Spillman stated that the potential of 32,000 new homes was a fantasy and that this process should be undertaken in a fair way and that these homes should be built for the residents of Thurrock, not of London.

Councillor Jones stated his concern with the Local Plan and that the number of houses had increased and with this increase in population how would the existing infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, cope.

Councillor Smith requested that the new partnerships in the Purfleet Regeneration engage with the Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee so that consideration can be given.

76. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 4 questions to the Leader of the Council had been received and 2 questions to Cabinet Members.

A copy of the transcript of questions and answers can be found at Appendix A to these minutes.

At 9.14pm, the Mayor moved a motion to suspend Council Procedure Rule 11.1 to allow the meeting to continue beyond the 2.5 hour time limit until 10.00pm. The majority of Members indicated their agreement to the proposal.

77. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

Councillor G Rice attended an Anglian (Eastern) Regional Flood Defence Committee where it been announced that a new £14 million flood defence gate would be commissioned and built in 2018/19 with the existing barrier in place until the new flood defence gate had been built and that this was very good news for Tilbury.

78. Minutes of Committees

The Minutes of Committees as set out in the Agenda were received.

79. 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 over the last year.

80. Motion received from Councillor Gerrish

The Motion, as printed in the Agenda was proposed by Councillor Gerrish and seconded by Councillor Fish. The Motion read as follows:

Thurrock Council supports the National Joint Council (NJC) pay claim for 2018, submitted by UNISON, GMB and Unite on behalf of the Council and school workers calls for the immediate end of public sector pay restraint. NJC pay cannot be allowed to fall further behind other parts of the public sector.

Thurrock Council therefore resolves to:

- *Write immediately to the LGA asking it to make urgent representations to Government to fund the NJC claim and the pay spine review;*
- *Write to the Prime Minister and Chancellor supporting NJC pay claim and seeking the additional resources needed to fund a decent pay rise and pay spine review;*
- *Meet with local NJC union representatives to convey support for the pay claim and the pay spine review.*

Councillor Gerrish presented the Motion and stated that most workers in Local Government and Schools had their pay determined by the National Joint

Council for local government services who saw their pay freeze from 2010-2013 and only 1% pay increase annually since then. With inflation making the cost of living more expensive, pay had dropped by approximately 20%. Councillor Gerrish continued that it was not fair that Thurrock Council employees who delivered crucial services see their pay eroded year after year. Councillor Gerrish believed that hard work should be rewarded with fair pay and that Thurrock Council should set a good example of this. It was also noted that Thurrock Council could not meet the increases in pay asked for on their own and that Government should halt the cuts to Local Government and adequately fund employees pay. Councillor Gerrish was proud to support the Pay-Up Campaign and the work that had been done on the pay cap.

Councillor J Kent echoed Councillor Gerrish's comments that recognised a need for pay restraints. This was not backed by a proper pay rise and consideration had to be given to those people that do those jobs and that it was about time they got a good pay rise and this was what they deserved.

Councillor Snell stated his support for the Motion and stated that it was about fairness and it was about time people got what they deserved.

Councillor Gledhill would not be supporting the Motion in this form but wanted to make it clear that it was about time pay restrictions on public serving staff are removed. The fact was that the Council was losing employees to the private sector due to more financial benefits. Councillor Gledhill stated that pay increases came from tax payers and that this Motion was asking for an unrealistic 5% increase. That an Annual Pay Policy report was presented at February 2017 Full Council identifying the 1% pay increase with no comments made by Members.

Councillor Coxshall stated that he would not be supporting the Motion as the budget required to be sound and in credit before it was looked at as to what could be done. Councillor Coxshall agreed that the restraint should be removed in areas of need and in the areas where people are leaving.

Councillor Cherry stated his support for the Motion but with some reluctance. Councillor Cherry agreed that it should be fair across the board and that it clearly was not. That the massive divorce bill paid to the European Union, money spent towards the HS2 and money spent on Foreign Aid could be put towards wages and good causes in the country.

Councillor Spillman would be supporting the Motion but stated that Labour had to take their share of the blame for some of the restraints set.

Councillor G Rice stated his support for the Motion and could understand the anger of those affected and that the Motion deserved the right and proper support.

Councillor Halden stated that it was not a matter about deserve verses not deserved as all Members agree that front line workers deserved a good wage.

Councillor Halden stated that if wages were forced up, and money was not available in the public purse this would then force taxes up.

Councillor Fish stated that the Government were out of touch with public perception and would be fully supporting the Motion.

Councillor Gerrish thanked Members for their debate and it was time that Theresa May now listened.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion.

Upon being put to the vote, 22 Members voted in favour of the Motion with 2 Members against and 13 Members abstaining whereupon the Mayor declared the Motion carried.

81. Motion received from Councillor Jones

The Motion, as printed in the Agenda was proposed by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Snell. The Motion read as follows:

We call on Thurrock Council to write to the Secretary of State to express many residents' views that in its present state the police service contact number 101 is not fit for purpose.

Councillor Jones presented the Motion and stated no response had been received from the Secretary of State from a letter sent one year ago and that the 101 Police Service had not improved in this time. That residents still continued to complain about the service and the lack of poor response.

Councillor Gledhill confirmed his agreement with the Motion and stated that each month he would continue to chase the Secretary of State for a response as this needed to happen now.

Councillor Snell spoke in favour of the Motion and requested the Motion go straight to vote.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion.

Following a clear majority in favour, the Mayor declared the Motion carried.

Subject to Council Procedure Rules, Chapter 2, Part 2, Rule 11.3 the following 2 motions are deemed formally moved and seconded and would be put to the vote by the Mayor without Debate.

82. Motion received from Councillor J Kent

The Motion, as printed in the Agenda, was proposed by Councillor J Kent. The Motion read as follows:

Thurrock Council believes the, so called, "dementia tax" is unfair and would be damaging to many older residents of Thurrock. The Council calls on the care minister, Jackie Doyle-Price, to rule out forcing older people to pay for their care with their home.

Councillor J Kent presented the Motion and stated it was the Government's plans to revive the "dementia tax" and that the Conservative Social Care Minister, Jackie Doyle-Price, had recently stated that people with homes should not see this as an asset to give to their offspring. Councillor J Kent stated that dementia tax was not the answer and had caused upset and had been unsettled that this item was now back on the agenda and stated that people with dementia should not be forced to pay for care with their homes and should not be part of the reform.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion.

Upon being put to the vote, 22 Members voted in favour of the Motion with 13 Members against, whereupon the Mayor declared the Motion carried.

83. Motion received from Councillor Gerrish

The Motion, as printed in the Agenda was proposed by Councillor Gerrish. The Motion read as follows:

Thurrock Council calls on the Government to provide the necessary resources and rule changes which would allow councils to build additional council housing at a scale proportional to need, in particular removing the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap. Council resolves to:

- *Write to the Prime Minister, Chancellor and DCLG setting out our concerns and seeking urgent action to enable the building of council housing at necessary volumes.*
- *Write to Thurrock's MPs seeking all possible Parliamentary support.*
- *Request that the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider whether there are any additional local opportunities to increase our supply of new council houses in Thurrock.*

Councillor Gerrish presented the Motion and stated that the average waiting time for a council house now stood at 14 years and that the Revenue Account be relaxed to allow Councils to build more council houses based on need. That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee could take up a review on this to consider additional local opportunity and Councillor Gerrish stated that it should be a right and not a privilege for residents to have access to affordable council housing.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion.

Following a clear majority in favour, the Mayor declared the Motion carried.

The meeting finished at 10.08 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**

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Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 25 October 2017

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

8 questions were submitted from members of the public. 1 question was withdrawn by the member of public himself.

1. From Mrs Imamzade to Councillor Halden

Can you tell us how far you have gone with the agreement and plans for the new Integrated Medical Centre in Tilbury. We desperately need this to improve the very poor health outcomes for Tilbury and Chadwell residents?

Mayor

Councillor Halden

Councillor Halden

Thank you Mr Mayor. I'm delighted to say this space will be in the ground next year. I remember several years ago, I think it was 2015, when I was an opposition Member sat on the Health Scrutiny Committee, we took the GP estate plan. I remember writing to the Chair of CCG (Clinical Commission Group) after that saying can we actually speed up and move to implementation. Obviously I was disappointed when I had gone, when the Leader gave me this Cabinet position to find there were no capital plans in place. There were no designs in place, there was literally nothing. There was just a concept but we said we was going to get started, we had. July this year, I took the plan to Cabinet that was approved to a) agree the principle at the Council where I'll just force the issue and take direct control and build it ourselves. And secondly, that we would appoint a design team and we went out to tender that team and we formally appointed them in September this year. So now we have the design team in place. That's also in addition to the extra work we done in the area, that Councillor Coxshall has done with the Tilbury Town master plan to make sure that we're not just plonking a new medical centre in the middle of Tilbury. That we are looking at how that can lend itself to the wider regeneration of the area. Obviously, a slight health warning to this, once we begin the process of building the medical centre, this is still dependent on NHS procurement, NHS England. For all Members who have tried to work with the NHS before, are not the speediest folks in the world. However, we've had lots of preliminary conversations with them, they've been intimately involved in the process and the NHS is very supportive in what we are trying to do in Tilbury, the CCG are fully signed up to the idea, so yes, the space will be in the ground next year and we are chugging forward. I'm very pleased to be able to say that.

Mayor

Thank you. Mrs Imamzade, do you have a supplementary question?

Mrs Imamzade

Thank you Councillor Halden. We know that Jackie Doyle-Price is in favour of closing Orsett Hospital, are you? *(Mayor advises Mrs Imamzade that her supplementary question will not be accepted as it does not relate to the initial question. He leaves it up to the Portfolio Holder to decide whether to answer the question or not).*

Councillor Halden

I'm aware I have a question about Orsett Hospital this evening from the Labour candidate for Stifford Clays. I will come onto Orsett Hospital later. What I would say, is that one of the things that perplexes me, well actually, presses me about Members opposite, I've announced that I will spend between £15 - £20 million in Tilbury building a modern medical centre that will be one of the biggest investments that the people of Tilbury has ever had for their medical services. It breaks years and years of log jam and what's more, it's not just about the quantity of services, it's about the quality. We passed my GP standards plan last year to ensure that the people of Tilbury don't just get new facilities. The existing GP facilities are held to account and forced to improve and if they are not treating the people of Tilbury in the way that they deserve, we have got a clear plan in place to help those GPs improve. It does confuse me that we can announce we're improving quality, we're spending a tremendous amount in Tilbury, we're going to start building these medical centres next year and the Party opposite finds or attempts to find a way to attack me. I do salute the inventiveness that takes because that's quite a stretch in terms of such a good news story for the people of Tilbury into an assault. I admit, I don't have that creativity, if I did, I'd probably be an author.

2. From Mr Jackson to Councillor B Little

Can the Portfolio Holder for Transport provide a high level transport plan that supports 32,000 new homes within the borough of Thurrock that does not add additional burden to the 17 air quality management areas already identified in 2016?

Mayor

Councillor B Little

Councillor B Little

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Jackson for your question. The Council is currently reviewing its Local Plan. As that Plan progresses and preferred locations for new development eventually become identified, infrastructure plans to assist in the proper delivery of that growth will be progressed in parallel that will include transportation needs related to specific locations where growth is agreed, as well as Borough wide transport needs. The Local Plan will be subject to a full environmental impact assessment which will address a wide range of issues, including air quality. We are not at

that stage in the process as yet, but I can assure you that the need to undertake this work is fully recognised.

