

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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1. From Mr Atkins to Councillor Halden

Could the Portfolio Holder for Education and Health tell me how many children are currently waiting for a school place via the SEN department please?

2. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Collins

The Council recently submitted two complaints to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), about the Editor of a Local Newspaper. Was there any financial cost to the public, if yes, how much?

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Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 31 October 2018

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

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Could the Portfolio Holder for Education and Health tell me how many children are currently waiting for a school place via the SEN department please?

Mayor:

Councillor Halden.

Councillor Halden:

Thank you Madam Mayor, thank you Mr Atkins.

As of the start of this year, there were 1331 of the Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) held by the Council. When I checked last week, out of the 1331, there are 5 children who have plans but do not currently have a school place. That's the equivalent of about 0.5%. Out of these five individuals, three of these children are currently receiving home tuition and there are consultations with all three to make arrangements with a special school for a placement. The fourth child was previously home educated, however, this has been deemed unsuitable and there is a consultation in place with a mainstream school to seek a placement. And finally, the fifth child, who moved into Thurrock at the end of April 2018, there is ongoing work to ensure the EHCP reflects input of all professionals in the decision making process. So out of the five of almost 1400, it's a combination of errors where we still have to do that little bit of extra work to go the final mile to get a child a place. And also, to develop a balance to the wishes of the parents in terms of what support they may wish to have in the home setting.

Mayor:

Mr Atkins, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Mr Atkins:

With parents having to stay at home to look after their children because the SEN department can't allocate them a school place, some are falling behind their rent and other bills due to leaving work to look after their children. As a Portfolio Holder, could you look into these cases as a matter of urgency please?

Mayor:

Councillor Halden.

Councillor Halden:

Thank you Madam Mayor. Certainly, any parent who writes to me, I'm always happy to look into their case with my Officers. It gives me the opportunity to give a brief update in terms of what we're doing with our SEN department.

Over the last 2 and a half years, we've worked very hard to strengthen the SEN departments for all children with special educational needs and disabilities. One of the challenges that we've got in Thurrock is despite how talented and hardworking our team is, we've got two Outstanding rated special needs school that attracts a huge amount of parents here who believe that by moving to Thurrock, they'll get access to one of these schools.

The result is, an over demand for a lack of supply. So, we do not have a surplus of these places. However, quite a few of these parents do move here believing that we do. We've done a huge amount to try and address the level of demand we're experiencing. We've expanded the size of the SEND team, we've hosted a Peer review and an inclusion conference to look at how we can work more efficiently. And of course, we're investing £20 million to build a brand new special needs school.

However, we need to be aware of the fact, Council can make mistakes and we don't always move in the most efficient or always the quickest manner. We need to understand what the criticism is from some parents and how we can address it. There are issues in the system, parents do expect us to act and it isn't always good enough and I get that.

To this end, I'm announcing a series of engagement events will take place over the next few months as we review our wider performance of how we process, formulate and action SEND plans. Obviously, we're going to talk to schools as part of this engagement process as we do through regular SEND consultations but what's vital for me is that we hear the voices of parents, who on the vast majority of occasions are saved by the machine but on a few rare occasions where the machine lets them down. That's why I will be hosting a series of events to parents to come forward and give their honest thoughts and impressions what it's like to work with Thurrock Council and the wider system. No filters, no Communications officers, just myself, other Senior Cabinet Members and our most Senior Officers.

Face to face with the parents, frank, honest and open. I'm very lucky that we have the Parents Carers Association helping us to organise the events. There will be 3 events across the Borough, different locations, different types of buildings and at different times designed to allow as many people as possible to come forward. It can't be just about listening, we then need to act. One thing that we're blessed with in Thurrock is a very strong relationship with our schools. That's why I've been working very hard over the last few weeks to solicit the support of the post-16 SEND lead of Palmer's College, the Chief Executive of the Treetops Special Needs Trust and the Head of East Tilbury, that is a SEND expert for every age group in receipt of full time education, that's an amazing resource for a panel who will sit down with us and go through some of the complaints we're facing.

