

## **Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 30 November 2016**

### **Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.**

Eight questions were submitted from members of the public.

**1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Gledhill**

As Leader of the Council have you any plans to make this a special Christmas for the unaccompanied child refugees currently residing in the Borough?

**Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you, Mr Perrin, for your question. Thurrock Council continues to work with our Foster Carers and placement providers to ensure the needs of all unaccompanied asylum seekers are being met throughout the year and that includes their religious and cultural needs and support, especially during the special Christmas period. Thurrock Foster Carers and Children's social care have arranged a series of Christmas events and parties for all of our looked after children, including those unaccompanied asylum seekers. Small hampers are being provided for some care leavers and I'd just like to echo what the Mayor has just said, with the help of Intu Lakeside and Officers time from here we have a 'give a gift tree' where people can donate gifts at Lakeside to unaccompanied asylum seekers, to children in care and indeed those that are in extra need at this time of Christmas. So, through all of those I think that we're covering not only the unaccompanied asylum seekers but all of our looked after children.

**Mayor**

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

**Mr Perrin**

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you, Leader. I take note that the Council is involved in a number of events for Thurrock's children, the gift tree at Lakeside and the visit to the pantomime for looked after children, organised by the Council's Fostering Support Team, to name but two. However, I ask if you and your 48 fellow Councillors would organise a special day specifically for those unaccompanied child refugees who are now the responsibility of Thurrock Borough Council. With this in mind I donate £100 to kick start a collection from Members to fund such an event. Christmas is traditionally a special time for families, with emphasis on young children. Some of these child refugees may well have experienced horrors we can only imagine and hope that our own children will never have to endure; you start your meeting with prayers and I end my plea to you all with the words of Jesus Christ to his disciples, "suffer the little children to come unto me". Finally, Madam Mayor, may I wish you and all Members a very happy Christmas and a happy, healthy, prosperous and safe 2017. Thank you for your indulgence.

**Mayor**

Thank you. Councillor Gledhill, do you wish to respond?

### **Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you Madam Mayor, and Mr Perrin, thank you very much for your kind offer. I did forget the panto as well, so apologies for those at the panto and those Officers providing support for that. Obviously, taking money from a member of the public does cause problems, so could I ask you to remain after the meeting, if you can wait that long, so we can work it out with the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Executive to make sure it's all properly recorded. I personally will be giving some time to the 'give a gift tree' and making a donation myself there. Obviously it's now very nearly December I'm not entirely sure if we can organise something with all Members this year for the unaccompanied asylum seekers, but certainly we'll ensure that your money is put towards them specifically, and if we can organise something we will obviously make sure that you, and members of Thurrock are aware. And again, thank you very much for your kind donation.

## **2. From Paul Vaughan to Councillor Tolson**

What action is the Council undertaking in conjunction with the Developers (Barrett David Wilson) and Essex Police to prevent the access onto the Golf Course and the Stanford Park Housing Development in Stanford le Hope from being used for illegal quad and motor cross biking activities every weekend which is causing extreme distress to residents of that development?

### **Mayor**

Thank you. Councillor Tolson, would you please answer the question?

### **Councillor Tolson**

Good evening Mr Vaughan, and thank you very much for your question. I do actually have quite a lot to say and I'll try to deliver it in a clear manner. So, the question you've asked actually goes across three directorates: environment, public protection and planning. So recently a Councillor Officer met, on 15 November, on site with Barrett David Wilson and Essex Police to discuss the issues that we're experiencing there. Stanford Park Housing did not attend. The Council Rights of Way Officer has been extremely busy, actually. At the footpath 41 there's been four large boulders placed, colleagues have already said that they're there so we know that's certain. She's met with the landowners that are also abutting that site, one is Ingrebourne Valley and the other is Mr Lyons, because they too want to be helpful. The stiles have been delivered to Ingrebourne and they hope to have them in place by the end of this week or next week, but she did actually give me some useful information and I don't know whether you know this, but on the weekend of 19/20 November, this gives you an idea of what we're up against, a Land Rover chained four fence posts along the boundary of the Ingrebourne side with Buckingham Hill Road and pulled the four posts out and left them on the carriageway. One of the vehicles, and I presume it was a car or something like that, ended up catching fire with the fire brigade unable to gain access, they had to wait for the fire to burn out before they could see if anybody was trapped inside. Ingrebourne Valley have just informed me that a website has been advertising Orsett Quarry for off-roading and "come on down to this site and have a great time". Ingrebourne Valley are at present

