

## Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 26 October 2016

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

One question was submitted from members of the public.

#### **1. From Mr Abbott to Councillor B Little**

Can we ask for specific details of what exactly the Council are currently doing to challenge and work with Highways England to deal with the almost daily misery the residents face at the current crossing? After all regardless of what or if another crossing is built the misery on Thurrock local road network will remain unless the current crossing is fixed.

#### **Mayor**

Unfortunately Mr Abbott is unable to attend tonight but I believe Councillor Little would like to respond verbally to the question tonight, am I right there?

#### **Councillor B Little**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. I'd like to wish Mr Abbott all the best in his problem that he's had today. I am sure I, and I'm sure all Councillors, share your views about the misery caused by congestion happening all too often in our Borough. Since I became Cabinet Member, Thurrock has established a dedicated highways network management team and appointed a Network Manager to help us manage our own road network better and provide a dedicated point of contact for improved joint working with partners. During office hours we have real-time monitoring of congestion on Thurrock's roads. We've engaged with partners to agree diversionary routes and protocols for variable messages on approach routes to the Crossing. I've also established a congestion task force which includes representatives from Highways England, Essex Police, Essex County Council and business. The Task Force has already delivered some quick wins; Highways England have added Thurrock Council to the list of organisations who are automatically contacted when there is an incident on the Crossing and we now get advanced warning of weather conditions which might lead to the closure of the bridge. Highways England have also committed resources to develop plans to link up Highways England's traffic management system with Thurrock Council and Essex County Council's control room in Chelmsford. They have promised portable variable message signs for Thurrock to help local traffic avoid a congested area. Thurrock has also commissioned experts to identify what investments are needed in traffic signals and junctions on Thurrock's own network to improve traffic flows; this work will form the basis of future bids for local growth funding. On 6 October Thurrock hosted a multi-agency 'Cold Debrief' in this Council Chamber to look at events arising from the last major incident on the Crossing and identify ways to reduce the impact of incidents and their knock-on effect in Thurrock and Essex. A number of areas for improvement were identified ranging from better access protocols for vehicles

needed to repair road damage, to improve traffic management when contraflow plans are implemented in the Tunnel. The Council, including myself, meet regularly with Highways England's Director of Operations; we also have raised congestion issues with the Department of Transport, and are lobbying for changes to legislation to allow camera enforcement at box junctions which is currently only allowed in London. A full update on initiatives being taken forward by the congestion task force will be presented to Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its January meeting. Thank you.

## **Item 13 – Questions from Members**

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 10 questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee had been received.

### **Questions from Members to the Leader, 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 Spillman to Councillor MacPherson**

If the council does not extend its transition funding to Thurrock Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) I believe that there may be a risk that it will close its doors in April 2017. Can the Cabinet Member please confirm whether the Council's transition funding will cease in April 2017?

#### **Mayor**

Councillor Macpherson?

#### **Councillor MacPherson**

Thank you very much, that's certainly not a problem, I understand why you've changed that. The Council's fully aware of the funding pressures that the CAB are going to be experiencing in April 2015, both myself and the Leader, Councillor Gledhill, have had meetings with both the Chair and the Manager of CAB to monitor the performance against the existing funding agreement. We're keen to explore what the CAB can do, how it can support the residents of Thurrock and this will help us then be informed with regards to what opportunities there are but at this stage of discussions it's too early to say exactly what's going to be happening. We're more than happy as these discussions progress to have a chat with you and let you know what's going to happen.

#### **Mayor**

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

#### **Councillor Spillman**

Yeah and I must declare some interest, 'cause I don't know if most people are probably aware but I worked for the Citizen's Advice Bureau for many years. If the decision is made that the Council will not extend this funding, can the Portfolio Member commit to a proper impact study being put before this Council to look into the effect it's going to have on access to advice, the effect it's going to have on the money that the Citizen's Advice brings in, the effect it's going to have on other charities as well because the rent they pay could

affect CVS as well, the effect it's going to have on the skills that people learn when they're going into the advice sector, and the effect it's going to have on civil society in general in Thurrock?

