

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 29 November 2017

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

5 questions were submitted from members of the public.

1. From Mr Byrne to Councillor B Little

Would the Council consider apologising to the residents of Stanford Le Hope for the ongoing issues at the King Street Car Park and the charges imposed on them and commit to a 100% guarantee of reintroducing free car parking by whatever means necessary?

Mayor

Councillor B Little?

Councillor B Little

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Byrne for your question. This is an important matter for the businesses and residents of Stanford-Le-Hope and this Council will apologise for the mistakes. And we do apologise for the mistakes that resulted in the loss of free parking prior to development at the time of the site's disposal. In response to a petition brought by Councillor Piccolo and discussed at our last meeting, the Council agreed unanimously that we should do everything in our power to return a 2hr period of free parking to King Street car park. I cannot give a 100% guarantee that free parking will return, it would be unwise to do so. However what I can guarantee is that we will do what we agreed to do at Council and explore every means possible.

Since our last meeting we have been working with the car park owners. We are expecting plans for the development of the car park to come forward shortly. If those plans are approved by Planning Committee, the Council will at that point aim to secure the return of a 2hr period of free parking at King Street.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor B Little. Mr Bryne, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Bryne

We're not asking for spades in the ground or even investment. It is disaster recovering, you have to commit to buying it and giving it back to its rightful owners.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor B Little?

Councillor B Little

I didn't quite get the question there but I think I got a statement there saying we should get it back? That your original question was a valid question and the response I gave you was about that we're doing all we can currently and we're in conjunction with, talking to the car park owners. I will say, this wasn't this administration's problem, this was created by the previous administration and we're trying to recover from a situation where we're not – we weren't in control at the time. And, to that point, we have got pretty close to a commitment. But I hoped to have an announcement tonight but I couldn't have an announcement tonight so we're very close.

2. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill, you are probably aware that there is waiting period before the first payment of "Universal Credit". In some cases this could mean some people are left without any form of income for at least six weeks. Is there anything the Council can do to help them, especially over the Christmas and New Year holiday?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Perrin and thank you Mr Mayor. A very good question. Obviously, as we heard at the budget, there will be a reduction that no one will last more than five weeks but that is still an excessively long amount of time without any particular money. Certainly as you say, over this Christmas season.

Of course, the Council is not responsible for organising Universal Credit payments but we do work to support claimants through this process. Customer Service staff volunteer at Hubs all receive training on Universal Credit to enable them to signpost and support claimants who are experiencing problems and are not digitally enabled. So they can make the claim if they are not entirely sure how to use the computer. The Council is also offering support via the Financial Inclusion Team to assist claimants in general advice and provisions in budgeting support. This means again to enable people to juggle what money they do have in the right way.

Claimants who do not believe they will have enough money to live on between application and 1st payment are advised to apply for an advance payment from the DWP. This is a payment that will pay a small amount upfront to make sure they are covered until the full amount is paid. We are assisting people with that.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Mr Perrin, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Perrin

Always, Mr Mayor. Councillor Gledhill, I may be wrong but I doubt any Councillor in this Chamber has ever experienced what it is like to be without money for a prolonged period. Unable to buy food or other daily essentials such as rent or fuel especially if there are children suffering as a consequence. To believe that reducing the wait for the first payment to one week is somehow a step in the right direction and that claimants independents will only have to suffer for five weeks instead of six shows a lack of understanding – *(Mayor asks Mr Perrin to ask his question)*. Councillor Gledhill, will you and the 48 other Councillors take a personal hands on approach to ensure that claimants waiting for a payment of Universal Credit over the Christmas holiday are cared for and not without food and other essentials?

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Perrin for your question. As I said, there is the ability for anyone who is going to be without any money to make the advance payment claim. That is over and above, obviously, the government trying to produce from six weeks to five weeks, I'm sure if you had to wait six weeks rather than five weeks, you're going to be happy about not having to wait quite so long. But, as I say, the Council does run a number of inclusion schemes to make sure people juggle the money they do have. We will refer people to food banks if that's the absolute necessity and we do all we can to support them through this change. There will always be issues when a government changes the way it deals with benefit payments however it is dealt with and whomever it is put in by. But obviously, we do what we can locally to ensure the distress is minimised.