Mayor

Thank you. Mr Jackson, do you have a supplementary question?

Mr Jackson

Thank you Councillor Little. Just a quick supplementary question. Will the Portfolio Holder for Transport support trams in future transport needs?

Councillor B Little

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you for your supplementary question. I will look at reviewing the need and support, anything that will help this borough in the future but it needs to be something engineered in a meaningful way.

3. From Ms Blake to Councillor Gledhill

Where does the Leader of the Council propose to build 32,000 new homes in Thurrock?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Ms Blake for your question. You will have to excuse a bit of the pre-waffle but it is important. The future growth of the Borough is a very important issue for all residents and businesses. Housing development is an integral part of that growth not least to provide new houses to meet the considerable needs of demographic growth and change in the Borough. A significant part of that growth is driven by existing residents and businesses. Since the original regional assembly imposed 18,500 homes on us in 2001, Thurrock has been very successful in creating the jobs that were put in at the same time. Unfortunately, we've not been as successful with the new homes. The way that we currently create new homes is to assess it in relation to the amount of the growth that we have through business growth. Now, when we get to the point where we have 32,000 homes, we then need to go through a local plan stage to dictate what type of properties they will be, propose where they will go, go through consultations with residents and through Members of course. We are not quite at that second stage yet.

The location of those new houses will be determined through the Local Plan which will be shaped through several stages of public consultation. The first stage of consultation took place in February 2016. The second stage which is called Issues and Options will be considered by Council soon before going to consultation. There will be a further two consultations before it is submitted in

2019. Now, all three groups have already had one look at the proposals. I've asked for a lot more information, the very second we have that and we're in a position to move to announce that, we will do at Full Council.

Mayor

Thank you. Ms Blake, do you have a supplementary question?

Ms Blake

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Will it be beneficial with the building plan for these houses if the Lower Thames Crossing is approved and opens up the green belt land?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you for your question. It makes absolutely no odds. The requirement for the 32000 homes comes from the growth we already have and already planned irrespective to whether the Lower Thames Crossing, which every single Member in this Chamber still remains in objection to, happens.

The Mayor asks Councillor Gledhill to clarify Group Leaders have had sight of the last consultation for the new homes. Councillor Gledhill believes this was done through each individual party group meeting.

4. From Mr Towlson to Councillor B Little

Further to my question to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Councillor B Little on the 27 September 2017 and on reading the Thurrock Transport Strategy for the period of 2013 to 2026 what reassurance can the Council supply to disprove my belief that it will fail to deliver on the 'Health and Well-being' and 'Protecting the Green Environment' aspects of the Strategy due to possible further massive road expansions, the requirement of further housing and as it has also been claimed by the Portfolio Holder for Education and Health "that there was only so much the Council could do on their own"?

Mayor

Councillor B Little

Councillor B Little

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Towlson for your question. The council is committed to promoting Health and Wellbeing and Protecting the Green Environment as part of a programme of sustainable managed growth. The forthcoming Issues and Options 2 consultation on the Local Plan will consider all aspects of infrastructure development within the borough and their cumulative impact on the environment and this will inform the proposed adoption draft for consideration by the Planning Inspectorate. With regard to

significant road expansions, the council continues its opposition to a possible Lower Thames Crossing through Thurrock as mentioned previously. As we are all aware this scheme is being developed and promoted by Highways England and that the council is a statutory consultee. The council has established the multi stakeholder Lower Thames Crossing Task Force to ensure full and transparent scrutiny of all environmental impacts associated with this project and will actively engage with the development consent order process to ensure as far as possible that adverse impacts are fully mitigated.

It is true that the council will not have the definitive say on whether Lower Thames Crossing and other infrastructure of national significance is allowed to be delivered in Thurrock. However, by ensuring that council stakeholders are fully sighted on all relevant environmental impact evidence, provide challenge where necessary, and are empowered to fight to ensure that adverse impacts are mitigated in line with global best practice, we will do everything within our power to support the aims set out in the 2013-2026 Thurrock Transport Strategy.

Mayor

Thank you. Mr Towlson, do you have a supplementary question?

Mr Towlson

Yes I do Mr Mayor. As a Thurrock resident and Chair of a local community forum, I would like to congratulate Thurrock Council on receiving a recent award for an innovative action of fitting cameras to refuse collection vehicles. A simple idea but costly. Can I please request that we now stop undertaking surveys, monitoring, analysing, discussing, meeting etc., which has been going on for many years and just take some action on our well known concerns? Let's show the rest of the UK that Thurrock does act and not be seen as thinking, I quote, 'thinking we may take action at some time Council'. I will consider an answer is not sufficient at this stage.

Councillor B Little

I believe I wasn't asked to answer but I will do. Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Mr Towlson for your supplementary question. What I would like to say is that, as an authority and the reasons that we receive awards for doing things is that we do them in a way which is based on getting information, getting data, presenting a case and getting funding delivered to us sometimes, not from a begging bowl because we're desperate but because we need things to happen in a certain way. We can only do that by progressively putting together information that supports our requests and that information can come from something that has been asked of us to have a look at, like pothole spotting for instance. It can come from us going into the new level from two to three of H Met which is the new highway maintenance efficiency programme. If we don't do these things, we are penalised by government which is right because they're giving us the money to do some repairs and do things in a

professional way. If we don't present the evidence in a professional way, we won't be able to get that money. Not only that, we will start to lose funds.

5. From Mrs Pegley to Councillor Coxshall

At the last public Council meeting it was stated that 32,000 homes were to be built in Thurrock, can the Council tell me please where is the land situated to build these houses?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

As the answer was just given, the future growth of the Borough is a very important issue to all of us here who live, work, including people who run businesses in Thurrock. The next stage is called Issues and Options 2 which you've just heard and will be presented to Council very shortly ahead of the consultation. I hope that this plan receives cross party endorsement as just for the purpose of the consultation to make sure we hear from residents across the Borough. Throughout this wide consultation, which will underpin the local plan, in its broad locations for where the new housing growth can be located will be brought forward at that time.

Mayor

Thank you. Mrs Pegley, do you have a supplementary question?

Mrs Pegley

Can the Council provide guarantees that these properties are intended for the people of Thurrock and not just to meet the demand of the overspill from London?

Councillor Coxshall

If the 32000 house document has been out there for a little while now, just before the summer. In that, it breaks down where this number is coming from and how we've arrived at the 32000 houses and how many houses, 1300 or so per year for the 20 years. That comes out from really, 75% of that is houses in this Borough. There's 11% really for inward because we've had 70,000 jobs, predicted growth in jobs, people are going to get inward migration to this Borough. That's a positive, that 11%, because it's really important to us. We've done such a good job that people want to come and live in Thurrock. Now, I'm not going to stop people doing that because I'm proud of this Borough and want to make sure this Borough is and now it's been a beacon of growth. So we can't stop job growth, I don't want to stop job growth. And then there's another interesting fact that I heard today. We're the last big housing expansion that built Ockendon in the 50s from when Harold

Mcmillan was a Housing Minister then he went on to the Prime Minister, we're now building hundreds , thousands of houses per year. This is a big undertaking to take across the country and Thurrock's got to play its part in this next big housing expansion. But 60 years ago when that was built, 2.5% of people lived on their own. Now, the current people, that is now at 12.5%, live in separate lives. That's a massive strain as well of that 75% on our living circle. We live separate lives now, that means there's a 15 – 20% extra houses we're going to need, just to support the new way people live. So, we can't just stop and get off, we've got to think about this and that is why the consultation is critical. We've got to move forward and actually got to have a sensible conversation on where we want these.

Councillor Gledhill requested that the order of the last two questions were adjusted to wait for Councillor Watkins arrival.

6. From Mrs Watson to Councillor Halden

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm from his correspondence with health partners what the process and timetable will be for consultations on the future of Orsett Hospital?

Mayor

Councillor Halden

Councillor Halden

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Mrs Watson for your question. The consultation will launch this year. As I've said in answer to the previous question, NHS England are good at many things, speediness is not one of them. They've decided they want to roll several consultations across the country, all into one period. The stipulations we demand as a council is we want a clear 12 week consultation period. We don't want a short consultation, we want a good consultation where people can respond. We also want a very clear dedicated Orsett consultation so people don't have to wade through all other things to find the Orsett section and unless my directives correct me, these are the stipulations. Now the process itself, Basildon and Thurrock University Hospital own Orsett Hospital so they are, essentially, the people who are asking to consult. The consultation is prepared in conjunction with the Clinical Commissioning Groups because obviously they are the people who commission the services out of Orsett hospital. From there, it goes to a third stage still, once a consultation has been written, NHS England have to sign off that they believe is sufficient and robust conversation and the clinical centre get involved to satisfy themselves that clinical issues are actually easily being explained to the public. And in the fourth stage still, HealthWatch which is an independent third party advocacy body and our Health & Wellbeing Overview Scrutiny Committee, are both statutory consultees, totally independent from the process. They will both get their opportunity to comment both on what is being proposed but also they will be able to comment on the robustness of the consultation itself. So, it's really a very full process as I have

said many times in the past as Portfolio Holder for Health. We work very hard with Basildon Hospital and with all partners, NFELT, EPUT, whoever the new mental health arm used to be called, SEPT, CCG and other partners to solicit the assurances that no clinical services will leave Thurrock. If changes were to take place at Orsett, no services will leave Orsett Hospital until brand new modern facilities are built for those services to go into. Those are the assurance that we've been given and those are the assurances that we are still working to. Of course, I'm happy to answer any supplementary you may have.

Mayor

Thank you. Mrs Watson, do you have a supplementary question?

Mrs Watson

We know the MPs are in favour of closing Orsett Hospital but Orsett at the moment is working full capacity with the consultants at Basildon and with clinics holding their surgeries there. How confident are you that following the closure of Orsett Hospital that the three walk-in hubs that you are proposing will meet the needs of the Thurrock residents?

Councillor Halden

Thank you Mr Mayor. First of all, it's going to be four brand new medical centres, not three for a start. Secondly, as I've already said, that, as I've said in the past, what you need to remember about Orsett Hospital is that there are no overnight beds. The last tour I had around Orsett Hospital, they showed me all the empty rooms, they showed me the huge amount of space that was used for storage. I might be wrong but I've got a figure off the top of my head which is about 46% of Orsett Hospital is not used for anything clinical. So when people talk about Orsett Hospital, it's misnomer, there are no overnight beds, vast majority of the site is not even used. To bring the site up to modern standards would be in the region of £10 million so I'm not in favour of constantly protecting a building that is out of date. What I'm in favour of is protecting the clinical offer in this Borough and I'm very clear in the Cabinet Holder responsible for health. We have got a deal, it is signed. No Thurrock clinical services will leave Thurrock. Nothing will change at Orsett until new facilities are built. So literally, the consultation, we are talking about consulting over a building. I am confident that all the health partners, not the Council, all the health partners, the CCG, the mental health hub, NFELT, they are signed up to the same principle that I signed in May of this year. All clinical services staying in the Borough, no changes happening until brand new modern buildings are fit and ready to accommodate those services. This is a good new story for the Borough and what I would finally say, and this is an important point, that I've already answered one question this evening when supplementary automatically set wage into a Member of Parliament for Thurrock. Your supplementary did the same thing. I'm aware you're the Labour candidate for Stifford Clays, I don't wish you luck but I do wish you well. I know it's a stressful experience standing for election for the first time.