We're a listening council, an active council. It will never be job done with SEND because of how complex it is and because of how much demand there is in the system. Services can always be better, I'm always clear about that and we want to work with our parents, work our schools to create that more efficient system.

2. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Collins

The Council recently submitted two complaints to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), about the Editor of a Local Newspaper. Was there any financial cost to the Public, if yes, how much?

Mayor:

Councillor Collins.

Councillor Collins:

Thank you Mr Perrin for your question.

There are no financial costs involved in submitting complaints to the Independent Press Standards Organisation known as IPSO. It is important to note that the complaints submitted by the Council to IPSO were related to the content of stories published, not complaints about the Editor.

Mayor:

Mr Perrin, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Mr Perrin:

Yes Madam Mayor.

Councillor Collins, I am pleased that there was no cost incurred. However, I am concerned that it appears that the Council is at war with a local press. Councillor Collins, were you and your Cabinet colleagues consulted before the Council decided to submit a complaint to the Independent Press Standards Organisation? Both of which were dismissed. And did the Cabinet agree with that decision? With the benefit of hindsight, would you all agree with me that rather than trying to out-trump President Trump, Council Officers could in future be more circumspect before complaining about the Press? The Press are not nor should they be the Council's propagandist.

Mayor:

Councillor Collins, you wish to respond?

Councillor Collins:

I should point out to you, that as Councillors, we're given strategic guidance but operational running of these departments is the matter of the Officers. And as we've previously stated, the Council continues to engage with all members of the Press and this position's not changed. The issue relates to a decision taken to, under the Council's agreed Unreasonable Behaviour procedure which is in place to deal with unacceptable behaviour by individuals. We have nothing to do – this has nothing to do with freedom of speech, freedom of expression is a fundamental right under British law and international human rights law.

Mayor:

Thank you very much and thank you Mr Perrin.

Item 14 – Questions from Members

QUESTION TIME

Questions from Members to the Leader, Cabinet Members, Chairs of Committees or Members appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee in accordance with Chapter 2, Part 2 (Rule 14) of the Council's Constitution.

There were 3 questions to the Leader and 6 questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee.

1. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Crime in Thurrock is on the rise. Can the Leader give us the year on year increase in sexual offences, robbery and crimes against the person?

Mayor:

Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Gledhill:

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question.

Some of this were provided to the Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 4th October 2018. This showed that between 2016 – 17 and 17 – 18, reported incidences of sexual offences increased by 72; robbery by 61 reported offences and violence against the person up by 674 offences. It also showed reported burglaries down; criminal damage down; racial and religious aggravated offences down. The following information is provided for 18 – 19 so far, is Essex police's provisional data and is for the 6 months from April 18 to September 18 and is comparable to the same period in 2017.

So far in that comparison period, there has been no change compared to the previous year for sexual offences, 159 offences for the 6 month period, whereas robbery of a person property – sorry, personal property has decreased by 3.2%.

Before I go onto the next one, there has been a change in National Crime Recording Standards in 2018. For example, stalking and harassment are now recorded as separate offences; even if one were a more substantive offence was disclosed at the same time. So now, all offences on these occasions are recorded, not just the most serious. This was following Home Office guidance to all forces and is particular prevalence to domestic violence situations. Along with the rest of Essex, Thurrock has seen an increase in the number of reported harassment offences which are also included in the now violence against the person stats. So, crime against the person is now recorded as

violence against the person and an additional 712 incidents in the first 6 months have been recorded. But as per my explanation, the police are not comparing like for like. This increase is in line with the national trend and along with Essex. A representative comparison will be made available in 12 months' point once those changes have been embedded.