**Councillor MacPherson**

Thank you very much. I can't give any assurances of a full impact assessment done on it because that's actually not something that is completely within our power as you, working at the CAB, would probably already be aware. The transition fund was approved to support the CAB to become a local incorporated organisation that could develop a stronger opportunity for those people within Thurrock, we need to make sure that every opportunity that the people of Thurrock need can be given; so if it is the CAB that needs to do that then we need to make sure that that's something that we do look at. But a full impact, I'm not quite sure how that would benefit, we're not the only financial supporters of the CAB as you're aware, there are other people so by looking at an overall if we withdraw our funding that isn't the be all and end all. People can't rely on the Council 100% to just have our funding, it doesn't work like that. If you go back 15 years yes, people were wholly reliant on the Council for that funding, but now they run their organisations as a business; they look at other funding, look at other ways of getting money in, look at what services the CAB can provide to the Council. They've got to look outwards, as they are doing, and which are the conversations that the Leader and I are having. Thank you.

**Mayor**

Councillor Spillman, do you wish to ask a second supplementary?

**Councillor Spillman**

I really do welcome that you're looking into spinning out possible services, contracting out stuff, that you're exploring these options. I must say, I mean I do know the financial situation there very well and the Chamber needs to be in no doubt, if the Council removes funding it will close, there's no two ways about it. If we remove funding, the Citizens Advice Bureau will close. Now, Southend Council provide funding to their Citizen's Advice Bureau, Basildon Council provide funding to their Citizen's Advice Bureau, Castle Point provide funding to their Citizen's Advice Bureau I think we'd be a bit of a shambles really if in a Unitary Authority we can't even support an advice service that's got such a proud track record of delivering. You know, the reason why the Citizen's Advice Bureau has been here for so long is that the model works, and so I would hope that you would look very closely before you make a decision that in 5 years' time we'll be sitting here and we'll be thinking...

**Mayor**

Councillor, can you ask a question please?

**Councillor MacPherson**

Of course we will look closely, but in February 2015 when we were discussing the financial envelopes and things like this, Councillor Gledhill said “if we agree the finances of 2015, this could look at reducing the funding that is going to the CAB” that’s why this side of the Chamber refused to agree to what Councillor Kent put forward. However UKIP, and it was a requisition vote, all agreed the funding envelopes and in those funding envelopes were to reduce the funding for the CAB. Councillor Gledhill brought it to everybody’s attention, look at the minutes of February 2015 and you will see that UKIP agreed to cut that, the Conservatives did not. Thank you.

## **2. From Councillor Smith to Councillor MacPherson**

Yeah thank you, Madam Mayor. The portfolio holder will no doubt be aware of the closure of Aveley community forum and the many youth services it provides. Is the Council considering action to mitigate the loss of the important services it was offering to residents?

**Mayor**

Councillor MacPherson?

**Councillor MacPherson**

Thank you very much. I’m aware that the Aveley Village Community Forum is in the process of making staff redundant and closing its offers to residents, including the Youth Service. This is because external funding has come to an end. Officers have worked with the forum for some time to understand its current position and to consider any appropriate support. The loss of the service is, of course, regrettable especially when community led and supported by a wider network of volunteers and families who add value to the whole of the community. We will of course continue to work with the management committee, Ward Councillors and residents to explore opportunities for the future, but can I just add that the Aveley Village Community Forum is actually a strong forum and it’s not the forum that’s closing. I know Councillor is fully aware of that, but just for the publicity outside, the forum’s still going okay? So I don’t want people to think that Aveley now hasn’t got a forum, it has. Thank you.

**Mayor**

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

**Councillor Smith**

Yeah, thank you for the reply. Yeah, if you could just answer my first question, and really I was asking about the Council and the mitigation of these losses. What are you going to do about that?

**Councillor MacPherson**

This is a business which unfortunately the Council is not in the process of actually mitigating any business losses; otherwise we'd be setting ourselves up for a huge fall if we started mitigating all business losses. It's a huge, huge regret that there will be services lost but if somebody has set up a business and unfortunately the level of funding identified as required to keep the service open until bids came in wasn't there, it's not a sustainable business. This Council is not in the habit of sustaining businesses that are doing a loss.

## **Mayor**

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

## **Councillor Smith**

Yeah, yeah. I guess it might be my ham-fisted question but it's about the loss of important services, particularly youth services and child services, these are obviously going to go by the axe. Really, again, if I could just ask are Council going to do anything to mitigate? Is there anything, do you have a plan that might accommodate this or help us out with some of our services that we're losing?