What I would say is, and I caution my Labour colleagues opposite, before you launch your 'Save Orsett Hospital' campaign, no clinical services are under threat. Tens of millions of pounds we used to build new buildings for those services to go in so before you launch a campaign that is based on lies, I would just remind you that lies are very, very easily beaten by the truth. And I do caution you all.

7. From Mrs Parker to Councillor Watkins

Can I ask the Council, if they will be tagging bins again which for whatever reason were not collected? It appears this is currently not happening, and it can help residents understand why bins were not collected.

Councillor Gledhill provided a response on behalf of Councillor Watkins.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mrs Parker for your question. I apologise that refuse collection isn't my strongest point. I get it done every week, it's not magic it happens and I'm grateful we are doing exceptionally well in doing so. The short answer is yes. It will take some time to get these tags organised. Councillor Watkins can talk at length about the education process we need to put in place, certainly for recycling residents know what we can and can't recycle, what needs to go in each bin. I think it's for every 11kg each household saves; we end up with £35,000 worth of savings. So getting that right every single time is important. Every contaminated load costs the council tax payer money, it costs us time and of course means we don't start reaching our targets for recycling. So as I say, yes is the short answer. It will take a number of months to get these organised to make sure unlike the last time, they remain stuck to bins and not wash off in the rain. And those are tagged on a weekly basis to identify why they are wrong and why their bins haven't been collected. It's very clear and a record is kept so if there are repeat offenders, they can be contacted direct by the waste department to explain what they should and shouldn't be doing in relation to their waste.

Mayor

Thank you. Mrs Parker, do you have a supplementary question?

Mrs Parker

Thank you Mr Gledhill. I would like as well to ask a question. Is it possible that there could be more street bins made available in every ward, some as well in Stifford Road near the schools? Which I hope will keep the area looking cleaner.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mrs Parker for your supplementary question. Yes we are currently going through a bin review. We are installing a number of trial, different types of bins and as I have cracked the same joke before, I'll crack it again, we are using big belly bins which I have absolutely nothing to do with. It is a style of bin from a company, nothing to do with me. This is a bin that will compress rubbish up to three times smaller than what we currently get. It's smart enough to actually let the Council know when it's ready to collect. Putting these bins obviously around the street in the Borough will help to collect more waste and spend less time in picking it up. That will free up the current bins we have to put in strategic places where we do see the accumulation of rubbish. This will obviously be tied in with further enforcement as I have said, 2800 tickets issued so far since December last year. It's a carrot stick approach, we'll put the bins there, if you don't use them, you'll get a ticket. But yes, it is part of the bin review.

Item 14 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 4 questions had been received to the Leader of the Council and 2 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 Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

Will the Leader be apologising to all residents affected by the confusion and chaos surrounding the 'Grass Tax' implementation?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, I will try to keep this short Councillor Gerrish. I apologise my answer may answer some of the supplementary so I do apologise in advance. The short answer is no. I made the position perfectly clear at the last full Council, the Grounds Maintenance service charge has been temporarily suspended and all tenants affected have been written to explaining this. Housing Scrutiny Committee will be overseeing a fundamental review on both the principle of a charge and how it might be fairly implemented. I understand Scrutiny had a useful discussion on the matter at its meeting on 17th October. The review will report back to the next Housing Scrutiny meeting in December and I look forward to hearing their recommendations.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. Yes. The particular element of confusion and chaos that I was referring to was around the fact that some residents seem to have still been billed. It's obviously a concern to me that many residents having been told that they wouldn't need to pay and those that payments would be suspended but none the less, they see some money coming out of their account. Could I ask what questions did the Leader ask Officers about the ability of the Council to adequately halt the payments including direct debit payments and what advice was he given? Thank you.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish for your questions. As you eluded to those effected were mainly on the BACs system including those on direct debits. I was fully aware both professionally and advisable Officers that you require ten days in which to cancel a request of payment from anyone under the system. Which meant that those on those payment methods for the 1st and 7th following month would be charged and their accounts accordingly adjusted for their next instalment whenever that would be. That still remains the case. If that isn't the case, I would like residents or indeed yourself, to contact me to take this up with Officers. There is a scheme within the direct debit authority that should the person that takes the money via that system has done it incorrectly, I believe they can claim a £10 compensation accordingly.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Gledhill. If he is, in that case, or if he was in full awareness of the fact surrounding the inability to cancel that charge, does he think that perhaps on reflection if you've made that clear to residents when you gave your statement last month?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Gerrish. If I did admit it, I do apologise for that specifically. I would apologise individually to any resident who has had that money and weren't fully aware that that was the case. Also, my understanding was that part of the letters would have outlined this. Again, if that wasn't the case, I profusely apologise again on that particular part.

2. From Councillor Jones to Councillor Gledhill

Would the Leader insist that members of Grays police station attend this year's remembrance service at Grays memorial and stop the traffic for the minutes silence out of respect for all service personnel that have served and lost their lives fighting for Great Britain in many conflicts over the years.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Jones for your question. Firstly, I have to make clear that Essex Police have been in attendance to lay wreaths every remembrance service. I've attended since being elected and did indeed before. I have spoken to Essex Police on this matter and can confirm that the Deputy Chief Constable BJ Harrington and the District Commander Richard Baxter, will both be in attendance and will lay wreaths at this service. In addition there will be a representative from Thurrock Community Policing Team laying wreaths across all services in Thurrock. You must remember that Essex Police lost 76 of their officers during the wars and of course, it is close to their heart. Now moving onto the traffic control, I'm told Essex Police wrote to the Council in 2015 outlining they will no longer be supplying officers with road closures and it will be the event organisers to deal with this. As such, our Parking Services Team will be on standby for this service. Attendance in the service appears to be increasing, something to be pulled year on year so we have to make sure our residents are safe at all times. That's without, obviously, showing the due respect that everyone should be showing on that special day and special time. I can confirm that following last year's service, I've asked the Council to cordon off the loading bays, the parking bays on the southside carriageway going from the memorial itself on Orsett Road to Cart Lane. This will better allow the Mayor to take the salute from the parade as it leads off Thameside complex. I'm please to say that officers will be there from 8 o' clock onwards and would ask the shops that they tell their customers not to park up. Equally, the barriers on the High Street will be closed and there will be a minimum of three enforcement officers on site to deal with the process. Hopefully, that will ensure a peaceful and adequate parade.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Jones, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Jones

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Leader. I wasn't having a go at the police, I know that they've got lots to do with the restrictive number they've got, I know they've got lots to do. Basically, I attended a memorial on the 17th of

September this year, with the Mayor. I was very embarrassed with the going ons there. There were no police, once again, the road wasn't stopped. We had many distinguished guests there that day, veterans, we had three lots of air cadets – Basildon, Grays, Stanford, and at times, I felt it was embarrassing. I didn't think this was the way that Thurrock should portray itself. So thank you, that you know, someone's going to be closing it.

Councillor Gledhill

Just very quickly. Councillor Jones, just to be fair, I know you wasn't having a go either at not having the police attending or not laying a wreath, you know they do it every year. I wasn't at that particular service, I was out of the Borough on that day, I've heard some of the horror stories and yes, that's not the standard that I would hope to happen at Thurrock whenever. Obviously, I'll be dealing with the highways team to ensure that they co-ordinate with all the exterior groups within the Borough that deal with these types of parades to ensure this doesn't happen in the future. As an aside, we're also going to make sure the trees are properly cropped this year so our Union flag doesn't get tied up as it's lowered at the memorial.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Jones, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Jones

No, Mr Mayor.

Members agreed to suspend standing orders to 10pm to finish the meeting.

3. From Councillor B Rice to Councillor Gledhill

Does the Portfolio Holder for Housing agree with me that it is only with the go ahead for the New Thames Crossing that he will uphold his commitment to 32000 new homes in Thurrock?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Rice for your question. To be honest, I read the first nine words and thought the answer was going to be no anyway. Surprising enough, I was right. No, I do not agree with you that the 32000 homes is dependent on the Lower Thames Crossing. I believe this has already been answered once this evening from a very insightful question from a member of the public and I don't intend to take up too much of Members' time reiterating what I've just said.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor B Rice, do you have a supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

I do and I'm really pleased about the Portfolio Holder's answer which is he doesn't agree and I think that's absolutely great and so will the residents of Thurrock who don't want another crossing in Thurrock. We will look forward to the plan coming forward to this Council with no reference points to junctions on or off the proposed new crossing and no settlements based on this premise. So thank you very much Mr Mayor.

Councillor Gledhill

It's a statement and I'm not going to take up time so thank you very much Mr Mayor. But there is an agreement there Councillor Rice.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor B Rice, do you have second supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

No.

4. From Councillor Potheary to Councillor Gledhill

Would the Portfolio Holder for Housing commit to reviewing the new caretaking arrangements for the six High Rise blocks in Grays as residents remain unhappy with the level of service provided?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and I do apologise, this answer is actually going to be a long one for a good reason. No is the short answer. This is the long one, this week, both the Assistant Director and I made one of our regular estate visits across the whole of Seabrook Rise. We visited every high rise block selecting floors at random and checked the stairwells and open spaces surrounding them as well. During the visits, we spoke to a number of residents including a former member of the caretaker staff, all who said they were happy with the caretaking service they paid for. I'm not saying the blocks were completely litter free but what little litter etc., that we did find was clearly no more than about 24 hours old. On checking the housing records, there have only been two complaints about the caretaking service from residents, none from elected

Members and nothing flagged up as a cause for concern by the Housing Management Team. I would like to make clear, there's been no reductions in the service provided following the recent changes to include the echoes following Councillor Allen's petition. But what we did find from our inspections and speaking to residents was that they were not happy with some of the stairwells being used for smoking, drinking alcohol, toilets or indeed drug taking. This, we will be reviewing.

We will also be writing to remind all tenants that they cannot store anything outside in the communal areas or leave large bags of rubbish for the caretakers to remove. These are clear recommendations from the fire service for their own safety but equally, it does not help the view of the neighbours and visitors when they themselves visit the hallways or indeed, our council staff operating to keep the areas clear. I would like to take this opportunity to pass on my personal thanks to the caretakers who work on six high rise blocks – Samantha, Michael, Martin and Scott and to their previous and current Team Leaders – Rob and Paul, who were absolutely great on our inspection. They are doing really great work and are not backwards and coming forward with suggestions on how they work, how their work could be made easier and where problems exist, how they could actively encourage people to make that change. So, instead of keeping these issues bottled up and waiting until Full Council to bring them, perhaps take a leaf out of their book, speak to me, speak to the Officers and don't delay in these things. Because the longer they delay, the more that it festers. Thank you Mr Mayor.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Potheary, do you have a supplementary question?