But equally worth of note, there have been an 18.6% reduction in burglary, equating to 250 less victims in April, as well as a reduction in theft from a vehicle, theft from pedal cycles, shopping and other thefts.

Mayor:

Councillor John Kent, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Kent:

Please Madam Mayor. I mean, it is clear that crime is on the rise if we just look at the example of possession of weapons up by 45% last year alone. We know that Essex Police have lost 600 officers since 2010, they've lost 300 PCOs since 2010 and in Thurrock, we have lost 3 police stations front desks. We know there was nothing at all in the budget this week for general policing. Will the Leader agree that it's time that we launched as a Council, a concerted campaign to make a strong case to government to give us the resources we need across Essex to keep our streets safe?

Mayor:

Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Gledhill:

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your quite fantastic question.

Just need to clarify though, since last week on speaking to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, the number of police officers in Essex has now risen above 3000 which is the first time I believe since 2016. Which is worthy of note.

It's been very clear that keeping open a front desk in a police station doesn't actually solve crimes or prevent crimes. What it does do is take money away from front line policing. So I do support the Police and Fire, Crime Commissioner in what he's done so far.

But equally, I support exactly what you're saying there Councillor Kent. It is right that we lobby, not just as Thurrock, but right across Essex and I will take this to my fellow Essex leaders when we next meet. It was also worth remembering that in the budget, the Chancellor did say that the police funding announcement was really December, will also include the Home Secretary

saying there will be a review of police spending power. But, I do agree with you and it's a good suggestion and will be taking it forward.

Mayor:

Councillor John Kent, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question? Thank you very much.

2. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Will the Leader of the Council reaffirm his opposition to the proposed new Lower Thames Crossing and set out how he has made our case to colleagues on Opportunity South Essex and the South East Local Enterprise Partnership?

Mayor:

Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Gledhill:

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent.

As said in my statement earlier, I, this Council remain opposed to any new crossing in Thurrock. Following the recent start of consultation on the proposed Lower Thames Crossing, I already made clear my disgust and the unacceptable lack of engagement and information from Highways England. Despite requests from the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force, meetings with myself along with other Group Leaders and meetings with Officers, they have failed to supply sufficient information in good time to allow us to properly prepare and provide guidance to residents or fully inform our other partners.

However, it's not just about process. I committed to providing the necessary funding to proceed to apply for leave of judicial review which hopefully, will be all back later on. And we will continue to scrutinise the actions of Highways England, to continue to obtain legal opinion and continue to stand ready to take legal action.

I've made it clear our stance at meetings, have not just overstate, said it, but also meetings of Essex Leaders, ASLA and indeed, the Chair of London Councils and at the Thames Estuary Commission. I've also written to businesses in Thurrock and formal letters to members of ASLA, OFC and SELEP will be sent later this week, outlining that we remain opposed to the proposed crossing and hopefully, the acceptance this evening that we will go forward for a JR.

This has all led to Thurrock Business Board changing their stance on the crossing and they now stand opposed to the proposals and some Leaders of other South Essex Councils, will also be making clear their objections.

As we further understand the detail of the scheme, Highways England have changed, changed and changed yet again. I will continue to make the case wherever necessary with the updated information as we go forward.

Mayor:

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

Councillor J Kent:

Well, Madam Mayor, that's okay as far as it goes. Councillor Gledhill, at the end there, said he will continue to make the case wherever is necessary but I took the opportunity just to look at the minutes and the attendance at SELEP over the last year or so. The Strategic Board met on the 15th of December last year, Councillor Gledhill wasn't there; on the 16th of March this year, Councillor Gledhill wasn't there; on the 29th of June this year, Councillor Gledhill wasn't there; on the 28th of September this year, Councillor Gledhill wasn't there. For the accountability board, it's met 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 times this year, the minutes show Councillor Gledhill has been there twice.

Madam Mayor, can I just ask, why is Councillor Gledhill not attending these vital meetings with our partners where we have the opportunity to make a strong case for Thurrock?