## **Councillor MacPherson**

With regards to services we're losing, if you're referring to the youth service and things like this unfortunately it's not a statutory service. We can't put money into a service that is losing money by a private business, I don't know how many more times. I understand that there are services for the youth and things like that but there are other services that the youth can be involved with. You know, if a play centre closed we wouldn't then be looking at providing more play centres for children, it's a business, we can't prop them up. Sorry.

### **3. From Councillor Cherry to Councillor Tolson**

The very latest Traveller incursion onto land at Chadwell Hill, Chadwell St Mary cost the Council over £6000. This is likely to happen again next year as it has happened before, unless something is done. Would you agree that the money that will very likely be spent next year be earmarked and spent towards preventing incursions there and elsewhere in Thurrock where this regularly happens by using methods of hardening that cannot easily be undone. Thus sending out the message that Travellers who break the law are not welcome so that all Travellers do not get blamed in Thurrock and save Thurrock residents the cost and annoyance of this unlawful trespass on their community land.

## **Mayor**

Councillor Tolson, would you please answer the question?

### **Councillor Tolson**

Yes, thank you very much Councillor Cherry. Just for clarity I have received confirmation that the clear up of the fly-tipping there, the clean-up costs actually came to £561, so I think you're adding that £561 into the £6000 for target hardening. So, yes I agree with you, we would like to target harden areas in our borough, we can't make it impregnable, if we target hardened everywhere it may be that travellers that decided to make incursions would then criminally damage property which again is then something we can use under power of Section 61.

### **Mayor**

Councillor Cherry, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

### **Councillor Cherry**

I mentioned the sum of £6000 because when I enquired of the Council how much it cost us that's the figure I was actually given, that may or may not include other money that was spent to deal with the eviction, I don't know. That was the figure I was given. What ideas do you have, what plans have you made to target harden the known public areas that Travellers use, and other public land that will become an alternative option, and what advice will you be giving to private land owners to prevent crime on their land?

### **Councillor Tolson**

Thank you very much. Well, where possible and where practicable we would like to target harden, with to date, the actual up-to-date figure is we've spent about £35,000 in the Borough in target hardening, so far. Working with private land owners, actually we've got a land owner in the Homesteads that's actually had a massive fly-tip in that area, it's about working with them again because whilst the farmer is happy to put some large pieces of agricultural equipment in a proactive manner to stop access to fly-tippers, the actual resident there is not willing to because he runs a business, so you have to really be dealing with people on their merits and whether they're running a business and how much access they want. It could happen anywhere, it could be that we make the whole borough impregnable and still an incursion may willingly come along and damage, but if any Ward Councillors have any difficulties in their area please contact me and we'll have a look at that site too. But we're target hardening the hotspots so I think we're doing very well actually we've spent £35,000 this year.

### **Mayor**

Councillor Cherry, do you wish to ask a second supplementary?

### **Councillor Cherry**

You say you spent £35,000 but I personally can't see where that money's been spent. I asked you what ideas you've got, what plans you've got, you talked for quite a period of time but you didn't actually give me any information. What are we going to see happen? Are we going to see definite target hardening that people notice or do we have to sit back and wait for the next 2017 caravan invasion of Thurrock or are you actually going to do something about it that we can actually see being done? Thank you.

### **Councillor Tolson**

Well, a lot of our green and open spaces around the Borough are supposed to be attractive amenity sites for our residents in the Borough, not caged in areas. We want it attractive and, as I've said, where there's repeated issues we have target hardened and we have to assess them individually and I think you're overlooking that we've come so far this year in the way that we interact with the Police and the issuing of Section 61, and the communication on that occasion in Stanford-le-Hope was fantastic. And when we went to CGS (*Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee*) you said that a local supermarket there, which was a chain, didn't report the pilferage etc. it's not just our problem, it's everybody's problem in the Borough and if a superstore chooses not to report pilferage in their store, it may not affect a chain but it would affect a sole trader because it would affect their profits. So, it's everybody being communicating, communicating to Councillors. We're all going in the same direction, we can't make Thurrock impregnable, it's gone up not only in Thurrock, incursions, but across Essex and also you'll recall that Sean O'Callaghan said the Traveller Community do like Thurrock because it's an access way into London, it's not far away it's half an hour, so I think you're underestimating what we have actually...yes.

### **Councillor Cherry**

Well I haven't seen it, £35,000...