Mr Perrin

Mr Mayor, may I take this opportunity to wish you and all the other Councillors a very happy Christmas and a very prosperous New Year.

Mayor

Thank you Mr Perrin. Same to you.

3. From Mr Fletcher to Councillor Gledhill

Given the current uncertainty over areas like the Culver and Dilkes sites in Belhus and Ockendon, will Councillor Gledhill please reassure us that the demand for new housing will be balanced with the need for local amenities and recreational space?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Fletcher for your question. Whilst there is an undoubtedly a significant need for new housing in the Borough, there is an equally important need to ensure that all new development are of the highest quality and includes spaces for people. So it is not just a space to live, but a space to work and enjoy. All of our local plans indeed have planning policies to ensure this does happen and will continue through the local plan process to ensure that we're not just putting in houses but we're making sure that the infrastructure and the facilities to enable the community to function are there too.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Mr Fletcher, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Fletcher

Thank you Mr Mayor. The South Ockendon forum meets on the 8th of January, assuming that the forum were to extend an invite, would the Councillor be prepared to come in and speak to the forum about these developments?

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Fletcher. The 8th of January is a family occasion for me. One that I cannot attend. But I will ask my Regeneration Cabinet Member to attend, Councillor Coxshall, should he be available. If not, one of us will.

4. From Mr Strange to Councillor Gledhill

In the light of the recent incursions by travellers on to the public parks in Ockendon. Could the portfolio holder tell me if there are any plans to secure Dilkes Park from any further incursions?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Mr Strange for your question. The unauthorised encampments in South Ockendon were at Dilkes Park and Bonnygate Wood happened. We have now put a further 4 concrete metal sleeved bollards to prevent further access at the location. But we have to do is try to give that openness whilst to allow people to come on and off the fields without those who wish to wreck the field going on and off. So we are working on what we can do to ensure that.

There is a wider programme of site hardening; I'm not going to go into which particular sites they are, I don't really wish to tip people off. But it is one of our main stage in the Borough to ensure that these are not happening again. We also don't stop at the physical; the physical is one way of dealing with it. The much better way is legislative and ensuring that there is enough support from the Essex County Traveller Unit and indeed Essex Police, to ensure they use the current legislation to move people on much faster and indeed, to get things like injunctions as we've seen in other Local Authorities in place to stop. I am pleased to say, it is part of the discussions with Essex Police and Essex County Traveller Unit and indeed, all the Leaders across Essex.

Essex Police have now set up a five man unit that will be helping to deal with this issue for an even and right understanding across Essex. So there will be no confusion as to when and when not the police can use their powers to move unauthorised encampments on faster.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Mr Strange, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Strange

Yes Mr Mayor. I understand that Bonnygate Wood has been secured but Dilkes Wood is completely defenceless. There's absolutely nothing to stop anything from driving on there and in fact, all through the summer, cars were parking on there, people were having picnics on there. Do you actually have any plans to secure that area? Because with the amount of traffic, there were actually cars driving straight across it in the summer. It's not just a matter of the travellers and people were having to take the children out the park because of it.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you for your supplementary question. I know Dilkes Wood quite well, I've lived in Ockendon for most of my childhood and

whilst picnics are very, very acceptable on our parks, using it as a through route is definitely not. I will take this up with the Director of Environment and indeed my Portfolio Holder for that area. We will work, not only with the Officers but indeed with the residents to ensure that there is still the openness but without turning it into a car park or a cut one.

5. From Mr Akhigbe to Councillor Watkins

Please let me know how many public remembrance sites are maintained by the Council and how many have not been maintained in the last couple of years. Does the Council have a program of maintenance for these sites?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you for your question. Across the Borough, we have 17 memorial sites which are maintained. I will point out; many of the war memorial sites are maintained by community groups such as the Stanford War Memorial Group who has done an excellent job in the past.