Mayor:

Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Gledhill:

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question.

Let me make it clear, as with most things in life, you'll find that it's quality over quantity. Labour know where I'm going with this one.

I have made very clear at these boards, SELEP strategic board on 21st September 2016, opposed the option of a route running directly through Thurrock; SELEP strategic board meeting on the 9th of December 2016, I made Thurrock's opposition to Lower Thames Crossing consultation options very clear; at the SELEP meeting board on the 3rd of March 2017, twice. Number one, because they forgot to mention the fact that I was in attendance at the previous one or indeed that I mentioned it. I advised the Board that we're still opposed to building the Lower Thames Crossing and the locations currently defined by the government agency involved, Highways England. And at the SELEP strategic board meeting on the 22nd of September 2017, I once again stated that Thurrock remains opposed to the Lower Thames Crossing.

As mentioned, I've also made it very clear of meetings with Essex leaders, and at ASLA and with one time meetings with other Council Leaders, and as

mentioned, Thurrock Business Board have now changed their thoughts in relation to what's their stance in relation to the Lower Thames Crossing.

I also took the opportunity, John, to go through some of the minutes from previous meetings. And as I said right at the start, it is about quality over quantity. So I'm checking the minutes since 2012 to 2016 when you were in attendance. Despite the Lower Thames Crossing being mentioned at 6 meetings, you only ever mentioned it once.

And I will go further than that. At the last SELEP meeting, one of the members said, "We always hear Thurrock's stance on the Lower Thames Crossing at these meetings and other meetings from Rob. But I cannot remember once when it was mentioned by John Kent, the previous Leader. Had he done so, our view may have been different."

Mayor:

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

Councillor J Kent:

Madam Mayor, when I was the representative on SELEP, SELEP's priorities did not include the building of a new Lower Thames Crossing. SELEP's transport priorities were the widening of the A13, the installation of free flow tolling at the crossing. It's only since I haven't been there, that they've managed to put the Lower Thames Crossing as one of their transport priorities.

Madam Mayor, the fact is, that Councillor Gledhill has taken the stance of the empty chair when it comes to representing Thurrock at these crucial meetings for the past year and frankly, it's just not good enough. We need it to be Rob centre stage, not what we've got now, which appears to be Sideshow Bob.

Mayor:

Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Gledhill:

Sorry Madam Mayor, a bit like SELEP, we're actually waiting for them to be mentioned at the Lower Thames Crossing. I was actually waiting for a question. You say that it wasn't our priorities, John, but as I've said, there were 6 meetings in which it was mentioned and it's been minuted that it was mentioned. Total silence. Doesn't matter if a chair is occupied or filled, it's what actually happens when you're there and you make it happen, John.

So, I have made a difference, and the difference is, that the business board – John, you can sit there and deny it all the time or you can just be silent and allow me to finish. As I've said, John, the business board have now changed their stance. Other Local Authority Leaders have come to me and have said,

“Actually, Rob, from what you’ve said, we’re going to be making clear our position.” You can sit there and deny it, John. I’m going on facts, the one that are printed in the minutes. That you, quite rightly brought up.

3. From Councillor MacPherson to Councillor Gledhill

Having seen the good news about the C17 gang member injunctions that Essex Police have secured can the Leader outline how Thurrock Council assisted in this and what benefits it will bring residents of Chafford Hundred?

Mayor:

Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Gledhill:

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Macpherson.

As Portfolio holder for Anti-social Behaviour and Public Protection; through the Community Safety Partnership, we have been engaging with Essex Police and partners to address the issues created by this gang and the impact it has been having on our residents.

I committed additional funds to Essex Police’s Operation Raptor Team which enabled them to carry out, for example, 186 hours of additional proactive policing in 1 month alone, target this cohort and obtain the evidence required for the injunction.

Along with the chair of the Community Safety Partnership, and Youth Offending Services Manager I submitted a community impact statement to the courts outlining why it was vital to our residents that this injunction to be granted.

