

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.

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 30 November 2016

Item 12 – 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.

1. From Councillor Jones to Councillor Gledhill

Would the leader agree with me how disappointing it was that when attending Grays Town Centre memorial for Friday the 11th of November remembrance service that traffic was not even halted for the minutes silence.

To receive a written response

2. From Councillor Spillman to Councillor Gledhill

Does the portfolio holder agree that the 1% social rent decrease has ended any hope of the council building enough homes to meet the demand of the increasing population in Thurrock?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you, Madam Mayor, and thank you, Councillor Spillman, for your question. Short answer is no, but I will have to elaborate slightly more than that. The rent decrease, as suggested, initially impacts on the Council's ability to build housing in the short and medium term. There have been recent suggestions that the amount that we can borrow is going to be, the headroom is going to be lifted, which may allow us to borrow more to obviously build more social housing, but it's not just down to the Local Authority to build social housing. There are many other models that should be provided by local developers and we are looking at innovative ways of tapping into that to be able to build not only as a Council but also to ensure other, flexibility within the system, to allow social housing to be build and not just promised and then not delivered.

Mayor

Councillor Spillman, would you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Spillman

Yes I do. If you look at the mid-term O&S estimates for population increase, and you look at, we basically need, just to stay the same as we are now, we need to build a minimum of 700 homes every year across the borough. I mean that's private, social and housing association. Is the Portfolio Holder confident that over the next few years we will have 700 new dwellings, the bare minimum, being built in Thurrock?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you, Councillor Spillman for your very insightful question. I checked with Officers just to see how many properties were built in the past number of years across Thurrock, and these are new units which have been provided and I'm shocked to see its only 471 social housing, obviously a lot more numbers for regular housing. I'm really concerned that we will not reach that 700 across all of the tenures of house building both social, the Council and indeed private.

Mayor

Councillor Spillman, do you have a second supplementary?

Councillor Spillman

Yeah, I do. This housing crisis is horrific and I'm already seeing we're getting genuine social cleansing in this borough due to a 50% increase in rents in about a 2 year period in certain areas in Thurrock. I really welcome the housing review and I would ask that we're all given the opportunity to work together to try and find a solution to this because it really is, with social care, it's the worst problem that is facing this borough. So, I would ask whether or not we can, if the Portfolio Holder will guarantee that we get some cross-Chamber work in on this.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Spillman. As a private renter, yes I feel the pain of suddenly increasing private rents and you're quite right, some people are being driven out or indeed are now house sharing just to be able to meet the rent. Yes, you get my guarantee, on record, that you will be involved in any of the decisions moving forward. There are many innovative ideas of changing the way we provide housing, things like off-site building, pre-fabricated housing whatever you want to call it. This provides more bang for the buck and it's something that I tasked Officers with pretty much from day one of taking the Portfolio. We need to be able to get these houses quick, we need to make sure they're going to last and we need to make sure they're affordable and that's the important part. More affordable housing will then obviously drive the market to provide more housing. So, yes, you will be involved.

3. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

Considering the current consultation underway, does the Leader support the closure of Children's Centres in Thurrock?

Councillor Gledhill

I will keep this one short, yes but I do not see them as closures as Councillor Halden has made clear. It is more of a reform of children centres rather than closures

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, would you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Madam Mayor. My first supplementary question relates to the consultation process underway and considering the administration are claiming is to be a complete open consultation it is interesting, I think, that the savings have already been built into the budget for 2017/18. Madam Mayor I contend that either that is a dodgy consultation or dodgy budget planning. Which one does he think it is?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish. I won't take any lectures on dodgy consultation, you are probably aware that the reason I become involved in local politics is because your party decided to close a local school in Tilbury without consultation but just said the consultation was "where are you going to go?, this is where you are going to going to be shut. This consultation is clear we are changing and reforming and making sure we are not missing out any current providers and as it has now reappeared Councillor Halden made very very clear we are expanding the offer so doing what we are doing is providing a saving, its providing an expansion and providing a services people need and what people want.

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, would you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Yes please Madam Mayor. In the previous answer the portfolio holder did tell the public there would be a reduction in staff of 10 and the bulk of the savings would be buildings and not people. Madam Mayor if I can quote quickly from the cabinet agenda from the 12 October, the new model would reduce the budget for running the children's centres by £400,000 with most of the efficiencies coming from the reduced staff members. Staff would be reduced from 39 to 41 full time. Could the leader tell us why the portfolio holder can't get his facts straight?