Councillor Potheary

Yes. Ok, so I have been in contact with Members Enquiries several times over lots of different issues so I don't know how Councillor Gledhill, you can make that claim but, never mind. Ok, so we've had blocked bin chutes, we've had blood left unwashed, we've had piles of cigarette butts in the car parks and these are things we've had photographic evidence of in some of these cases. Residents, there are still some residents who feel there is not a gold service being delivered here. And there is a discrepancy between what council office records are showing and how some residents are feeling. To what my question is, to try and move this forward in a constructive manner, is how is caretaking work evaluated, assessed and supervised and how could residents be involved more in this process?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Potheary. If our gold service, which residents pay for, isn't being delivered, then they should contact the service immediately. They shouldn't hang about and wait for next time they see a Councillor on the street, that includes myself, they shouldn't sit there and fester at home thinking nothing will ever get done. I don't like the idea of

seeing pools of blood anywhere. I don't like the cigarette butts building up. I don't like rubbish accumulating, nobody does. However, this stuff doesn't come from anywhere, some of it does come from residents, some of it from tenants. So, they need to take that active role themselves, to make sure they're putting their rubbish in the bin rather than just throwing them out and reporting to us, the anti-social behaviour that is happening in the stairwells, that is happening in the car parks and in some of the lower landings. There is a number they can contact on all of the noticeboards, there are a number of numbers they can contact immediately and I suggest that they do so. And in that way, we can take immediate action. As to how it's evaluated each day, the operators that clean the flats, have a long checklist to tick to show that's what they've done. They've seen we've just gone round to check that at random, as we've seen this week, both the Assistant Director and I will go round to see as well. But as I say, if residents are not happy with the gold service they are paying for, they must contact us straight away so we can then start taking the action. Building up a body of evidence, all that's doing is leaving a problem there that will fester and fester. Just get on and clear with the problem straight away, it will improve the service no end.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Potheary, do you have second supplementary question?

Councillor Potheary

I wasn't going to but yes. Ok, so I think this is part of the problem, is that residents are reporting these things. And I think also they are feeling that if there is a caretaking service there that they are paying for, that the caretaker doesn't necessarily have to be alerted to the fact that there is a problem that should just be part of their, sort of, ongoing work. What I would ask, is I'd ask you to reconsider the question I just asked, which is how residents can be more involved. Short of reporting things because they're already doing that, but how can residents be more involved in how that service is kind of put together, how that service is assessed on a kind of broad level?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Potheary. My apologies, I kind of see a bit more of where you're coming from there. One of the best things any tenants can do is start a tenants group. It doesn't have to be a mass tenants group covering the entire estate, it can easily be for the block or a group of landings. This is the kind of thing where they can get together, discuss the issues, come to us as a tenants section panel that they can apply to join, bring these issues forward. And again, collectively, they can see where the problems lie, collectively, they bring them to our attention and we will correct them where we possibly can. We do believe that tenant participation is the one best way to change tenant perception in any council accommodation so I strongly suggest that. I can certainly get one of our Officers to draft

something up to put on the boards and indeed, deliver to each property if necessary to show how that can be facilitated.

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

1. From Councillor Liddiard to Councillor Coxshall

Can the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration please explain why Tilbury was excluded from the grant funded scheme to improve shop fronts?

Councillor Coxshall

Yes. Some of my colleagues asked did I plant this question for you. You are correct. It is excluded from the fund and I'm sorry to say that it was excluded by the Labour administration in 2013. Shame yes. It was deemed, not warranted to be part of the scheme and it was approved by Cabinet later in that year to exclude Tilbury. Both Tilbury wards. I must say, if I may ask as well, did you actually make any representation to your colleagues or the Cabinet Members at the time to actually include that? But not to worry, I noticed this and we've actually made, we've asked, we're making good on Labour's mistake again in Tilbury. And we've put a bid together and submitted it to the community led local development project to cover Tilbury riverside and Tilbury St Chads. We expect to know the answer later this month or next month at the latest. And if approved on the bid, we'll add in to the Tilbury fund and they will be able to get the shop fronts done. I have to say again, from 2010, we been saying for the Members of Parliament and all the Councillors at any level, that Tilbury needs some love and the Conservatives are going to deliver that. My answer is, any Tilbury Councillor, if they want to come over, we're the ones delivering for Tilbury for no political gain, not every day, every entire week, not just at election times.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Liddiard, do you have a supplementary question?

Councillor Liddiard

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Coxshall. So we can expect all 60 shops in Tilbury to get your support for shop front funding then, can we?

Councillor Coxshall

Absolutely. The same way as the same they can apply in Grays, Stanford, we're going to make it to Tilbury. I have no earthly idea why Tilbury was taken out of the campaign when it was under Labour administration. As I've said , I've got no idea why it wasn't, it's crazy, that one high street was excluded and that Tilbury was. I can only think it's because no one cares about Tilbury. The Conservatives love Tilbury and we're going to give some love to Tilbury.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Liddiard, do you have second supplementary question?

Councillor Liddiard

No, thank you Mr Mayor.

2. From Councillor Okunade to Councillor B Little

The ASDA roundabout in Tilbury is becoming very congested, particularly between 4.30pm and 6.00pm. Does the Portfolio Holder for Transport have any plans to tackle this?

Councillor B Little

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Okunade for your question. The asset in question falls within the Highways England's remit, and is currently undergoing detailed scrutiny in relation to proposals for Tilbury 2 port expansion. The Council will continue to work closely with Highways England to monitor the capacity at this location.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Okunade, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Okunade

Thank you very much for that response. My supplementary question is that the Tilbury Masterplan has been widely circulated on social media and the potential increase in road traffic has given rise to deepen concerns regarding air quality. What assurances can the cabinet member for Transport give that the air quality will be measured and what action taken if results show dangerous levels.

Councillor B Little

Thank you Councillor Okunade. Thank you Mr Mayor. Yes you mentioned the Tilbury Masterplan which is obviously the proposal going ahead but Tilbury 2 is within consultation period it is a development consent a national strategic area and will have consultations going on and environmental analysis being done on that as it is going forward.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Okunade, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Okunade

I know that Part 6 of the new Masterplan for Tilbury is reconstruction. With the current issue that I mentioned I know you did say that it is Highways England but with the current issues with congestion on the roundabout. The envisaged traffic from Tilbury 2 and the slip road from the tunnel. So I am wondering what additional road building will be considered to deal with additional traffic.

Councillor B Little

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Okunade for your second supplementary. Environmental Impact Assessments will be carried out with Tilbury 2 and with other things that are going around on the area, or possibly others stuff that is going on around in the area, and I believe that will start to generate mitigations for issues that are around and any of these potential developments that are going ahead.

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Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 29 November 2017

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

5 questions were submitted from members of the public.

1. From Mr Byrne to Councillor B Little

Would the Council consider apologising to the residents of Stanford Le Hope for the ongoing issues at the King Street Car Park and the charges imposed on them and commit to a 100% guarantee of reintroducing free car parking by whatever means necessary?

Mayor

Councillor B Little?

Councillor B Little

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Byrne for your question. This is an important matter for the businesses and residents of Stanford-Le-Hope and this Council will apologise for the mistakes. And we do apologise for the mistakes that resulted in the loss of free parking prior to development at the time of the site's disposal. In response to a petition brought by Councillor Piccolo and discussed at our last meeting, the Council agreed unanimously that we should do everything in our power to return a 2hr period of free parking to King Street car park. I cannot give a 100% guarantee that free parking will return, it would be unwise to do so. However what I can guarantee is that we will do what we agreed to do at Council and explore every means possible.

Since our last meeting we have been working with the car park owners. We are expecting plans for the development of the car park to come forward shortly. If those plans are approved by Planning Committee, the Council will at that point aim to secure the return of a 2hr period of free parking at King Street.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor B Little. Mr Bryne, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Bryne

We're not asking for spades in the ground or even investment. It is disaster recovering, you have to commit to buying it and giving it back to its rightful owners.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor B Little?

Councillor B Little

I didn't quite get the question there but I think I got a statement there saying we should get it back? That your original question was a valid question and the response I gave you was about that we're doing all we can currently and we're in conjunction with, talking to the car park owners. I will say, this wasn't this administration's problem, this was created by the previous administration and we're trying to recover from a situation where we're not – we weren't in control at the time. And, to that point, we have got pretty close to a commitment. But I hoped to have an announcement tonight but I couldn't have an announcement tonight so we're very close.

2. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill, you are probably aware that there is waiting period before the first payment of "Universal Credit". In some cases this could mean some people are left without any form of income for at least six weeks. Is there anything the Council can do to help them, especially over the Christmas and New Year holiday?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Perrin and thank you Mr Mayor. A very good question. Obviously, as we heard at the budget, there will be a reduction that no one will last more than five weeks but that is still an excessively long amount of time without any particular money. Certainly as you say, over this Christmas season.

Of course, the Council is not responsible for organising Universal Credit payments but we do work to support claimants through this process. Customer Service staff volunteer at Hubs all receive training on Universal Credit to enable them to signpost and support claimants who are experiencing problems and are not digitally enabled. So they can make the claim if they are not entirely sure how to use the computer. The Council is also offering support via the Financial Inclusion Team to assist claimants in general advice and provisions in budgeting support. This means again to enable people to juggle what money they do have in the right way.

Claimants who do not believe they will have enough money to live on between application and 1st payment are advised to apply for an advance payment from the DWP. This is a payment that will pay a small amount upfront to make sure they are covered until the full amount is paid. We are assisting people with that.

Mayor

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

Mr Perrin

Always, Mr Mayor. Councillor Gledhill, I may be wrong but I doubt any Councillor in this Chamber has ever experienced what it is like to be without money for a prolonged period. Unable to buy food or other daily essentials such as rent or fuel especially if there are children suffering as a consequence. To believe that reducing the wait for the first payment to one week is somehow a step in the right direction and that claimants independents will only have to suffer for five weeks instead of six shows a lack of understanding – *(Mayor asks Mr Perrin to ask his question)*. Councillor Gledhill, will you and the 48 other Councillors take a personal hands on approach to ensure that claimants waiting for a payment of Universal Credit over the Christmas holiday are cared for and not without food and other essentials?

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Perrin for your question. As I said, there is the ability for anyone who is going to be without any money to make the advance payment claim. That is over and above, obviously, the government trying to produce from six weeks to five weeks, I'm sure if you had to wait six weeks rather than five weeks, you're going to be happy about not having to wait quite so long. But, as I say, the Council does run a number of inclusion schemes to make sure people juggle the money they do have. We will refer people to food banks if that's the absolute necessity and we do all we can to support them through this change. There will always be issues when a government changes the way it deals with benefit payments however it is dealt with and whomever it is put in by. But obviously, we do what we can locally to ensure the distress is minimised.

Mr Perrin

Mr Mayor, may I take this opportunity to wish you and all the other Councillors a very happy Christmas and a very prosperous New Year.

Mayor

Thank you Mr Perrin. Same to you.

3. From Mr Fletcher to Councillor Gledhill

Given the current uncertainty over areas like the Culver and Dilkes sites in Belhus and Ockendon, will Councillor Gledhill please reassure us that the demand for new housing will be balanced with the need for local amenities and recreational space?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Fletcher for your question. Whilst there is an undoubtedly a significant need for new housing in the Borough, there is an equally important need to ensure that all new development are of the highest quality and includes spaces for people. So it is not just a space to live, but a space to work and enjoy. All of our local plans indeed have planning policies to ensure this does happen and will continue through the local plan process to ensure that we're not just putting in houses but we're making sure that the infrastructure and the facilities to enable the community to function are there too.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Mr Fletcher, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Fletcher

Thank you Mr Mayor. The South Ockendon forum meets on the 8th of January, assuming that the forum were to extend an invite, would the Councillor be prepared to come in and speak to the forum about these developments?

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Fletcher. The 8th of January is a family occasion for me. One that I cannot attend. But I will ask my Regeneration Cabinet Member to attend, Councillor Coxshall, should he be available. If not, one of us will.