Essex Police have worked closely with our Youth Offending Service who now manage a violent cohort of offenders. Our Children’s Services are now dealing with the increase in exploitation, and missing persons, many which are linked to the activities of this criminal gang, C17.

Our Anti-Social Behaviour Housing Officers have supported through joint patrols and have been identifying perpetrators for the police. And we have funded additional CCTV which is monitored 24/7 by our CCTV team, and this has been used to support evidence gathering in relation to the injunction and now for monitoring to support enforcement.

Our Adult Social Care Team has worked with and supported victims of cuckooing which have led to links to C17 and our Trading Standards team are working with support businesses to combat the sale of knives across the Borough.

Chafford Hundred, along with other areas of Thurrock, will benefit from the wider restrictions within the injunction which include:

- non-association with other members of the C17 gang, this means they cannot be anywhere as a collective group;
- the banning of making drill video music – sorry music videos, which is then publically available through YouTube;
- wearing hoodies or face coverings in public; and
- being in the company of girls under 16.

If they are found in breach of any of these conditions, anywhere in the borough they will be subject to arrest. Conditions may be extended to disperse and from other areas if this is evidenced and evidence is gained. This will not only reduce crime, it's getting the message out that gang life in Thurrock does not pay.

Mayor:

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

Councillor Macpherson:

Thank you Madam Mayor.

A lot of work goes on behind the doors that we don't know about and at the end of the day, we just see the injunction so a huge thank you to both yourself and to Officers as well as the police for getting this in full. But obviously, this injunction is only effective if it can be enforced. Can you outline what is being done in that respect please?

Mayor:

Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Gledhill:

Thank you Madam Mayor and Councillor Macpherson for your supplementary question.

As I mentioned in my recent statement, the actions of Essex Police has been absolutely fantastic and second to none. This has now led to an additional gang member being included in the injunction. But, yes, as you said, it is about whether or not it is actually enforced. It is being robustly enforced and I shall give you some examples of refs of the breaches that have already happened.

The leader of this gang was arrested on Monday the 1st of October for breaching the order. He was found wearing a hoodie, carrying a knife, cannabis and two mobile phones which was not registered with the police. He

appeared at Basildon Magistrates Court and was given a 28 day suspended sentence.

17 year old boy from Grays was arrested in Grays on Thursday the 18th on suspicion of breaching the order. He appeared at Chelmsford Magistrates Court the next day who denied the breach, and will return to court later this month.

17 year old boy, another 17 year old boy from Grays was arrested on Thursday the 19th for breach of the order, for wearing a hoodie. He admitted the breach but was not made subject of any sentence. He was further arrested on Sun – Saturday, the October 21st, for riding a pedal cycle in Grays. He admitted the breach and is awaiting sentencing.

The leader of the gang was again arrested on Monday this week and was bailed to appear in court on November – I can't mention too much from that because it's an ongoing case.

But we need to remember these injunctions have a positive effect and this is from the police. Talking to town staff, Grays town center businesses, "My staff and customers were very intimidated and scared witnessing drug deals and smelling cannabis every day. Since this injunction and the following actions, the drug dealers have all but disappeared and the staff are no longer afraid to leave work at night. And neither, as added, people were afraid to come and walk, to come into my shop, and walk past them. They were regularly threatening my staff and making them feel intimidated about coming to work. Since all of this action, my staff actually enjoy coming to work."

Essex Police, Operation Raptor continue to enforce these injunctions through high visibility patrols and responded to the increased intelligence being provided by the public. And I would urge every member of the public to go onto the Essex Police website, get the pictures of these individuals and memorise them. We are putting them up in Council offices and wherever we can.

Council will obviously continue to take preventive role safeguarding vulnerable people from this criminal gang. I need to say that this, all these criminal gangs been given the opportunity to work with the Council to get them out of gang life. So it's not just about the injunction being enforced, it's about us trying to actually draw them away from that and put them back on the straight and narrow.