Councillor Gledhill

When it comes to getting facts straight one very few people I would say who you cannot fault on that is Councillor Halden.

4. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

Could the Leader please update the chamber on progress on the 2017/18 budget. In particular, have all savings or income generating measures for 2017/18 now been identified or are we still short of target?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor. Sorry but whilst this is a closed question that something Councillor Gerrish does seem to like asking I cannot just give you a yes or no there is quite a complex response to this. Also Councillor Gerrish getting the answer you don't want is not the same as not getting an answer. I would have thought the number of years you have sat in this chamber you would have understood that. When we took control of the council shocked to find we had a budget gap of four million pounds to tackle as well as planning forward for the future. If we had assumed that we had stuck with your quite horrendous budget, quite drastic cuts to the environment and highway services um yes everything that has gone to overview and scrutiny so far would have matched the budget gap for next year. However, I and my cabinet and indeed the rest of the conservative group were not happy with that and therefore introduced the Clean It Cut It Fill It. That in itself obviously put pressure on the budget for this year and obviously for future years. We couldn't carry on having a borough in the state that you left it. That is appalling. On top of that we also did a review of the reserves, and remember you were in power for 6 years, so look we have the built up reserves actually built up reserves to level that are 5 years old. Now we are looking at building up those reserves for the future. So adding all those together comes to 1.2 million shortfall at the moment. I have spoken to the head of service and indeed the cabinet colleague who has responsibility for finance who I am surprised did not ask this question to and have been assured by both of them that the savings coming forward to meet that budget gap will be in the next week or so.

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, would you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Council Gerrish

Thank you Madam Mayor. While we are all hopefully that further proposals will come forward does he expect to find enough options to give members the genuine choices on what we might take forward.

Councillor Gledhill

Well, ya, obviously we have started, and have been going for a couple of months now, the council spending review where we have put forward a number of ideas and asked for ideas from opposition members. UKIP have taken part in this 100 per cent and would like to thank them for that and not just the portfolio holder, sorry the leader and deputy leader but on one occasion one of the portfolio holders we would obviously like to see this mirrored by your group, it would be nice to see them turn up and yes I would like to see a bit of a selection going forward. I don't like saying we need to save x amount of money and only just come up to that x amount I like to say we have a bit of head room here let's have a bit of choice.

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, would you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Madam Mayor. I will just finish by asking the Leader how hard does he think his administration tried to find savings or revenue alternatives to close four of Thurrock children's centres.

Councillor Gledhill

Again, this is really shocking as a Conservative we are always blamed you are always about the money, you are always about the money; you are always about the money. Oliver you seem to be all about the money on this it's not all about the money it's about the outcome for children. It's the making sure those families in need get the support they need and want. And surprise surprise, the plan that Councillor Halden has come up with officers are going to do that and expand on it. I know it is hard to understand the word expand for less but trust me we do it on a Conservative run council. It might be something you might want to learn. Thank you.

5. From Councillor Collins to Councillor Gledhill

Since the ban on Trap Driving on the Manorway came into force in July this year, how many Trap Drivers have been stopped and fined please?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Collins for your question. The main purpose of the order was to deter trap driving and believe it has been very effective in this regard. However, it would be very foolish for anyone to guarantee that one method on its own would completely stop it. However since its introduction two fines have been issued by Essex Police in relation to this offence and understand they have information for a third but too late to attend to issue with a ticket.

Mayor

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

Councillor Collins

Yes please Madam Mayor. It just seems to highlight what we were discussing before that we should apply the existing laws more effectively rather than trying to find new ones. But my supplementary question to the Leader was how much has this scheme actually cost to implement versus other suggestions proposed at the time such as cattle grids. Thank you.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor. Yes you are quite right using existing powers and use them to the best effect is much better than trying to recreate a new system certainly on something that is so quick to change. The cost of the implementation of the traffic regulations associated signs showing the horse and carriageway on the highway was approximately £4,500 this included the sign posts that have been reordered and moving existing clearway signs to make sure that street clutter that becomes confusing.

Mayor

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

Councillor Collins

Yes please Madam Mayor. Just a question. How much savings is that? 200 per cent or something? Thank you.