4. From Mr Strange to Councillor Gledhill

In the light of the recent incursions by travellers on to the public parks in Ockendon. Could the portfolio holder tell me if there are any plans to secure Dilkes Park from any further incursions?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Mr Strange for your question. The unauthorised encampments in South Ockendon were at Dilkes Park and Bonnygate Wood happened. We have now put a further 4 concrete metal sleeved bollards to prevent further access at the location. But we have to do is try to give that openness whilst to allow people to come on and off the fields without those who wish to wreck the field going on and off. So we are working on what we can do to ensure that.

There is a wider programme of site hardening; I'm not going to go into which particular sites they are, I don't really wish to tip people off. But it is one of our main stage in the Borough to ensure that these are not happening again. We also don't stop at the physical; the physical is one way of dealing with it. The much better way is legislative and ensuring that there is enough support from the Essex County Traveller Unit and indeed Essex Police, to ensure they use the current legislation to move people on much faster and indeed, to get things like injunctions as we've seen in other Local Authorities in place to stop. I am pleased to say, it is part of the discussions with Essex Police and Essex County Traveller Unit and indeed, all the Leaders across Essex.

Essex Police have now set up a five man unit that will be helping to deal with this issue for an even and right understanding across Essex. So there will be no confusion as to when and when not the police can use their powers to move unauthorised encampments on faster.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Mr Strange, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Strange

Yes Mr Mayor. I understand that Bonnygate Wood has been secured but Dilkes Wood is completely defenceless. There's absolutely nothing to stop anything from driving on there and in fact, all through the summer, cars were parking on there, people were having picnics on there. Do you actually have any plans to secure that area? Because with the amount of traffic, there were actually cars driving straight across it in the summer. It's not just a matter of the travellers and people were having to take the children out the park because of it.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you for your supplementary question. I know Dilkes Wood quite well, I've lived in Ockendon for most of my childhood and

whilst picnics are very, very acceptable on our parks, using it as a through route is definitely not. I will take this up with the Director of Environment and indeed my Portfolio Holder for that area. We will work, not only with the Officers but indeed with the residents to ensure that there is still the openness but without turning it into a car park or a cut one.

5. From Mr Akhigbe to Councillor Watkins

Please let me know how many public remembrance sites are maintained by the Council and how many have not been maintained in the last couple of years. Does the Council have a program of maintenance for these sites?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you for your question. Across the Borough, we have 17 memorial sites which are maintained. I will point out; many of the war memorial sites are maintained by community groups such as the Stanford War Memorial Group who has done an excellent job in the past.

The war memorial at Little Thurrock Rectory – I have a feeling you might know where this is going, was reported to us on Remembrance Sunday by the Leader and Ward Councillors as being unacceptable. That same day, the Director for Environment had also visited the site. By Tuesday, the cleaner for the memorial had been done; it is now back to an acceptable standard. However, this is not enough so in the run up to the remembrance of First World War, war memorial standards will be put in place to ensure all war memorials are at an acceptable standard. This will be working with the Royal British Legion and will include refreshing name plates on them.

Just a little bit of background information, each war memorial is different and unique. Each memorial can have up to three different variants of stone, as each stone is different, obviously, that can cause some problems to cleanliness, especially at the time of installation, depending on how those were installed. A series of test had been carried out on the site at Little Thurrock Rectory to ensure that the work we had carried out on the Tuesday were not going to cause any damage to the site and that's the reason why we carried that out because that was not going to be the case.

Obviously in light of the plan we have got coming forward, I'll ask all memorial groups to get in contact with us because we want to work with you. And I would also like to thank the team who are out and around cleaning the war memorials on a Friday, Saturday, Sunday in the morning and also on the Sunday after the service. Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Mr Akhigbe, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Akhigbe

I'm quite happy with your response. That's good to know, at least you know the number of sites that we do have. I recognise that the Council has no statutory duty to maintain these sites but nevertheless, at the beginning of this meeting, the Mayor paid tributes to the war heroes. And I think it's an important thing for us to continue to do, not in words but in the actions of the Council. So, whilst that is not a particular question, it's more of a please keep doing what you are doing. Thank you so much.

Mayor

Thank you.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor. As I say, the standards plan has been put in place and has been worked on to ensure the higher maintaining standards that we expect are there for next year. We will be working with the Royal British Legion as I say to make sure we get it right and obviously, we want to be working with the war memorial groups out there as well so we can work together on that. Thank you.

Item 12 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 7 questions had been received to the Leader of the Council and 9 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 J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Back in 2016 the Leader of the Council appointed an external company to conduct a review of the Thameside Theatre. Will he give an update on their findings?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

(Councillor Gledhill requested a motion to extend the time limit for Members' questions to ensure all were answered. The Mayor agreed and also put forward the motion to extend the time of the meeting to finish at 10pm. Members voted and the motion was carried to end the meeting at 10pm and ensure all Members questions were answered.)

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. Consultants were appointed to advise on the sustainability and viability of the Thameside. A number of reports have been submitted to the Council to review what is currently provided at the theatre and what can be done to improve its future financial viability. In parallel, work is continuing to look at options for theatre provision in Grays in the context of the wider Masterplan. The commitment remains to a theatre provision continuing in Grays to support the local community. We are looking to bring forward an initial document to the Cabinet next year and then onto Overview and Scrutiny before making any final decision.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor J Kent, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

Mr Mayor, that just did not answer my question. I begin to wonder what the secrecy is around this. Back in January, when the Leader of the Council put out a press release saying it appointed these consultants, I asked the Chief Executive what the brief was that had been given to the consultants when the decision to appoint the consultants to carry out the work that was made, when it might report, how much it was costing. The Chief Executive refused to tell me that. I'll ask the Leader – who are the consultants, when is the brief, when will they report?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. I do actually have their names here somewhere. Sorry, I don't have their names here somewhere. I believe one of their names are Charcoal Blue, I cannot remember off the top of my head the second one, I'm more than happy to supply that to Councillor Kent.

I'm really quite concerned, when it comes to trying to find a conspiracy; Councillor Kent seems to be way, way up there with some other Members here. There's no secrecy about this, we couldn't be more open. The whole point of reviewing what's happening at the Thameside is: 1) ensure that as we move forward as a modern Local Authority, that all of our provision, whether it be entertainment and indeed, factual or actual from the Council, is fit for purpose. And that's exactly what these consultants have come forward with.

The last thing I really want to do is to rush out with a new decision and say, 'Right, we're going to throw x amount of money at this', and it not working like we seen in the previous administration. Indeed that Leader do repeatedly. I want to make sure that all our responses and what we do and how we spend council tax payers' money is accurate and actually deliver something that's fit for purpose.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor J Kent, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

I don't think it's a conspiracy theory Mr Mayor, when I ask the Chief Executive in January for this information and was refused it. That, to me, looks like a culture of secrecy. Does the Leader recall that I met him face to face in January and asked him if he would provide me with that information? That he undertook to do so and still hasn't.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your supplementary. In that case, I'll be brutally honest with you. I had assumed it had been passed over to you after your request and our face to face meeting. Hence, I'm wondering where you get this idea of a secret society trying to keep everything from you. But the reality still remains; everybody knows we're reviewing the Thameside provision. Councillor

Snell and I sat on the original team that started to look at this in 2015 I think, and we realised then that there was a great deal to do to bring that particular part of the Thameside and indeed along with the rest of it, into the modern world. Quite frankly, that's a simple outline of it. If you want the downright specifics, I'm more than happy to supply them and will ensure commercial confidentiality rules that they are provided as soon as possible.

2. From Councillor B Rice to Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill will you support a cross party working group to investigate with officers and residents how we could raise funds to both purchase equipment for our recreational areas and maintain it thereafter?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Rice for your fantastic question. As we've heard already from Councillor Watkins, the Council is already progressing the improvement programme for our open parks and spaces. Officers have been reviewing the approach and developing a methodology for prioritising investments in the park and open spaces based on the following criteria:

- quality and value findings – the active place parks and open spaces,
- parks and open spaces public consultation,
- residents survey,
- health data,
- known operational requirements and issues including the problems of vandalism and anti-social behaviour as we heard from Councillor Jones earlier,
- health and safety,
- physical activity in adults and
- deprivation.

Capital funding to the tune of £1.35 million has been provided to support the delivery of this programme over the next three years. However, I couldn't think of anything worse than actually trying to sort out play equipment using those very dull and uninteresting terms. Play equipment should be fun, it shouldn't be something forced on the community. So, as part of that, we will be engaging with the community to try and get active leaders that will help decide what goes in, where it goes in and how the community can help to prevent vandalism. So yes, I will certainly be supporting this call. I think it's a fantastic thing to do, we need to improve the parks and open spaces to get our children out and in a safe environment and make sure that the place for Thurrock is exactly that. Not just a place where they live, but a place where they can work and play actively.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor B Rice, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

Yes please. The reason I ask this question, Councillor Gledhill, is because many of our residents actually do want to take it on board to raise funds and to start to be part of caring for their environment. And I think it's really important that we take this opportunity when they've come out to us to engage with them. Hence, my question is not a trick, it's not anything else, it's a straightforward question that I would like to work with all Members to set up a group to start to engage our residents and some are engaged. So I want the blessing of this Chamber to go forward and start to do that and explore ways.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Rice. I know it's never a trick question with yourself, it's always as it appears. It does so what it says on the agenda. It's actually fantastic, our residents want to raise funds to improve their area. I think we can all think back to a time where whatever it was, the Council will pay for it, the Council will pay for it, the Council will pay for it. Actually, you're quite right, the residents agree across the Borough that are making friends in certain names of parks which are really working well. And when people put their own money into it, there is that ownership as well. It's not just their own money, but their time and effort that ensure that what goes in is the right thing. When we redid the park in Little Thurrock Rectory a number of years ago, I was expecting half a dozen of slides, some swings, a roundabout maybe. I think the swings are still there, the slides have been repaired, there's no such thing as a roundabout anymore, there's so much more fun stuff and that's what the children want. So engaging with the residents and getting what they want in there is the right thing to do and as I said, I will support it and I'm sure so will the other Members in this Chamber will do so.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor B Rice, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

A very quick one please Mr Mayor. I just would also like to ask Councillor Gledhill if he would join with me in making sure that the bureaucracy isn't so grey and that we can't get through the red tape. Basically around insurances, health and safety etc. When we do form this group and start to purchase equipment. Thanks.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. To be brutally honest, the only red tape I want to see is on the front of that park. You cutting that tape to make sure people can get on there as fast as possible.

3. From Councillor Smith to Councillor Gledhill

Is disrepair in council homes a factor in the appearance of black mould which is, as we know, a contributing factor to breathing difficulties experienced by many children in Thurrock?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Smith for your question. Short answer is yes but only in part. There are a number of factors that aid the growth of black mould in a property. The World Health Organisation made clear in their 2009 report that the cause is excessive moisture in the air from a number of potential sources. They are such things as:

- leaky pipes;
- rising damp;
- water ingressment;
- leaky roof, windows;
- blocked guttering or drainage; and finally,
- condensation.

This is where excess moisture in the air forms water droplets which help the mould in the air to grow on surfaces. Whilst there is no definitive list of where this comes from, actions such as boiling water, cooking, bathing or showering, drying clothes inside, heated aquariums and of course, breathing in and out but only where there is insufficient ventilation to cope with the amount of moisture being produced. This applies to the work, the home or indeed, the school.

