

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 30 November 2016

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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