Councillor Gledhill

My apologies Madam Mayor I did not answer Councillor Collins second part there. Cattle grids would have cost something in the region of £90,000 just for the construction of the grid so that's £2000, sorry 2000 per cent saving by going this route rather than going for a cattle grid. So yes this would have been born by the tax payer so doing it cheaply we got the results.

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

1. From Councillor Duffin to Councillor Hebb

Can you advise if conversations between Thurrock Council and the Government have taken place regarding the pledge by the government that 100% of Business Rates will be kept by local authorities?

Mayor

Councillor Hebb

Councillor Hebb

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Duffin. The short answer is absolutely without a doubt. There are two components to my answer and I will try to be brief madam mayor. Firstly, only as recently as 17 November my section 151 officer marched from Grays into White Hall to have another discussion which happens on a monthly basis with the DCLG and the treasury which is a code chaired meeting around the future of what 100% business rate retention means. The second thing, this council has also consulted and constructed, which is a better word sorry, conversation responses to the fair funded settlement paper and the N&R reformed piece of work which had been submitted came to the council spending review not sure if you were at that one it might have been one of your colleagues they both came to the council spending reviews as part of our openness around what we are going for and they were submitted just before 11pm by Sean if I remember rightly. So yes, very much on the ball on that one Councillor Duffin.

Mayor

Councillor Duffin do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Duffin

Thank you. In the 2015/16 financial year Thurrock Council had a 106 million in business rates, 50% to the government but they also took another 22% which is 23

million as a tariff because Thurrock has too much money. Do you agree with your government that Thurrock does not need that 23 million.

Councillor Hebb

I agree with the former Chancellor of the Exchequer that business rates should be made by the people that make it in localities and it should be able to be spent on localities. That's the point. With our consultation and our contributions to the consultations which are on-going. The fact that our finance team are marching into White Hall and will fight Thurrock's case it's much better to be at the table demanding on what we need now rather than not engage with the process, let the process ride on and then ultimately get a world put in your lap that you don't like and start moaning about it. So George Osborne was absolutely right to introduce the 100% business rates that's why we are at the front of the table, we are right at the front of the queue for the Thurrock people.

Councillor Duffin

So, with the 100% business rate likely to come with a massive increase in that tariff will you continue to fight the Government until they give Thurrock the full 100% they are promised with no tariff.

Councillor Hebb

I think you are being slightly mischievous there Councillor Duffin. Primary legislation hasn't even been or enabling legislation, sorry, isn't even stated to happen until January/February. I can't say it any other way to make you understand it. The section 151 officer has contributed to the ongoing discussions on a periodic basis, we are fighting Thurrock's needs, we have done the two consultation responses which have been presented at the CSR. The enabling legislation hasn't happened, hold your horses, we are at the table now. We are fighting Thurrock's corner and getting us to the front of the queue.

2. From Councillor G Rice to Councillor MacPherson

When will the Pyramid Centre at Orsett Heath be refurbished using the £160,000 Section 106 monies from the Thurrock Technical College Development so the 4 new football pitches can become operational for the Community?

To receive a written response

3. From Councillor G Rice to Councillor Tolson

When will the asbestos at the garages in Oxford Avenue Chadwell be removed as children are playing near this hazardous material?

To receive a written response

4. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Hebb

Will the Portfolio Holder explain the rationale behind the creation of the post of Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services?

Councillor Hebb

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent. As Councillor Kent is aware obviously the head of paid service, our chief executive, presented a paper towards the later end of last year under your administration which effectively from the 1 January this year sought to recalibrate the way the senior management team worked or was structured. In keeping with that recommendation the role that has been recalibrated now has gone from head of service to director. If you look at our constitution it is defined in the Local Government Housing Act 1989, Localism Act 2011. Senior officers reporting to the chief executive by default in our constitution and in law are at director level so you know that was last year and clearly being abled now. Taking all the boring corporate-ness away from it and speak operationally it makes perfect sense for a department that isn't anything to do with human resources or an organisation development to report directly into the chief executive who is responsible for pushing this boroughs needs. I think it makes perfect sense with a go with one directorate with another does not really work and so that makes sense. I think the other additional prospective Councillor Kent is around the financial savings we were at 21 posts I think at 18 months ago we are now down to about 16.4 posts which is about £500k saved from the senior salary line over time. So that is the rationale.