### **Mayor**

Can we get on, please Councillor? (*continued heckling*) Can we come to Order please? I have asked for answers to be brief and questions and that doesn't appear to be happening very much. Can we go on to Question four from Councillor Potheary.

## **4. From Councillor Potheary to Councillor Halden**

I promise I'll be briefer, Madam Mayor. So, my question is for Councillor Halden and I'd like to ask the question now:

In her inaugural speech as Prime Minister, Teresa May described mental health as a key social injustice, would the portfolio holder agree In her inaugural speech as Prime Minister, Teresa May described mental health as a key social injustice, would the Portfolio Holder agree and how does the Portfolio Holder see this injustice being addressed in the borough?



## **Mayor**

Councillor Halden

## **Councillor Halden**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. What the Prime Minister was referring to was the issue of parity. For a great deal of time issues like Social Care, Hospital deficits, they've always taken a more prominent role in discussions about health services and there has been the issue of mental health never actually seeming to have the same status as some of the other issues. That's why the NHS some time ago now launched the Parity Document to try to bring that in line. I think it's a wider social injustice in terms of the fact that mental health still, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, has a stigma attached to it; there's still people who don't want to talk about mental health, do not want to admit that they have a mental health issue. In general terms, what the Administration is doing, our drive to improve standards amongst GPs that will improve reporting pathways. Obviously our statutory mental health services are held by SEPT, the vast majority of referrals come via GP so as we improve GP services, improve access, that will improve mental health access but in general terms I've visited both the SEPT facilities in the Borough, at the Community Hospital and at Grays Hall, I know my colleague Councillor MacPherson has visited Mind as Cabinet Member for Communities and we will be taking the third goal of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which is around mental and emotional health through the next Health and Wellbeing Board, after myself and the Director have finalised the policies that will be going through. So that's in generality what we're doing, but if Councillor Potheary has a more specific supplementary I'm happy to try and answer.

## **Councillor Potheary**

Thank you very much, Councillor Halden. Yes, my question is, is that clearly the Council does fund certain mental health services; can the Portfolio Holder guarantee that funding for mental health services in Thurrock will be maintained under his watch?

## **Councillor Halden**

Thank you, Councillor Potheary. We don't fund a few, we fund a lot of mental health services. As I've already said, SEPT carry out our statutory care, Thurrock Council also funds Mind, Thurrock Council in conjunction with the CCG (*Clinical Commissioning Group*) have put together Inclusion Thurrock, Public Health is currently piloting, in conjunction with the CCG, a depression pilot to see how that can be used. What I would say specifically about the issue of maintaining, we need to look at services anew. One of the things I'm proud about with the new healthy lifestyle service that we put in place is the obligation for it to engage with schools; helping young people in terms of alcohol, obesity issues, smoking, these will help root out emotional issues that we see through adolescence that do become mental health issues

later. So it's about seeing services anew and seeing how we can head off those mental health issues before they can arise, it's smarter, more coordinated services.

**Mayor**

Councillor Potheary, do you have a second supplementary?

**Councillor Potheary**

So just to clarify, you won't make that guarantee?

**Councillor Halden**

Well, Councillor Potheary wants me to guarantee that the funding level will stay precisely the same regardless of the way the services are shaped, the way that services are delivered, the way that services are accessed. That's an irresponsible guarantee to give; I will give you the guarantee we will improve GP pathways, we will improve a wraparound service for young people which will ensure that the problems of today don't become disasters of tomorrow. We will improve access with a more coordinated integrated healthcare system in the Borough, I will give you that guarantee. We are building a better, stronger service. Will I arbitrarily tell you that a certain pound sign will be put next to it, no, only a moron would do that.

**Mayor**

Councillor Potheary, could you read out Question five?

**5. From Councillor Potheary to Councillor B Little**

Certainly, so my question is to Councillor Little apparently, which is: Tenants and residents of the three Western High Rises on the Seabrooke Estate in Grays are currently experiencing great difficulties with car parking. There is a problem with capacity not meeting demand. What plans does the portfolio holder have for rectifying this situation?

**Councillor B Little**

Thank you for the question, Councillor Potheary. I'm in discussion with Councillor Gledhill in his capacity as Portfolio Holder for Housing to explore the possibility of converting the delivery area at the front of Butler House to provide additional off-street parking. Any proposal would be subject to capital funding being allocated to the scheme.

**Mayor**

Councillor, do you have a supplementary question?