The war memorial at Little Thurrock Rectory – I have a feeling you might know where this is going, was reported to us on Remembrance Sunday by the Leader and Ward Councillors as being unacceptable. That same day, the Director for Environment had also visited the site. By Tuesday, the cleaner for the memorial had been done; it is now back to an acceptable standard. However, this is not enough so in the run up to the remembrance of First World War, war memorial standards will be put in place to ensure all war memorials are at an acceptable standard. This will be working with the Royal British Legion and will include refreshing name plates on them.

Just a little bit of background information, each war memorial is different and unique. Each memorial can have up to three different variants of stone, as each stone is different, obviously, that can cause some problems to cleanliness, especially at the time of installation, depending on how those were installed. A series of tests had been carried out on the site at Little Thurrock Rectory to ensure that the work we had carried out on the Tuesday were not going to cause any damage to the site and that's the reason why we carried that out because that was not going to be the case.

Obviously in light of the plan we have got coming forward, I'll ask all memorial groups to get in contact with us because we want to work with you. And I would also like to thank the team who are out and around cleaning the war memorials on a Friday, Saturday, Sunday in the morning and also on the Sunday after the service. Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Mr Akhigbe, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Mr Akhigbe

I'm quite happy with your response. That's good to know, at least you know the number of sites that we do have. I recognise that the Council has no statutory duty to maintain these sites but nevertheless, at the beginning of this meeting, the Mayor paid tributes to the war heroes. And I think it's an important thing for us to continue to do, not in works but in the actions of the Council. So, whilst that is not a particular question, it's more of a please keep doing what you are doing. Thank you so much.

Mayor

Thank you.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor. As I say, the standards plan has been put in place and has been worked on to ensure the higher maintaining standards that we expect are there for next year. We will be working with the Royal British Legion as I say to make sure we get it right and obviously, we want to be working with the war memorial groups out there as well so we can work together on that. Thank you.

Item 12 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 7 questions had been received to the Leader of the Council and 9 questions had been received 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 OF THE COUNCIL

1. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Back in 2016 the Leader of the Council appointed an external company to conduct a review of the Thameside Theatre. Will he give an update on their findings?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

(Councillor Gledhill requested a motion to extend the time limit for Members' questions to ensure all were answered. The Mayor agreed and also put forward the motion to extend the time of the meeting to finish at 10pm. Members voted and the motion was carried to end the meeting at 10pm and ensure all Members questions were answered.)

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. Consultants were appointed to advise on the sustainability and viability of the Thameside. A number of reports have been submitted to the Council to review what is currently provided at the theatre and what can be done to improve its future financial viability. In parallel, work is continuing to look at options for theatre provision in Grays in the context of the wider Masterplan. The commitment remains to a theatre provision continuing in Grays to support the local community. We are looking to bring forward an initial document to the Cabinet next year and then onto Overview and Scrutiny before making any final decision.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor J Kent, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

Mr Mayor, that just did not answer my question. I begin to wonder what the secrecy is around this. Back in January, when the Leader of the Council put out a press release saying it appointed these consultants, I asked the Chief Executive what the brief was that had been given to the consultants when the decision to appoint the consultants to carry out the work that was made, when it might report, how much it was costing. The Chief Executive refused to tell me that. I'll ask the Leader – who are the consultants, when is the brief, when will they report?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. I do actually have their names here somewhere. Sorry, I don't have their names here somewhere. I believe one of their names are Charcoal Blue, I cannot remember off the top of my head the second one, I'm more than happy to supply that to Councillor Kent.

I'm really quite concerned, when it comes to trying to find a conspiracy; Councillor Kent seems to be way, way up there with some other Members here. There's no secrecy about this, we couldn't be more open. The whole point of reviewing what's happening at the Thameside is: 1) ensure that as we move forward as a modern Local Authority, that all of our provision, whether it be entertainment and indeed, factual or actual from the Council, is fit for purpose. And that's exactly what these consultants have come forward with.