Mayor

Councillor Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

Yes he hear a lot about openness and transparency could the portfolio holder explain why he didn't on the 26 October when he delivered his portfolio holder report that covered this area mention that this post was being created.

Mayor

Councillor Hebb

Councillor Hebb

It seems to be the night for saying what you want to hear rather than what you have been told. I don't get what is difficult to understand. Last year a paper was published with your name on it last November about recalibration and re-organisation of senior salary structures. Why on earth would I go back and report back on what you have done when it is already part of the work programme that we are already doing. So. Slightly mischievous John, let's play by the right rules here.

Mayor

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

Councillor J Kent

Yes the fact is we have created a director post without having any consultation or talk, mention of it to members. Does the portfolio holder really think that is appropriate?

Mayor

Councillor Hebb

Councillor Hebb

Do I think it's appropriate that a paper was passed under his previous administration has been unacted. Do I think it's appropriate that a pay policy which was approved last January under a labour administration is the existing pay policy to this time next year when the conservatives get their first chance to have a go at it. I mean let's look at the theme of this council. Every time that man gets up and has a discussion with me it is always, you know, the first time he got up started talking about our financial plan well with respect we unravel the fact that he couldn't even be bothered to turn up at any council spending review and hadn't touched the reserves in terms of review for 6 years. Last time there was the wonderful

Mayor

Councillor, Councillor, Councillor, Please. Thank You. Please can you stop waffling and waffle a bit less and answer the question a little bit more so that all questions can be done.

Councillor Hebb

I will stand down for Councillor Kent, Madam Mayor.

Mayor

Thank You.

5. From Councillor B Rice to Councillor Tolson

Can the Portfolio Holder explain why are Blue, Black and Green wheelie bins being collected by the same waste truck and therefore being mixed together?

Councillor Tolson

Thank you very much. If there is an incidence where this is happening the correct way to deal with it is to report it. As an elected member you should know that. If residents are saying that to you and you have an incidence then you can then forward it to me and I will deal with it. But you haven't reported anything.

Mayor

Councillor Rice do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Rice

Thank you very much Madam Mayor. My question again is is it the correct method to mix these two together. Can you just answer the question for me Councillor Tolson. Is it correct or isn't it.

Councillor Tolson

It is not correct to mix them together but it may be something to do with freight breakdown or something behind it. If you provided an incidence and reported it we could have looked at that. It may be down to that dreadful pepper pot system you put in place which doesn't work well in our borough.

Mayor

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

Councillor Rice

I don't really get many good answers so no thank you Madam Mayor I shall not ask another question. Thank you.

6. From Councillor B Rice to Councillor Halden

Can the Portfolio holder tell us what progress has been made in the recruitment of much needed GPs.

Councillor Halden

Thank you. The answer is iron in the fire. Councillor Rice is right to raise the GP issue Thurrock has got a tremendously under-doctored population. I think its a slight not unhealthy question I think it is slightly in the wrong direction as we don't just have under-doctored population we know some of our primary care is inadequate even if it is there and it needs fixing frankly. Now obviously the role to supply medical services, GPs etc, is with NHS England but made it quite clear the council leadership and will actually drive forward the issue because the issue has never been tackled. So a couple of things. Obviously in the short term we spoke about the health hubs for frankly too long. We spent talking about them. My corporate director has assured me that we will receive fresh information early in the New Year putting forward more comprehensive plans detailing how we are going to deliver them and precisely when we are to deliver them because it is quite essential we actually get things built. The slightly longer term plan, obviously we have spoken about the STPs in the past, the government's plan to reorganise health care to ensure it is more sustainable. Not only have myself and my director met with my counterparts in Essex County Council and Southend this morning and then also travelled to Basildon in the afternoon that makes up the 15th or 16th meeting like that I have had to make sure the STP does not just reflect the hospital reorganisation, reflects GP reorganisation more GPs for the borough we don't deal with the under supply of GPs and we don't fix the inadequate areas of primary care and quite frankly hospital reorganisation could frankly end up being a waste of time because the existing burden that is on A&E department because there aren't enough GPs aren't enough good GPs will still be present. We are doing a huge amount of engagement work to ensure that happens. Someone Councillor Holloway maybe asked question about the annual public health report earlier....

Mayor

Councillor can you just answer the question that was asked and not go on about other questions that have been asked before...