Mayor:

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

Councillor Macpherson:

Yes please, it's amazing the work that is going on. Can you tell us of any other initiative that the Council is working on and helping Essex Police with at the moment?

Mayor:

Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Gledhill:

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Macpherson.

Yes, there are a number. I've had to say this to other elected Members, obviously, it's not my role or Council Officers' role to take action through direct criminal activity such as drug dealing, that's solely down to the police. But we are helping the police in whichever way we can, to not only act against this particular gang but others that are causing anti-social behaviour. I'm not going to go into all of them, I can't go into all of them, some of them for operational security reasons.

But, for example, canisters of special spray that tap motor cycles, quad bikes, to identify them later on when it's safe to do so, this has led to 46% reduction in the reports of the associated crimes. Purchasing specialist CCTV cameras – I'm not going to say what type, improving CCTV coverage so the police can call to gather evidence. Increased officer presence in anti-social hotspots to increase residents' confidence in the ability to report crimes to the police. Without those reports, course the police can't target their resources. And of course, we're looking to additionally fund 8 extra full time police officers, PCSOs to provide the uniform presence in the areas where crime and anti-social behaviour has been causing problems for our residents.

Now, most of this has been possible through the good financial stewardship of this Council from the one off circumstances

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

1. From Councillor Worrall to Councillor Watkins

What is the importance of parks and improving our open spaces for residents to enjoy?

Mayor:

Councillor Watkins.

Councillor Watkins:

Thank you very much Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor for your question.

Parks and spaces play a vital role within Thurrock. Obviously, they are used by everyone really, from the elderly residents using it for their social care purposes and the children of Thurrock using it for the enjoyment of the sport and to the people wanting to just walk their dogs or just to have a leisurely walk around the parks and open spaces.

(Member makes a remark).

Thank you for your remark. You may want to refer to Councillor Gledhill's earlier comments on what we're doing with that.

Mayor:

Can we please keep to the business. Thank you.

Councillor Watkins:

As part of the administration's policy in regards to Clean It, Cut It, Fill It, obviously, we wanted to ensure that not only are our parks and open spaces clean and tidy but they are also maintained and improved. So in July 2017, a report went to the Cleaner, Greener Overview Scrutiny Committee outlining the plans which we were going to take over a 3 year period of time.

£1.25 million plus worth of investment, would first of all happen in a review looking at all the important areas such as consultations with the residents; the health data of those areas; the operational requirements, the type of equipment already within those parks and open spaces; the physical activity levels around those areas and also the sort of equipment which may well be needed within those areas in order for more people to use it such as sensory equipment. And that's stuff that's already ongoing. I had the privilege in the summertime of meeting with residents in Aveley rec who were taking a keen interest in trying to get that park and open space improved. They got some real good plan they want to bring forward to the Council which I do ask any residential group who want to get involved with local space to come forward to the Council because we're very much willing to listen to your idea, we want to work with you not against you.

And I know that there has been some good work that's gone on there with some maintenance of that equipment recently as well which is really good news. So yes, Madam Mayor, our parks and open spaces play a vital role to residents in this Borough and I'm proud that this administration is also investing in them.

Mayor:

Councillor Worrall, would you like to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Worrall:

Yes please Madam Mayor. So of course, I love our parks, just to name but a few, we've got Grays Beach, you know the great work that's done there. Hardie park, you know what they're doing over there. Recently, we've got the work that's going on in the Daisy Field with them raising money. But tonight, I want to talk about our park in Grays and that's the Elm Park where residents are facing losing a well-used and open space. As Cabinet Member for overall responsibility for parks and I direct it at you and not Councillor Halden because it is about losing a facility. Can you assure us, in the Chamber, that residents and Councillors will be fully consulted on any possible closure of our parks as was announced 3 months ago? And secondly, can you assure us that every other location will be fully investigated before any decision is made and this will, again, form part of the initial consultation?