trying to locate this website and trying to officially shut it down, I've also sent that information to the Police. They confirm they contact the Police on every incident of trespass, they're hopeful the Police may soon introduce Officers on motor cross bikes, so that was a juncture to bring that in. Council have also liaised with the Police to patrol this area, Councillor Piccolo witnessed the Police there last weekend speaking to scramble riders. The Police have said that if they receive information they will try and get there and act on it. Council are also looking to install a gate at the end of footpath 41, to give access to walkers but not scramble bikes. Local Councillors have also asked for junction protection on the Butt's Lane, Mucking Wharf Road and Walton Hall Road; Highways department are wondering if a clearway would be better placed there. We haven't made a decision yet, but we want something there that's enforceable. The Police, if it was a clearway the Police will be able to enforce that. Also currently, from the Planning team, Officers are investigating whether there's a breach of planning at this site. Councillor Terry Piccolo is also raising the item on the Cleaner, Greener, Safer meeting next week because there's an item on there called "Active Thurrock" and he would like to identify somewhere in the borough that we could give planning permission to where this could legally go on. I think something goes on at Arena Essex, but whether or not it's only short-term for an hour or something and they don't want to pay that much money for one hour when they can come all day. Barrett David Wilson has put in extensive trenching and that's been seen by one of the Council Officers to deter scramble bikes and quad bikes, they've also put in place hoarding. Another site, Ingrebourne I mentioned earlier, has already previously trenched and I think Barrett David Wilson are actually thinking, or spoke of, private enforcement. Whether or not they've made a decision on that they haven't said but it was mentioned at the meeting.

**Mayor**

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

**Mr Vaughan**

She actually answered my supplementary question in the long answer, but thank you very much.

**Mayor**

Okay, thank you Mr Vaughan.

**Mr Vaughan**

Thank you very much though, excellent.

**3. From Francis Wilson to Councillor B Little (Originally Councillor Gledhill)**

From the Highways England proposed motorway junction A13/C3, how far on most days, in meters, will the constantly emitted plume of harmful diesel air pollution spread in the prevailing south westerly winds under a sinking inversion?

**Mayor**

Councillor Little, would you like to respond to the question please?

**Councillor B Little**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. Thank you, Mr Wilson for your question. Since we have no further traffic flow and composition data yet, for the proposed route or possible routes, it's not possible to give a definitive answer. Even if the flows and composition were known, modelling ambient concentrations in low wind, low dispersion, high stable air conditions would likely result in very high uncertainties in any output. A little bit more information in terms of when we would be able to supply more of an answer to you, we're currently awaiting an announcement as to whether the Government intends to progress plans to develop a Lower Thames Crossing and if the decision is to proceed we would anticipate that a choice of route alignment would be followed by at least 12 months of detailed design and modelling work, followed by a public consultation. At this stage, we will be better informed to quantify the likely environmental impact. Highways England would then be required to undertake further environmental impact analysis to inform the examination in public, prior to any Development Consent Order being made.

**Mayor**

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

**Mr Wilson**

Will Thurrock Council challenge Highways England's assertion that the spread of the contamination from such a junction is 200m, mainly because the Orsett Hospital is not far away and the only reason they say 200m is because that's what they find from a normal motorway, but the difference when you have a junction is quite considerable and it's worth challenging them on it now before they announce which crossing or which route they want to take. So, will Thurrock Council challenge Highways England?

**Mayor**

Councillor Little?

**Councillor B Little**

There aren't plans yet to challenge Highways England on that, but we are awaiting a decision as you're probably well aware and the rest of the Chamber is aware. That decision is in the late stages of being implemented and once we've got some information on whether there's going to be a crossing, and where that crossing is, then we are enabled, it will enable us to spend more time talking to Highways England about possible areas of concern.