NHS website states that babies, children, elderly, those with existing skin conditions such as eczema, those with respiratory problems such as allergies and asthma, those with weak immune systems are more susceptible. So yes, whilst disrepair is one of the factors in the cause of the black mould, it cannot be taken into isolation. Equally, other groups and vulnerable people as well as the young are susceptible to the problems of black mould.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Smith, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Smith

Yes, sure. Regardless of the source of the black mould and these issues, we have a duty to these children. Could you confirm for me, that Council do everything, regardless of the source, to eradicate and put these problems away? And have there been improvements in these areas over the past 12 months?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Smith for your supplementary question. Yes there has been improvement across there. When I first took the portfolio shortly afterwards, we moved the way that we deal with damp mould in residents' properties. We now ensure, especially surveys done, rather than just going along and slapping some paint on there, the treatments on minor works are done so things like triple vents are put in and make sure that where major works are required that are done and where they are not required, that it's explained to residents how to operate these factors to decrease the amount of moisture in the air. As I say, where there are works that need to be done, they will be done in line with the major works programme and then ultimately, to advise the tenants to help reduce and prevent some condensation that happens because that is one of the major causes of damp and mould. So it's not just about the fabric of the building, it's about how they are occupied and what we do inside them.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Smith, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Smith

Yes. So, when we come back to Council in November 2018 and I come back to this question again, can I expect further improvements?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Hopefully, in November next year, if I'm still Leader and I'm still here, you're still here and asking the same question, yes I would love to be saying, 'yes there is a massive improvement.' Obviously, every single property that we go to and we get it right and we get it right first time, that makes it an improvement. We do have the outcomes of

the Stock Condition Survey, not going to go into them right now because they're at the preliminary stage.

I'm surprised at how low the amount of damp and mould issues actually are compared to what we get as Councillors in the form of complaints. But we will be using that to work out how best to put the resources in to ensure that everybody's getting a good service when it comes to clearing up these problems of black mould and the associated problems that that causes.

4. From Councillor Collins to Councillor Gledhill

Could the Leader outline the rules affecting Officers and Members on the extent of their party political activities?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Collins. The answer for this is very quite long and I won't say uninteresting, obviously interesting for those involved. Basically, there are significant amount of guidance in relation for Officers involved in political activities. A lot of this revolves around those in politically restricted posts and the Local Government Officers (Political Restrictions) Regulations 1990 the Council is under a duty to draw up a list of politically restricted posts to ensure political neutrality; and to prevent advice and decisions from being made improperly or influenced by separate loyalties.

The Officers of the Council owe a duty both legally and in managerial terms both to the Council and to Corporate bodies as a whole to ensure they give a fair and equal service to everyone irrespective of their own political thoughts.

When it comes to elected Members, there are no restrictions on political activities, surprisingly enough, of elected councillors beyond those within the general framework of acting within the local Code of Conduct for Members and discharging their official duties. We'll get a very long and uninteresting lecture on this when we first become elected Members. We get very interesting updates, sorry, when the law changes but basically, these have remained very similar for the past five or six years.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Collins, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Collins

I do Mr Mayor, thank you very much. Councillor Gledhill, unfortunately, my original question prepared, to what we see down here tonight, it would be difficult and a

follow on question. But do you feel, it is right, that when elected Members on whatever level, share platforms with extremists or help support those who take part in terror activities, that action should be taken against them?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Unfortunately, well say fortunately, unfortunately, when the Standards Board for England was disbanded, the sanction of removing someone from Office went with it. I do personally believe that these kind of activities, should be made public, invariably they are made public. Should action be taken against them? Unfortunately, now that's just solely down to the individual group for political parties but I'm sure all political parties act accordingly and would take the right actions in those circumstances.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Collins, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Collins

I do Mr Mayor. I too, like Councillor Snell, saw the reports in the Daily Mail about giving former terrorists and jihadists preference on the council housing list among other things. Would you say this would be sharing a platform against those who do not have the UK interests at heart?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank Councillor Collins for your supplementary. I will be supporting Councillor Snell's motion just to make that very clear from the start. Obviously, the report in the Daily Mail was a report in the Daily Mail. Do I think that supporting jihadists and people working against us, not really my place to say. But, as I say, I will be supporting that motion and hopefully, everyone else in this Chamber will do.

5. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Will the leader give us an update on discussions about a devolution deal for South Essex?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. I am not entirely sure to what Councillor Kent is referring as there's been no discussion about any devolution deal for South Essex. However, one of my first actions as Leader in May 2016 was to attend a debate at Essex Leaders Forum which involved a proposed elected Mayor model for a devolution deal across the whole of Essex. The outcome of the vote was that the majority of the Essex Councils rejected it and that was by one vote. That includes my vote so it's just as well I had turned up there since had I not, we would be looking at a devolution deal across Essex with an elected Mayor, something that I personally could not stomach.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor J Kent, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

Mr Mayor, it has been the policy of this Council, I thought, across administrations that we wanted to work more closely with authorities along the Thames Gateway South Essex area rather than working across the whole of Essex. Our travel to work area, our geographical locality along South Essex makes more sense. Is the Leader suggesting that that is no longer the case?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. That couldn't be further from the truth. Since approximately July 2017, I've been in discussions with colleagues across South Essex on work in the South in South Essex Vision 2050. A strategy that's along the Thames Corridor, one that makes economic sense for all of us. This is not a devolution deal, a city deal, a merger, a takeover bid or any other version or a form of arrangement that would take decision making away from the individual authorities. It is solely about ensuring that we are working collaboratively across those lines on the map that sometimes act as hurdles to progress.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor J Kent, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

Yes. I'm grateful for that and I think that gives a lot of comfort. I think one of the difficulties that we will have is that we haven't been given updates on the devolution, locality, whatever we want to call it, since Councillor Gledhill became Leader of the Council and I would ask that there are more regular updates so that we actually know what's going on. Clearly, one of the big issues here is about the pooling of business rates. We read in the local press that there was an attempt made to put Thurrock in a pool with the whole of Essex, something that would have really been financially damaging to this authority. Can the Leader just give us an assurance that that is now dead and give us an update on where we are with pooling the business rates.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. You're quite right, we've always said we want to work locally with our South Essex colleagues and not with Essex as a whole. The plan that was put forward by Essex, we did withdraw from that as soon as I found out that was being suggested that we were going to take part in it. Quite frankly, that deal isn't its deal. It is a dead deal, it isn't going to happen.

Where we are with pooling rates, we are looking to extend the pool from the following financial year to ensure we get to keep more of our business rates just to make sure that the pilot that has been suggested and supported by Essex County Council may have seen 100% of the business rates across the whole of Essex being brought in. Unfortunately, there is no detail at all as to what extra responsibilities or indeed what extra grants we would lose, so you're quite right to point out that probably would have been somewhat detrimental to us in Thurrock. Nobody wants to see a return to a pre-98 even though I wasn't a Councillor, we still lived here, we still experienced the problems. Thank you Mr Mayor.

6. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

What work has been done by the council to understand the potential impact of Universal Credit on Thurrock residents?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish. Universal Credit went live for new claimants on the 25th October 2017. According to DWP there have been 134 new claimants since that time. We have contacted them to offer support and advice from our financial inclusion officers.

We have set up a fast track APA (alternative Payment Arrangements) with DWP to support vulnerable clients so the rent comes direct to the rent account. Once Universal Credit is in payment we will be encouraging tenants to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments if they have any shortfall in their housing costs.

Personal budgeting support is being made available to tenants via the financial inclusion officers. We will be encouraging claimants to request an advanced payment to help in any delay of the first payment of Universal Credit.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thurrock food banks have sounded the alarm on the impact that Universal Credit might have on some of our poorest and most vulnerable residents. Does the Leader share their concern on the impact that Universal Credit might have?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish for your question. There have been many organisations indeed. Members of the press have sounded the alarm on a number of different issues on Universal Credit, some of them in which I share and some of them maybe hyped indeed as I saw at the weekend. One of the journalist apologising saying actually what he put forward was perhaps a bit too harsh, slightly skewed what was happening. I do share some of the concerns as said, we do need to ensure that people do have enough food to feed themselves. There are statutory requirements for them to pay debts, that's why we got our financial inclusion officers helping them out to make sure what money they have go further and that they can get the money in as soon as possible to ensure they themselves do not go hungry or lose their homes.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. I think one of the issues here is that when we talk about juggling the money they have, one of the issues here for these residents is that they

simply don't have any money to juggle. One of the things that neighbouring Basildon is considering, is a scheme run by the Council that leaves hardship residents who are out of pocket while they are waiting for Universal Credit. Is the Leader considering, or could consider any scheme here to help our residents in a similar way?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish for your question. As I say, the advanced payment system that's already in place should be the default situation where residents are in a particular circumstance where they need money now and won't have to apply for Universal Credit and we are supporting that. If you feel there is something specific from another local authority that may help, please feel free to pass it on to myself or indeed, Councillor Hebb who is absent this evening to see if it something that we could implement. But of course, what people must remember is that this is not a gift to people, at most, it would be a loan to get them through that first hurdle so would need to be paid back. Thank you.

7. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

As the Lower Thames Crossing saga continues, is the Leader satisfied with the approach and performance of Highways England?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish. Short answer is no. No I'm not. As you know, all three group leaders met with Highways England earlier this year and set out expectations that were agreed by them. This included a week's notice about any letters or communication that would be sent out to our residents, details of consultation including documents that would be provided in advance and so on. However, since that meeting, I've been made aware a couple of times that meetings have taken place on very odd subjects including robo-technology and how the Lower Thames Crossing will improve this industry plus other meetings with business stake holders. Again, first I found out of that was a general invite to everybody. I know that my Deputy Leader attended the meeting in my stead with yourself and Councillor Snell, it was agreed that if this kind of approach continued, we will write to the Secretary of State to outline our concerns again. As you know, a letter setting out concerns of the Council has been sent about the approach former to Highways England on the Lower Thames Crossing that was signed by all three group leaders and indeed, the Chair of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force on Monday 20th November. I do look forward to the response on that one.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. I think first of all, I would just associate myself with the remarks made by Councillor Gledhill on the performance of Highways England and I'm sure all Members in this Chamber would agree with the principle that actually they need to be much better in terms of the openness and clarity in the way in which they are working at the moment. Clearly, Mr Mayor, it's important to challenge and question government and government agencies on their approach and views on the Lower Thames Crossing. Can the Leader tell us what is said to challenge Michael Gove who said during his recent visit, the new Thames Crossing would be good for Thurrock?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish. Obviously, just to reiterate, everything that happens on Lower Thames Crossing, affects Thurrock the most. It doesn't affect the Kent County Council or the Kent authorities or indeed any of the other Essex authorities. So, you would have thought Highways England would be putting in an awful lot more resources and information and actually working with us downside closer than they are indeed, with other local authorities. As to what Mr Gove said when he was here, at the time he made that statement, I wasn't within earshot so I couldn't have responded.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. I just wonder if the Leader will undertake to take up correspondence with Mr Gove to put him right. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish. I don't know why I should stop at Mr Gove, I will be taking it up. Obviously, right across the board, everybody

knows what we feel as a united group in this Chamber and indeed, outside of this Chamber, we indeed as well. This is just a disaster that has been thrust upon us and it's not about managing it out, it's about managing it not to happen.