Mayor:

Councillor Watkins.

Councillor Watkins:

Thank you very much Madam Mayor. I know obviously, she's directing the question at, sorry, saying she, that's quite rude of me. Apologies, Councillor Worrall. That Councillor's directing the question to me. I will ask if you will wait till Councillor Halden's question in a moment and the answers you will be given. I can say though, in any circumstance whereby a park or open space within the Borough is needed to be used for something else such as a school. I mean, obviously, we do support the opening of new schools across the Borough. We know how important it is that we give every kid the opportunity within Thurrock to kickstart their life and they require good and outstanding schools to do that. And it's great to see that, we, the Council is investing in those new schools. And obviously, in those moments, the right consultations and events will go on with that to ensure that parks and open space facilities can obviously be used somewhere else where necessary and the work that can go on with other parks and open spaces around the area.

But in regards to individual parks, I will pass this over to Councillor Halden in the following question. Thank you, Madam Mayor.

Mayor:

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

Councillor Worrall:

I certainly do. And why I brought it here, is because, in the Cabinet meeting that I attended where this was announced. Councillor Watkins, you didn't make a peep of a noise in opposition to giving up a park. You know, this is an open space, this is a park. I'm not against the need for schools but I have not seen one real piece of evidence that should we once have the expansion of

the William Edwards site, that we actually do need this school and I'm not that we have, I'm not sure that we have done enough consultation to just write off one of our parks and again, we haven't gone out to consultation and last month, we had a motion in here, where you apologised for not consulting and it's in the minutes. Councillor Gledhill agreed everything would be consulted and it's still 3 months later, we still haven't had the consultation start. 3 months, Madam Mayor, and if there is a consultation, we, as Councillors have not been advised that there is going to be one so we're asking, do not start it without us.

Mayor:

Councillor Watkins.

Councillor Watkins:

Oh Madam Mayor, there was no question within that. As far as I can see it, it was just a long statement. I refer again, to the question coming up shortly by Councillor Halden.

2. From Councillor Jefferies to Councillor Halden

Can the Portfolio Holder for Education and Health outline what is being done to deliver more school places in Thurrock?

Mayor:

Councillor Halden.

Councillor Halden:

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor Jefferies for your question.

This evening, I can announce some exciting news regarding new school building in Thurrock – news that balances the need to deliver high quality school places and preserve and enhance sporting and open spaces.

As Members will know, between capital monies that the council holds, and monies that we worked with on our MAT's to win via the free school delivery programme, we are currently investing £70 million to deliver 3,500 new good school places and more modern facilities across this Borough. As Council will know – minus Councillor Worrall apparently – we have 1000 too few school places in Grays by 2021 to a statement that she's not quite sure if she needs a school.

(Member makes a remark).

Mayor:

Can we please just keep –

Councillor Halden:

Let me just say Councillor, as Members will know, we are currently delivering 3 brand new free schools. The Treetops special needs school and 2 Grays based secondary schools to address this looming crisis. For all 3 sites, we had to identify council land because for every penny of money that the ESFA (Education, Skills Funding Agency) are not spent on land, can be invested into our children's education.

The land disposal for Treetops 2, adjacent to the current Treetops 2, has been approved by myself and heads of terms have been signed with the ESFA. Planning approval is on course. And our special school, £20 million of investment would duly be delivered.

The land for William Edwards 2 (Orsett Heath Academy) is a council land next to the Thurrock Rugby Club, but not the rugby club itself. There has been some concerns regarding the rugby club losing some space from the council that they sometimes use. The council is satisfied that this outstanding rated specialist sports academy will be able to forge a great future working in partnership with the rugby club, as outlined by the letter signed by the rugby club President and the school's CEO. As such, any planning application will ensure any community and sports access to this site will be cemented. On this basis, the Council has agreed heads of terms with the ESFA to proceed.