**Mayor**

Thank you. Thank you Mr Wilson

**4. From Lee Watson to Councillor Halden**

Thank you for receiving my question tonight, I'd just like to say that I'm quite appalled and astonished that the Council are proposing to shut four Children's Centres in such a vital service to our community, so on that basis can I please ask the Portfolio Holder to confirm whether the staff at the Children's Centres, which are proposed to close subject to consultation, be re-deployed or are they actually going to be the efficiency saving.

**Mayor**

Thank you, Councillor Halden would you like to respond to the question please?

**Councillor Halden**

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you very much for your question. I welcome all the public questions tonight, this evening members of the public are going to succeed in one night asking me more questions than 14 Labour Councillors combined have managed to table me in 7 months, so well done. And considering lots of them are Labour activists, you may want to wonder maybe that lot should be sat there and that lot should be sat there. The front line is going to be really very safe, there will be a small amount of redundancies, hopefully under 10, hopefully very much under 10 and where possible staff will be re-deployed within the Council but let me say this, there will be very few impacts on the front line. The bulk of the £1.4million saving, in bulk is coming from getting rid of duplicated contracts, because there were lots of fragmented services, a huge amount is coming from getting rid of extremely expensive building rental for example... You're tutting? You're happy that we spent almost, I think it's over £22,000 to rent a space in a private nursery in East Tilbury, a tiny space not much bigger than that actually. That's where a huge amount of the saving will come from and in terms of the staff, the majority of roles that are going to be reduced are things like administration, reception positions, management positions and as we formulate the single point of access offer, with education and health services merged, there will be a wider range of services offered to people. So, out of the £1.4million worth of savings, actual redundancies, you know the bulk of the savings is coming from astronomical rents. So we should be looking at the quality of the service, not just the cash spent on it.

**Mayor**

Mrs Watson, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

**Mrs Watson**

Will the staff be put at risk of redundancy then?

**Councillor Halden**

Obviously, in line with Council procedures they will go onto a list to look at re dispersal at the end of the consultation, after analysing the results, because we're talking about a reasonably small amount of posts it wouldn't be appropriate for me to speculate who's going to go where and who's going to go when, but there is very clearly defined process in law. But again, the majority of these costs are coming from getting rid of duplication in the

system, getting rid of extremely expensive building rental, not from frontline staff.

**Mayor**

Thank you, Mrs Watson.

**5. From George Abbott to Councillor B Little (Originally Councillor MacPherson)**

On 17 March 2016 the council provided a list of 17 reasons why the council were opposed to any new crossings in Thurrock, since that release what further studies have been done specifically relating to point J copied below. As the borough is already suffering some of the worst air pollution in the UK, what work has been taken by the councils own environmental team to investigate the impacts further crossings would have on the health and wellbeing of current and future Thurrock residents ready to present to Highways England and government officials.

*(J) The environmental harm caused by the scheme has not been fully assessed or quantified, including the impacts on health and local amenity and this may not be out-weighed by any economic or transport benefits - clearly further work is required on air quality and public health before the Government makes a decision. It must be given weight alongside economic and transport benefits.*

**Mayor**

Councillor Little, could you please answer the question?

**Councillor B Little**

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you, Mr Abbott for your question. The Council recognises the challenges of improving air quality in Thurrock and will be asking Cabinet at its December meeting to approve a new Air Quality and Health Strategy, setting out measures which the Council will pursue to address this issue in the immediate future the strategy will be reviewed regularly to reflect any changes in circumstances in the borough. With regards to a Lower Thames Crossing, should Government choose to progress plans for a Lower Thames Crossing at least 12 months of detailed design work will be required in order to develop a detailed picture of traffic movements on the road and proximity to local communities. Until this information is available we are not in a position to analyse the impact on public health. The Development Consent Order process that any crossing proposals are required to follow requires a detailed assessment of environmental impacts to be published in advance of the examination in public. The Council is geared up to analyse and respond to this information once it becomes available. The chosen Lower Thames Crossing scheme, if there is one, could only be assessed and the impact determined once the Government has announced their decision, only then will they release an environmental impact assessment for their chosen route. This document will then be audited by relevant Council departments and other organisations such as the Environment Agency, Natural England including those matters

relating to air quality, noise and contaminated land that fall within the remit of the Council.