Councillor Halden

I am attempting to answer the question. The Public Health Report as we mentioned earlier as part of the STP will now distil the Thurrock Ask and what we want NHS England to do for us so we can drive forward the STP and that will include primary care improvements, GP access so not just buildings

physical people and finally to address not just the under provision but to address the weaknesses in the primary care system as at the two cabinet before last we have introduced the first ever scheme to attempt to improve the quality of primary care, GP scorecard that will be going live next year. So that we get that peer to peer scrutiny between health professionals, like we do with schools scrutinising each other to try and drive those improvements in the GP market.

Mayor

Councillor Rice do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

Yes just to ask the portfolio holder if he will agree with me that once again this is a dire circumstance we find ourselves in and indeed we have one more or one less, I should say, GP than what we did in the summer months yet we have another one of our GPs leaving us in Thurrock, one of our younger GPs leaving and it is in a very poor state. So I urge the portfolio holder really to make headway and start to address this as early as he possible can because it really is a situation that is going from bad to worse. Thank you.

Councillor Halden

Thank you Madam Mayor. I take her point on board. Myself and my team are intervening on a daily basis attempting to get the very best deal for Thurrock. One of my first engagements with one of the younger GPs in Horndon on the Hill was discussed with that what would attract more of his colleagues fresh out of medical school to come to Thurrock. High quality housing; the leisure offer and grammar schools. Have we attracted new GPs to the borough and more to the point Councillor Rice we have got certain providers like College Health much like a multi academy trust. College Health, Dr Malic, operating out of the Shehadeh practice in Grays they have already taken on recently another local practice that hasn't had perhaps the most robust record in the past. I have made representations to NHS England. I have made representations to wider colleagues about what College Health are doing and how these are the sorts of organisations that we should support so that I can tell you categorically that the stronger GP providers who are attempting to help their own colleagues they are physically, their good efforts, are physically being met with the might, with the effort and with the force that my entire team can muster.

Mayor

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

Councillor Rice

No thank you Madam Mayor.

7. From Councillor Spillman to Councillor MacPherson

The future of the Housing Advice and Support Service (HASS) looks very uncertain at the current time. Can the portfolio holder explain what impact the closure of this service would have on Thurrock?

HASS Open Door provides general and specialist housing advice and information. They are based at the Beehive in Grays but also run outreach surgeries across the borough. HASS works very closely with the Council's Housing Solutions service assisting non-priority cases to find accommodation with private landlords – in most cases, within shared accommodation (Houses of Multiple Occupation). The Council provides HASS with deposits and rent in advance for cases who would otherwise be street homeless. The value of the service has been recognised through a recent grant of transitional funding whilst HASS seeks secure longer term finance. Should the service close, then options available to non-priority cases would be impacted. The Housing solutions service would need to increase direct engagement with private landlords in order to mitigate the impact.

Mayor

Councillor Spillman do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Spillman

Yes I do, thank you for your recognition of the impact on the services is going to have. The service in Thurrock is suffering from a terminal illness it's in real trouble. What reassurances can the portfolio holder give me and, more importantly, the thousands of people that use these services this administration is taking seriously the vast challenges that these organisations face.

Mayor

Councillor MacPherson

Councillor MacPherson

Thank you very much. Of course if you are in trouble you do need advice and you need to know where you can get this advice from. With regards to housing advice if this service did close then what we would need to do is our housing department would need be liaising directing with private landlords and the owners of HMOs to make sure that the advice that is being given to these people with the correct advise.

Mayor

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

Councillor Spillman

Yes as far as I am aware and not sure if the portfolio holder is aware if HASS does close then the only specialist housing advice that people will be able to receive based in Thurrock will be from me. Does the portfolio holder think that it is acceptable that the only specialist housing adviser that is more than likely only going to be available to the residents of Thurrock will be coming from a political party.

Councillor MacPherson

That's scary. I don't think you're the only person that can give that advice we have got a lot of private letting agents and people who are experts in their field.

8. From Councillor Potheary to Councillor Halden

It has been reported that Thurrock schools are facing potentially devastating cuts with Thameside Primary School set to lose funding equivalent to ten teachers. What actions will the portfolio holder be taking to fight these cuts from central Government?

To receive a written response

9. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Halden

How many delayed hospital discharges have there been into Thurrock since 1st June 2016?

To receive a written response