**Councillor Potheary**

That's really interesting to hear Councillor, and do we have a kind of timeframe on when we expect a decision might be made on that?

**Councillor B Little**

Not currently, no.

**Mayor**

Do you have a second supplementary question? Okay, thank you. Councillor Gerard Rice, would you please read out your question?

**6. From Councillor G Rice to Councillor Tolson**

Yes, Madam Mayor. What actions are the Council taking to bring fly tipping in Chadwell under control?

**Councillor Tolson**

Thank you very much, Councillor Rice. Well, as you may or may not know fly-tipping is going up in Thurrock. It's been going in an upward trend for quite a while now, not just in Thurrock, across the Borough. Chadwell, you ask specifically about that because you are a Chadwell Councillor, but some of the measures we put in place not only will help Chadwell but they help the Borough as well, we need to think about the whole of the Borough. So, we've brought in duty of care business waste contracts because it is found that some businesses actually fly-tip in our borough and they haven't got a duty of care waste contract in place. We're also going forward with a capital bid for CCTV because where we used to have 12 enforcement officers that were deployable for environmental crime we now only have 2, something you voted in February '15. That's not enough officers, actually.

**Mayor**

Councillor Rice, do you have a supplementary question?

**Councillor G Rice**

The reason for the question is really to seek out from the Portfolio Holder, we have a problem in Lee Road and recently we had round the back of Lee Road there was a lorry just happened to dump asbestos. It's very near young children and when I did get on to the Council I must admit they cleared it pretty quickly but what I want to know is what action we're going to take on the access to this back road where we do already have a couple of poles which we put into the ground. Every time the Council put them in someone removes them and I want to know what other action we can take to prevent illegal fly-tipping in this area because I'm getting phone calls from residents on a regular basis and when asbestos is dumped it's rather concerning because you have young children and you know what young kids are like they pick

things up, throw them up in the air and they don't realise the danger and this is why I'm seeking some assurance this evening.

**Mayor**

Councillor Tolson?

**Councillor Tolson**

Yeah, I'm not sure whether back access, is it a back access, is it private or is it public but I'll still continue to answer the question. With asbestos obviously there's a safety implication for residents. If it were fly-tipping in the back access that's not public we wouldn't remove it. Probably if it was private, it was asbestos, we may because we've got the Community safety to think of. Some Councillors have actually said to me you know, we thought this fly-tipping might get collected a bit quicker, well two years ago it may well have done because we had 60 more staff, 30 in street services, 30 in parks but as I said we're being very proactive. Asbestos would have gone up the priority to get collected more quickly, we're putting the capital bid forward for CCTV and again this is a community problem so if residents have got the time and they're able to get details, registrations, video footage, mobile phone footage, send it to Councillors without putting themselves in danger, if not contact your Councillor and see if we can get down there, because what we really want is prosecutions and you might find...

**Mayor**

Can we please, please can we make our answers brief? We've gone over time and we've still got questions left and if we can't have brief answers then that's going to make this a very long meeting, 'cause I've got nothing else to do this evening regardless of whether you have. So can we please make, I've asked this every time I've been in this chair, can we make our answers brief please? Thank you.

Councillor Rice, do you have a second supplementary? Okay, can we go to Question 7? Sorry, before we do that I have to, legally, ask if you'd like to suspend standing orders for 10 minutes just so we can finish these questions. Okay can we have a vote then? All those in favour of suspending it for 10 minutes to finish the questions please raise your hands? Okay, those against? Okay, so unfortunately we've gone out of time which... I don't know why people are sniggering, I think it's very, very, I'm just very disappointed in the behaviour of this Chamber this evening, Councillor Coxshall. (*Heckling*) Well I did ask for answers and questions to be brief and they haven't been, haven't done so. So, hopefully by next meeting we would have got the message.

**Councillor Tolson**

Can I make a Point of Order, Madam Mayor?

**Mayor**

What Point of Order's that, Councillor?

**Councillor Tolson**

You ask that questions be short, Councillor Rice's question wasn't short, it was elongated. Before now when people have acted badly you've allowed them to do so when talking to me, but you know it's obvious...

**Mayor**

Councillor, your answer, Councillor! Councillor! If you don't like what I'm going to say you're quite free to leave the Chamber, or you could be escorted out, but your answer wasn't short and sweet either so don't start making accusations across this Chamber. We will now move on to the next item on the agenda.