**Mayor**

Thank you, Councillor Little. Mr Abbott, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

**Mr Abbott**

Yes, please. I acknowledge that a number of Councillors have individually helped with the Lower Thames Crossing campaign, so this question is aimed at the Council as a collective group, but since March, 17 March when these points were released there have been 76 statements, press releases and other official commentary from a variety of MPs, other Councils, official bodies and large corporations and not one of these has been from Thurrock Council. So whilst everybody else has their sights firmly locked on Thurrock as a borough why does this Council not see it fit to ferociously defend the borough, and actively defend the borough, and do you think it's acceptable that a group of volunteers, which do so in their own time, have and still do more to protect this borough from another further crossing than this Council?

**Mayor**

Councillor Little?

**Councillor Little**

Are you going to say whether I'm allowed to answer this?

**Mayor**

You are allowed to answer this, go on.

**Councillor Little**

Thank you. Thank you for your supplementary question, Mr Abbott. I'm not quite sure since March this year what you think we haven't been doing, but we have actively pursued an approach that was agreed amongst us all some, I don't know it's nearly a year ago now I expect, a long while ago in regard to we will make sure that we oppose any crossing within Thurrock. That is the view of the Council; that view has not changed. There have been numerous letters and information sent out to Ministers, many of us have been engaged with Government regarding congestion, the issues around Thurrock in general, and the fact that we are not in favour of a crossing. I'm sorry to hear that you feel that we haven't done anything but I assure you that isn't the case.

**6. From Qaisar Abbas to Councillor Halden**

With a high number of young families, why does the Portfolio Holder believe that there is no need for a Children's Centre on Chafford Hundred, considering the current proposals being consulted on?

**Mayor**

Councillor Halden, would you like to answer the question please?

**Councillor Halden**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. It's quite amusing that, even though Mr Abbas was not elected as the Labour Councillor for South Chafford in May, he's succeeded in asking me a question on children's centres faster than any of that lot have done in half a year; well done. Despite the party political rant, I did not say that there was no need for a service, so let's get things into perspective. Currently we pay, I think it's just over £37,000 for the Chafford facility. It is not a children's centre, it is a small space above the Beacon Centre, the church, it is not a purpose built facility. What is proposed is all the children's centre services are going to be offered out of Warren Primary and the Belmont Children's Centre, so they will still be offered but we are going to get rid of the astronomical rent for a building that isn't particularly fit for purpose. So, at no stage was it said that children's centre services aren't valuable; I think it's been suggested on that side because it kind of fitted a rhetoric of closures. And what I'd also say is that, thanks to the single point of access merging health and education services together, people are going to be able to get access to services they didn't even know existed, and that's the beauty of outreach. You can reach beyond the people who just come to a children's centre and you can reach out to the type of people who would benefit from the services and I've been quite clear that children's centres in Thurrock currently serve about 75% of eligible parents. We are not aiming to continue to serve those 75% with the new service; we are aiming to serve up to 97%. That is because that is what would be graded as "outstanding". This should not be about bricks and mortar; this should be about outcome for children.

**Mayor**

Mr Abbas, would you like to pose a supplementary question?

**Mr Abbas**

Thank you, Councillor Halden. What is the current footprint of Chafford Hundred Centre in terms of how many children are helped by the children's centre and what will this number be after the closure?

**Councillor Halden**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. Madam Mayor, in light of the time, if you were to use your indulgence I am still happy to answer the other public questions. I don't know the, you're asking about the specific numbers in Chafford, we can quite happily supply the figures to you, but as I've said at the moment the children's centre service in Thurrock serves about 75% of eligible parents, no-one will be turned away, there will not be a drop in service, there will be an increase in service. We are aiming not just to serve the 75% of eligible parents who currently come to centres, we are aiming to use our outreach services to go beyond and go up to, hopefully, 97% to build an outstanding service. More people will be served. Sorry Oliver, did that not match the supplementary you wrote? Such a shame.

**Mayor**

Thank you, Mr Abbas



**Mr Abbas**

Thank you, Madam Mayor

**Mayor**

Members, we've got a few more questions still from members of the public which I'd like to get through this evening, so can I ask that we move a motion to suspend Council procedure rule 14.11 to allow public questions to be answered? Yes? Thank you.

**7. From Neetu Jurek to Councillor Halden**

I'm a bit scared to ask the question to Mr Halden. My question is: It is proposed subject to consultation that the Aveley Children Centre will be closed. If so, which of the activities currently available will still be available to local parents and which will not?