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

1. From Councillor Allen to Councillor B Little

Does Council accept the problem of vehicles parking on footpaths and pavements has become a serious issue here in our Borough?

Mayor

Councillor B Little?

Councillor B Little

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Allen for your question. The Council are aware that parking on the pavements and obstruction to the footways is an ongoing issue. Parking restrictions are regularly considered and investigated, also though, we have to be conscious that sterilising parking provision could push parking into further surrounding roads.

The parking demand from local residents in some locations vastly exceeds on-street provision, in particular properties that were built at the beginning of the last century, where road width is such that if residents do not mount the kerb, then they park on the street. They would obstruct traffic movement if that was the case.

Officers continue to consider options on a localised basis and enforce in areas that have yellow lines and Traffic Regulation Orders in place. Otherwise enforcement of pavement parking lies with Essex Police; under obstruction legislation.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor B Little. Councillor Allen, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Allen

If I may. Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Little. I'm not sure whether you are aware that since 1883, it has been illegal to drive on the pavement under section 72 of the Highways Act 1835, it's in our current highway code. Can I ask you, Councillor Little, to keep me informed of any further action on this matter so I can keep my residents in the know regarding Council's actions in supporting this very problem of pavement parking?

Mayor

Councillor B Little?

Councillor B Little

I will keep Councillor Allen informed on anything that we are doing but I would also ask him if there are specific areas that he would like to be looked at that we haven't looked at previously. If you would let me know, I will look at that as well. But, it is an issue and it's not going to go away. I'm appreciating the fact that we are generally growing this problem, it's not reducing. Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor B Little. Councillor Allen, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Allen

Yes please Mr Mayor and thank you for your reply with that Councillor Little. I'm aware that the law surrounding pavement parking is a complete grey area in the UK. But, in London, where the rules are with the Highway Code stating that drivers must not do so. The rule 244 of the Highway Code again states, 'you must not park partially or wholly on the pavement in London' and you should not do so elsewhere unless signs permit. Now, is it possible, that we can, in problem areas where we are facing this pavement parking, can we look into implementing such things, in all 32 boroughs in London that currently do?

Mayor

Councillor B Little?

Councillor B Little

We can look at things obviously. The Highway Code is not the law and one of the other parts of this is that people, at the moment, parking on pavement, causing an obstruction, should be able to be penalised by the police. And that's not happening very well and I have had some discussions about how we can start to look at our enforcement officers with police officers starting to go round and doing things. I think that is probably a more pragmatic approach than trying to put legislation in that we haven't got.

London is a separate entity in terms of Transport for London and how they manage to do things. For instance, I tried to get a yellow box junction on junction 31 and I put the last yellow lines on there and I want to enforce it but I can't because I don't have the powers to within Thurrock. So there are issues round what we can do and what we can't do. I take your points on board and it's something that we are working on. Thank you very much.

2. From Councillor B Rice to Councillor Watkins

As part of the clean-up promised by Councillor Gledhill, will you give a commitment to undertaking a full assessment of all the waste bins situated in our wards to see if we have adequate numbers and that they are where they have the most impact?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. I like this question because I get to talk about the public street bin review. You probably all remember that in July when I waffled on, don't worry, not again. My report has actually already gone to Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny which was in October which was outlining the public street bin review.

As outlined in this review, we will be commencing to main stages. Stage one has actually already been completed which is looking at the current location of every single bin, condition of every bin, the types of bin we have. Also how much rubbish has been accumulated next to and around them and how many times they have been emptied.

Stage two, we would be looking at what new bins we could purchase to replace the old, damaged stock, we got much of that in the Borough. What types we would need and also we'll look more at what dual purpose bins as well. As we've already shown with the ongoing Big Belly Bin pilot, if we need to invest in something, we will invest in order to get the better ones out for our residents.

I have obviously highlighted in this, we would working closely with Street Services to kind of work out what the best types of bins will be. Those are the teams who are cleaning out and emptying the bins out every single day so want their input and expert advice on what we believe will be the best ones for the Borough. And yes, we will also be looking at the current locations, if they are in the location or if they need to be moved.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor B Rice, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

Yes please, thank you. Of course, it's very welcome that we are having a review of our bins and sooner rather than later because it appears bins are in a very, very poor state. A lot of them are rusted and I noticed in the foyer by the lifts, the battery bin's been overflowing for weeks, we need to get that sorted out. Batteries are on the floor in there, it doesn't give a very good impression when people come in.

Apart from that, the other thing I was going to ask the Portfolio Holder is, on our sports playing field, when we give – I've got two nice new bins, thank you very much, the Officers who has put them there on Orsett Heath. The Heath is looking in general, very nice especially with the park run. And the park run actually clean up their rubbish afterwards.

However, some of the football teams don't and I just wondered what we put in place for our football teams when they use our pitches? Is there something where we can say, 'you must clean up after you'. Otherwise, it's penny pounds foolish because we're getting money coming in for the pitches but we're having to clean up after them. So welcome an answer.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor. I've had two Councillors comment now about Clean It, Cut It, Fill It so thank you very much for that. And I'm glad you can also see the investment we are making is making a good difference to the Orsett Heath. Also, again thank you for informing us and being grateful for the bins on the site. Basically, there is an expectation for teams that do rent out spaces to clean up after themselves. Again, if you've got individual cases, let me know, we'll make sure we do something about it.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor B Rice, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

No.

3. From Councillor Spillman to Councillor Halden

Is the Children Service's aftercare team fit for purpose?

Mayor

Councillor Halden?

Councillor Halden

Thank you Mr Mayor. Obviously, as statutory service, it undergoes a number of investigations. No parts of the service are in special measures so by definition, yes it is a fit for purpose service. Obviously, the majority of cases this department sees tend to be some of the individuals in some of the most desperate circumstances. So of course, it is one of those departments that is under the most pressure and is facing some of the most tragic circumstance. So, yes it is a fit for purpose department but be under no illusion, it is not an easy to run department, I'm assuming you have somewhere to go with your supplementary.

Mayor

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

Councillor Spillman

The Portfolio Holder must understand how many individual failings must have occurred for people supposedly under the supervision of the aftercare team who are under council properties to be falling under massive rent arrears facing warrants of eviction that I have to intervene in without any action being taken, any meaningful action being taken by Children's Services. And without any meaningful communication being had with the rent department and the benefits department. Can the Portfolio Holder please assure me that I won't be seeing any more cases of care leavers that have been placed in council accommodation as a transfer from care to independent living coming through my door with massive rent arrears that just haven't been picked up due to failings of supervision in the aftercare team. Thank you very much.

Mayor

Councillor Halden?

Councillor Halden

Thank you Mr Mayor. Ok, the question is in two parts. Clearly, the social care team's job is to administer good social care for children, it is not to try and provide budget housing advice because they are not the experts. Equally, it is the housing department's job to provide housing advice and not to try and administer social care, they are not the experts. And there should be a very, very clear line of demarcation, in fact, a statutory line of demarcation, the incidences that Councillor Spillman is referring to.

If an individual comes into the council service and they are being seen by the social care team and it is obvious that they are falling behind in their rent payments, that they may be perhaps housed in inadequate premises. And if they are then only seen by the social care department and a referral isn't made to the housing team, then clearly, that is wrong and it is not acceptable. We have got all the skills in this building to administer these different services and we need to see people when they come through our front door as a whole person. They don't come through the front door as a social care case or a housing case. They come through as a whole person and the Council needs to see them as a whole person.

I know I've had conversations with the Director of Children's Services and he's looking at the type of joint resource that we put in place which will be the Child's Social Care Department and the Housing Department and the Aspire Team that does the aftercare service when people leave care which is under my portfolio, hence me answering the question, to make sure that there is that good join up. So while I don't think that the social care team or housing team should be trying to make decisions about each other's department because they are not the experts and that could cause great problems to the family. Clearly, if someone presents themselves

with acute housing issues and the social care team are not making those appropriate referrals, clearly that is not acceptable and it needs to change.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor S Little. Councillor Spillman, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Spillman

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you for that answer, I think the Portfolio Holder understands the problem and what we need to do to improve. One of the most profound things I've noticed is when – I'll come out of it, I'll ask this, what this administration is doing about it? We've got evermore specialist services who are specialising in certain areas and yet there seems to be this ongoing culture of compartmentalisation, where people are just not talking to each other, departments are just not communicating. And not only is it dangerous for people when those departments aren't communicating but it ends up wasting a lot of council money. These inefficiencies, can we please drive home the importance of proper communication and proper cooperation between departments?

Mayor

Councillor Halden?

Councillor Halden

Thank you Mr Mayor. Yes absolutely, the correct communication between departments is vital and as I say, that's why the Director is looking up what joint resource we can put in place between the housing and social care team to make sure the right people get the right advice at the right time.

And in terms of joint up service and you ask what the administration is doing about that, one of the undertakings that I gave and we had the debate over children centres, I said that the reason I wanted a policy of purely building better services is because I wanted a more joint up service between the health and education team to try and push up, the amount of children that we see. That the old social care – the old children's services, Children Centre Scheme, only saw about 75% of eligible people. Well I understand now that we are bordering on the 94% of eligible families in those reach areas are now registered with their children's centre. 94%, so that is what this administration is doing.

We're trying to push past old outdated systems, fewer buildings, better service, making sure that the people who need support are actually registered with the right services. Because as you say yourself Councillor, if a family actually has to look at severe housing changes to make sure they can look after their child, there's no way we should be making decisions that could possibly push up their rent arrears.

We need to be intervening faster and it's schemes like this, 94% of eligible families register with their children's centre making the Council more connected and the key

to doing that is making sure we see somebody as a whole person and not just as a social care case or a housing case. And that's the undertaking I can give you.

4. From Councillor Spillman to Councillor S Little

Would the portfolio holder agree that only offering accommodation to the children of homeless families, where no homeless duty is owed to the family and no other welfare issues are of concern, would be inhumane, unethical and potentially place children at threat of serious harm?

Mayor

Councillor S Little?

Councillor S Little

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you for your question Councillor Spillman. That's actually incorrect. Children's social care do offer accommodation to families and not just to their children under section 17 of the Children's Act. Duties for families have been found intentionally homeless, we do help. And we have 15 families on our books at present. So that's incorrect, we do help them.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor S Little. Councillor Spillman, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Spillman

I'm afraid there's been an attempted – maybe without your knowledge, there's been an attempted shift of policy from the sort of casework that I have been seeing. I'd just like to ask, can the Portfolio Holder, whether she considers the following acceptable:

- Families told to leave the Council by social services when they've got young children without social services having any idea where these children will sleep that evening.
- Families being told that the only option would be to give their children up if they accept help.
- Families being offered privately rented accommodation in Clacton, Southend, North East of England.
- Parents being told that if they can't find a property, then they risk their children being taken away.
- Families being offered privately rented accommodation by social workers in Southend that aren't remotely affordable due to Children's Services having no knowledge of the local housing allowance.
- Children's Services spending over £10,000 because they didn't realise the family could claim housing benefit when they were paying the rent for them.
- And a family that's already been dumped in Thurrock, now this Christmas face being evicted.

I don't think this is acceptable behaviour and please tell me this Portfolio Holder doesn't either.

Mayor

Councillor S Little?