Finally, the land offered for St Clere's 2 school, the Thames Park Secondary, is the council open space on Elm Road, next to Thameside Primary. There has been a great deal of concern regarding this site, but we forged forward because if we had not provided a council owned site, the ESFA would not have progressed plans for the new school on the basis that we would be a delay. The ESFA plan has now gone to the next stage with the Council offering our full commitment for the disposal of land below market value. The ESFA have now decided that they would rather procure a different site for a range of reasons.

As such, Council Officers forcefully made the argument with the ESFA that because we offered the land in good faith, and the ESFA have chosen that they would like an alternative piece of land, the cost must be borne with the ESFA and the project cannot be put at risk. The Council has done what we were prepared to do and prepared to make a difficult decision to dispose of open land to prevent the looming placement crisis in Grays. The EFSA have accepted this argument, we have won this fight and they will invest additional monies to acquire a private site. As such, in consultation with Councillor Coxshall, I have rescinded the instruction to dispose of this site. While I know this is the position many people hoped for, this is a position that can only be arrived at by forging past NIMBY pressure from the start and ensuring that we offered land available. If we did not be here, fore say, simply would have come back to us as they have with countless other Authorities in the country and said that we are land banking and that they cannot proceed on this basis. That is not what we've done and this is a good outcome.

Madam Mayor, as I have already said, November Cabinet will see a release of additional funds for temporary accommodation where it is needed to ensure that we deliver our new free schools. I will be clear, the money that we'll release will be in a robust amount to reassure people these schools will be delivered and will comply with our policy that temporary accommodation will simply not be portable cabins but rather be a lasting legacy for sports and education provision.

Mayor:

Thank you very much Councillor Halden, that brings us to the end of our question time. The 30 minutes is finished. I would now go to the rest of the questions and ask the people asking the questions if they would like those questions to have a written response or if they would like the questions to fall. So the next one – *(Member asks question)* carried over yes – Councillor Anderson?

3. From Councillor Anderson to Councillor Halden

Can the Portfolio Holder for Education and Health update the chamber on children centre provision?

Question was withdrawn and be resubmitted.

4. From Councillor Rigby to Councillor Halden

Please can the Portfolio Holder for Education and Health update the chamber on the progress to deliver new Medical Centres in the Borough.

Question was withdrawn and be resubmitted.

5. From Councillor Okunade to Councillor Halden

Can the Portfolio Holder for Health and Education tell us what the Council is doing to protect the health and wellbeing of our Tilbury residents from the hazardous air pollution?

Question was withdrawn and be resubmitted.

6. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Johnson

How many homeless families are Thurrock Council helping at the current time?

Question was withdrawn.

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QUESTION TIME

Questions from Members to the Leader, Cabinet Members, Chairs of Committees or Members appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee in accordance with Chapter 2, Part 2 (Rule 14) of the Council's Constitution.

There are 3 questions to the Leader and 6 questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE LEADER

1. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Crime in Thurrock is on the rise. Can the Leader give us the year on year increase in sexual offences, robbery and crimes against the person?

2. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Will the Leader of the Council reaffirm his opposition to the proposed new Lower Thames Crossing and set out how he has made our case to colleagues on Opportunity South Essex and the South East Local Enterprise Partnership?

3. From Councillor MacPherson to Councillor Gledhill

Having seen the good news about the C17 gang member injunctions that Essex Police have secured can the Leader outline how Thurrock Council assisted in this and what benefits it will bring residents of Chafford Hundred?

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

1. From Councillor Worrall to Councillor Watkins

What is the importance of parks and improving our open spaces for residents to enjoy?

2. From Councillor Jefferies to Councillor Halden

Can the Portfolio Holder for Education and Health outline what is being done to deliver more school places in Thurrock?

3. From Councillor Anderson to Councillor Halden

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