**Mayor**

Councillor Halden, can you answer the question please?

**Councillor Halden**

Thank you very much for your question. It is proposed that all timetabled services that are currently offered will still be offered. All of them, Olly. I can explain how this will be done, I know it sounds counterintuitive, but what you can currently get from the expensive building with fragmented services you'll still be able to get from one joined up provider reaching out from other locations. What will change will be that the current drop in service, where people can just drop in and access services, these will just now need to be booked, and that makes sense. If you want to measure the service's impact to see how it's actually helping children, obviously you want booked services, you want a firm framework so you can actually see how they help children; but every timetabled service currently on offer will still be on offer. And again, that's because with a joined up service, education and health together, you won't have one team rushing around trying to help a child and another team not even aware of that child because the two teams can't talk to each other, but in answer to your question, I think it's unfortunate that instead of asking me questions in the chamber, instead of writing to me, emailing me, face booking me, tweeting me, or in any way communicating with me, no-one on the Labour bench has spoken to me about this, because if they had spoken to me about it I would have pointed out that there's a difference between getting rid of duplicated services, getting rid of expensive building rentals but keeping the basic service that actually serves the public, it's not about the amount of money we're spending, the amount of staff we have, the amount of buildings we have, it's about outcomes for children. The services we're offering for children to improve lives are going to remain in place.

**Mayor**

Councillors, please calm down in the corner, Councillor Coxshall. Yes, calm down please. Miss Jurek would you like to pose a supplementary question? Thank you for your question.

## 8. From David Hann to Councillor Halden

What is the Portfolio Holder's message to families with young children in Stanford le Hope who will no longer have access to a local Children's Centre if the proposed changes, subject to consultation, are adopted?

### Mayor

Councillor Halden, could you please answer the question?

### Councillor Halden

Thank you, Madam Mayor. My message is don't listen to Labour Councillors who don't turn up to Cabinet meetings, don't ask questions and they try and tell people they're losing vital services when they're not, and certainly don't listen to that one.

### Mayor

Councillor, Councillor please, I find that pointing quite offensive, can you withdraw that?

### Councillor Halden

I apologise. I withdraw, sorry Oliver.

### Mayor

Thank you

### Councillor Halden

All timetabled services that are currently offered will continue to be offered in the case of the Stanford children's centre, I can't remember the figure but, then tens of thousands of pounds we currently spend on the Stanford Children's Centre instead there'll be outreach work from Abbott's Hall. Again, not just accepting we want to deal with the 75% of people who currently engage with centres and reaching past them and trying to get upwards to 97%. So, the only things that are going to be lost will be having a full time receptionist at the centre and some management bits and pieces. The fact of the matter is it will be a better service, and beforehand children's centres, so what's currently offered at Stanford, is a service to 0-5 year olds. The new service is going to go up to 11 and then eventually 19. It's going to be a 0-19 service, a true wrap-around service for children, merging health, merging education, going further than ever before. We can go further than ever before because we are actually reforming a service; we are not just leaving it there to rot. Labour say closures, closures imply that services are ending; this is not closure this is reform.

### Mayor

Mr Hann, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

### Mr Hann

It's all very well and good to talk about all these efficiency savings, like you can have health services without nurses and police forces without police officers and fire services without fire fighters, but if all these centres are

closing, physically where exactly are these people going to go to get their services?

**Councillor Halden**

Well again, it will be outreach. Where do the people of the Homesteads currently go? There's no children's centre there. Where do the people of Blackshots currently go? There's not a children's centre there, but they still access services. Where do the people of Orsett go, not a children's centre there, there's still access to services. The point is what services do the Council offer and what do we want to do to help children? One of the key metrics is going to be "good early years development for children", making sure that we can actually demonstrate the services that we offer have an impact on that child in the classroom. We don't need to measure how many buildings we've got to do that. We don't need to measure how many fragmented services we've got to do that. We need to look at a child and say "this child came into the system when he was four and he was performing at x level, this child is leaving the system at 19 and he attained that level". I want to see better outcomes for children and I will simply not accept the status quo, I'm sorry if that offends you.

**Mayor**

Thank you, Mr Hann.