Councillor S Little

Thank you for your reply, Councillor Spillman. What I'm beginning to get strong overtones for is that this is a specific case that you are talking about or several. Because, I've had 15 families on the books for quite a long time that we've been paying the rent for, supporting them and even offering to pay a month upfront for their deposit etc, to get them on the right road. And some of these people just will not be helped. Now, I'm sorry, I think what's happening is, these people now, was part of the 15, and two of them have now found further accommodation. Now, I know you have been speaking with the Director of Children's Services, but you haven't come – and I haven't had one email from you telling me what specific cases you have. And, I've been supporting quite a lot of these cases for well over a year. So, if you'd like to give me their details and the exact cases, or pick up the phone and say, 'Hi Councillor Little, can we meet up unofficially?' Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor S Little. Councillor Spillman, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Spillman

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Little. Will the Council please give a promise that this administration find the thoughts of losing your children has a means to gatekeep and reduce demand on services to be extremely dangerous, unethical and inhumane? And please explore all means to find a solution to this problem without this shocking, shocking potential policy that is – this change of policy that I'd seen in several cases as part of my casework?

Mayor

Councillor S Little?

Councillor S Little

Thank you Councillor Spillman, I'm glad you're going to take my offer up. No, this is incorrect. I haven't seen any cases where this has happened. So please bring them to me and I will look at them but there has not been a change in policy. Thank you.

5. From Councillor Allen to Councillor Watkins

Councillor Watkins, following our site meeting in Tilbury last month to look at the litter and abandoned cars, could you give me an update on these car parks and could your response also include the unmaintained land that divides Sycamore Close and Albany Road?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. First of all, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to come out and meet with you on site. As eluded tonight, it's one of the best ways to get some action done. And thank you also for bringing it up before coming to Full Council meeting rather than just sitting on it for four weeks and then trying to get action on it afterwards as we see sometimes.

As you may have seen in a recent press release, 20 vehicles were flagged up by the DVLA and we will be ensuring these vehicles will be removed if they are not claimed. Even if they are claimed, all owners are getting fined with £200 each individual car for leaving vehicles in abandoned conditions. We will be monitoring very closely what happens and of course, if we see more abandoned cars. Thank you for your input and if you could continue to give that input to us as well, we will make sure that action again is swiftly followed.

Alongside this, once we had obviously met, the car park had a deep clean, I was there the day it was happening, had another walk around with the team to make sure everything we had discussed was being followed up on. I'm really glad to see that was the case and also, fortnightly, cleaning will be taking place on that. The electric company next to it who obviously have the fenced off area have been reminded of their cleanliness and maintenance. And if we need to, we will take enforcement action which is known as a Community Protection Process.

Again, going back to the areas of private land, whether this has been the case, we are making sure we are informing them of their responsibilities and again will be taking action against those should we need to. Further information as well based on it, I unfortunately have seen to have been across of town, shops were checked for their trade waste, documents which I'm glad to see most of them had. We're keeping a close eye on the commercial business around to ensure trade waste bins are in their designated areas and are maintaining their cleanliness standards which are expected and are using the land as they should be following on from obviously, what we saw that day. Along with this, as I've said, we've already had our enforcement officers.

After investigation again, of the bigger piece of land we saw, again, had a long site visit, saw some unfortunately, horrible stuff on that site as well, had to be very careful where we were all walking. We are making sure that the land owners again, are completely responsible for their actions and again, enforcement action will be taken. But please, continue doing what you've done and again, good work. Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor Allen, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Allen

If I may, thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Watkins for the update. First of all, I'd like to thank the officers enforcing the abandoned cars and I would appreciate that if the Portfolio Holder can assure Members that further and ongoing investigations will continue in regards to these two locations, thus keeping these two areas clear of both rubbish and abandoned cars. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor for your supplementary. I can inform that, obviously, in recent months, we were given more responsibilities and powers to go off on untaxed vehicles so that forms into part of the enforcement action that we do follow up on those sites as well. But 100%, we're doing that and we're doing that across the Borough as well.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor Allen, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Allen

Thank you and I will keep you informed Councillor Watkins. Thank you.

6. From Councillor Snell to Councillor Hebb

The Money Advice Trust, as part of their Stop The Knock Campaign highlighting the trend in increased use of bailiffs by local authorities, recently sent in a FOI request for information about the use of Bailiffs by this Council. Unlike most neighbouring Councils, Thurrock did not respond. Can the Portfolio Holder explain why?

(Councillor Hebb was not present to answer this question so the question would be deferred to the next Full Council meeting).

7. From Councillor Collins to Councillor Watkins

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm what is being done to improve recycling in Thurrock please?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. Obviously, it's environment night tonight. As I stated in my annual report this evening, we have been hard at work cleaning this Borough up, bringing it back from the neglect and mismanagement we saw under the six years of Labour. One of the priority areas is recycling, it's something we would be really looking into in 2018. One of the things that I wanted to mention is something of my recent investigations. Recycling rates have seen the biggest dip between 2013 – 14 to 2015 – 16, we went from 42% to 37% which was again, under the former administration and then looking at the annual reports and then hoping to do one better tonight because it seems to be on two separate reports. The only line is, we need to improve communication.

For those who don't know, we have to reach 50% target by 2020 and as I've already alluded to, this is something that I really want us to make headway on in 2018. Also for the fact is, it does use taxpayers' money due to increase in disposal costs. There are few quick wins we will be undertaking for the remainder of 2017. We will have a WEE amnesty over Christmas to ensure small electrical items are disposed of quickly and correctly. Additional clear recycling bags will be available for residents across the Borough in areas such as libraries so we will be allowing side waste of recycling across the Christmas period. And we will also be instigating greater communication over the social media channels to try and again encourage recycling. But also safety as well which is obviously key at Christmas time with people leaving boxes out, obviously, it can show people what they've had.

However, this is not enough. A project group has been set up with research being carried out over the last few months so we can go deeper and produce more direct messages to areas we see the worst recycling rates in. This communication will be going live from January and it will be a communication plan which will also continue to evolve. Last week, myself and Director in Communications met to go over a lot of new ideas we will be instigating again in 2018. A little too early to be mentioning those tonight, it will be coming back, please do ask me. I think there will be some very great ideas where we will be working with all members of society including Children for Education.

In regards to that as well, the 28 new waste vehicles will each be individually named by schools of our Borough so we will be actively working with the schools doing some photos, encouraging early education about recycling, about obviously, putting litters in the bin and obviously will be fed back to the parents. There is more to do to get recycling rates up, it is a main priority of 2018 and I welcome what we will do.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor Collins, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Collins

I do Mr Mayor, I'm afraid to ask. Can you very quickly give us more information on the developments of Linford Waste Site? It was touched upon in O & S.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor. In response to the Council over there, you already asked me a question about the Portfolio Holder report anyway so I think it's only fair if other Councillors have got questions that should be heard.

Obviously, as I've already alluded to tonight, there will be a series of changes hopefully going forward with the Linford site to improve access, accessibility for the residents and to stop trade waste abuse. We obviously procured the site in June of this year and a survey took place to see what was going on and we saw multiple times, trade waste abuse.

This is actually really important, you can laugh it off Councillor Rice but this costs the Council a lot of money, taxpayers a lot of money, people abusing this site. So this is something we are putting a stop to. There will be a permit system in place so vans and lorries can only access the site 12 times per year and they have to be residents of this Borough as well. If not, they will be turned away. As I say, this is coming to Cabinet in December, it will go to Planning for approval, to get their views and thoughts. Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor Collins, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Collins

No.

8. From Councillor V Holloway to Councillor Huelin

Why have volunteers in Purfleet hub been told the hub can only open and operate when paid staff are present?

Mayor

Councillor Huelin?

Councillor Huelin

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. Not actually sure where you got this information from, it's not correct. They haven't been told that volunteers can open and operate a hub without paid staff being there.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Huelin. Councillor V Holloway, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor V Holloway

Well that's a great response and that's what I want to hear. I was told directly by volunteers themselves who had been stopped on a couple of occasions from opening the hub when they were available. They were told on one day that because no staff member was present, they weren't able to open even though they were there. In following up with Officers, I was told this was because there were people at meetings and they couldn't open the hub and there was no follow up to my question about why volunteers weren't allowed. I just wanted to ask, that bearing in mind that, basically, what is happening, why have they been told this? Are there new rules in place with volunteers? I'm sure Councillors will agree that hubs have been a fantastic success and they're really important to a lot of our communities. The volunteers and I are concerned that the hubs not opening mean that the communities aren't involved in their environments when they should be. Can I ask if you are taking the hubs from volunteers?

Mayor

Councillor Huelin?

Councillor Huelin

Basically, on that particular occasion in question, it wasn't volunteers, it was a volunteer. And unfortunately, it's fantastic that she or he, I don't know which, wanted to volunteer but there wasn't any available staff that day and there wasn't another volunteer to go with them. Now we have a duty of care and health and safety to protect members of the public as well as staff. We can't have one volunteer opening a public building on their own, it's not safe to do so which why they were unfortunately, turned down that day. But when there are volunteers and what we are doing to make sure we get more volunteers is that we're in the process of recruiting a volunteer co-ordinator. That way, we can help to grow the number of volunteers and make sure that we can open more often.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Huelin. Councillor V Holloway, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor V Holloway

Thank you. I am concerned obviously, that there is misinformation and I am minded to believe, obviously our volunteers who came to me who were quite distressed even though we had different versions of what happened in that instance. Volunteers are obviously key to our hubs and staff aren't, shouldn't be essential to their running.

Can you promise our Officers are upholding the principle of the hub for communities, run by communities for the community?

Mayor

Councillor Huelin?

Councillor Huelin

I kind of thought I did when I said volunteers can open a hub without paid staff being present but if you feel that's not happening, then by all means, I'm happy to meet with volunteers, we'll talk with Officers, we'll make sure that is definitely in place. But I've been reassured by all Officers, Directors that it can open, but with volunteers, not volunteer.

9. From Councillor Redsell to Councillor Watkins

It was great to see officers cleaning around the war memorial at Little Thurrock just before the service. The memorial itself was still in need of a clean, can the cabinet member explain why it was not cleaned before Armistice Sunday and who organised the clean up after?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. Firstly I would like to thank you for your kind comments about cleanness and I will make sure they are passed on to the team who took great pride in making sure that it was cleaned around Armistice Day. I am not going to go into details that we have already eluded them already this evening but I can confirm that it was Councillor Gledhill who made the initial approach on Armistice Sunday to make sure that the memorial was inspected on the same day and it was him that ensured that the clean-up was followed on and standard plans are in place for next year.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor Redsell, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Redsell

Thank you Mr Mayor, I have read with disgust that other political parties have tried to grab headlines and take credit for works that from what you see, or what you say, were justifiable delay and something that the leader took immediate action on. It was good to see the editor of Thurrock independent newspaper not only attended Turps Corner ceremony but to make clear the

difficult circumstances in relation to this particular memorial and promote the action to be taken over the next year to bring each and every war memorial up to scratch. Can the Portfolio Holder tell me when any other enquiry was made about this memorial.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, other than the one obviously made by Councillor Gledhill on the Sunday I do believe the only other reported enquiry was on Tuesday by then tests had already been completed on the memorial site and the clean-up had already begun and all most finished.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor Redsell, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Redsell

Thank you Mr Mayor, I don't want to score any cheap political points, that aside, can you outline any other memorials that had had works already to improve them since the Leader's announcement.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor for your supplementary. Very quickly I can confirm that the Council will be picking up the costs of the new flagstone at the bottom of the memorial site.

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