The last thing I really want to do is to rush out with a new decision and say, 'Right, we're going to throw x amount of money at this', and it not working like we seen in the previous administration. Indeed that Leader do repeatedly. I want to make sure that all our responses and what we do and how we spend council tax payers' money is accurate and actually deliver something that's fit for purpose.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor J Kent, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

I don't think it's a conspiracy theory Mr Mayor, when I ask the Chief Executive in January for this information and was refused it. That, to me, looks like a culture of secrecy. Does the Leader recall that I met him face to face in January and asked him if he would provide me with that information? That he undertook to do so and still hasn't.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your supplementary. In that case, I'll be brutally honest with you. I had assumed it had been passed over to you after your request and our face to face meeting. Hence, I'm wondering where you get this idea of a secret society trying to keep everything from you. But the reality still remains; everybody knows we're reviewing the Thameside provision. Councillor

Snell and I sat on the original team that started to look at this in 2015 I think, and we realised then that there was a great deal to do to bring that particular part of the Thameside and indeed along with the rest of it, into the modern world. Quite frankly, that's a simple outline of it. If you want the downright specifics, I'm more than happy to supply them and will ensure commercial confidentiality rules that they are provided as soon as possible.

2. From Councillor B Rice to Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill will you support a cross party working group to investigate with officers and residents how we could raise funds to both purchase equipment for our recreational areas and maintain it thereafter?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Rice for your fantastic question. As we've heard already from Councillor Watkins, the Council is already progressing the improvement programme for our open parks and spaces. Officers have been reviewing the approach and developing a methodology for prioritising investments in the park and open spaces based on the following criteria:

- quality and value findings – the active place parks and open spaces,
- parks and open spaces public consultation,
- residents survey,
- health data,
- known operational requirements and issues including the problems of vandalism and anti-social behaviour as we heard from Councillor Jones earlier,
- health and safety,
- physical activity in adults and
- deprivation.

Capital funding to the tune of £1.35 million has been provided to support the delivery of this programme over the next three years. However, I couldn't think of anything worse than actually trying to sort out play equipment using those very dull and uninteresting terms. Play equipment should be fun, it shouldn't be something forced on the community. So, as part of that, we will be engaging with the community to try and get active leaders that will help decide what goes in, where it goes in and how the community can help to prevent vandalism. So yes, I will certainly be supporting this call. I think it's a fantastic thing to do, we need to improve the parks and open spaces to get our children out and in a safe environment and make sure that the place for Thurrock is exactly that. Not just a place where they live, but a place where they can work and play actively.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor B Rice, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

Yes please. The reason I ask this question, Councillor Gledhill, is because many of our residents actually do want to take it on board to raise funds and to start to be part of caring for their environment. And I think it's really important that we take this opportunity when they've come out to us to engage with them. Hence, my question is not a trick, it's not anything else, it's a straightforward question that I would like to work with all Members to set up a group to start to engage our residents and some are engaged. So I want the blessing of this Chamber to go forward and start to do that and explore ways.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Rice. I know it's never a trick question with yourself, it's always as it appears. It does so what it says on the agenda. It's actually fantastic, our residents want to raise funds to improve their area. I think we can all think back to a time where whatever it was, the Council will pay for it, the Council will pay for it, the Council will pay for it. Actually, you're quite right, the residents agree across the Borough that are making friends in certain names of parks which are really working well. And when people put their own money into it, there is that ownership as well. It's not just their own money, but their time and effort that ensure that what goes in is the right thing. When we redid the park in Little Thurrock Rectory a number of years ago, I was expecting half a dozen of slides, some swings, a roundabout maybe. I think the swings are still there, the slides have been repaired, there's no such thing as a roundabout anymore, there's so much more fun stuff and that's what the children want. So engaging with the residents and getting what they want in there is the right thing to do and as I said, I will support it and I'm sure so will the other Members in this Chamber will do so.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor B Rice, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

A very quick one please Mr Mayor. I just would also like to ask Councillor Gledhill if he would join with me in making sure that the bureaucracy isn't so grey and that we can't get through the red tape. Basically around insurances, health and safety etc. When we do form this group and start to purchase equipment. Thanks.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. To be brutally honest, the only red tape I want to see is on the front of that park. You cutting that tape to make sure people can get on there as fast as possible.

3. From Councillor Smith to Councillor Gledhill

Is disrepair in council homes a factor in the appearance of black mould which is, as we know, a contributing factor to breathing difficulties experienced by many children in Thurrock?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Smith for your question. Short answer is yes but only in part. There are a number of factors that aid the growth of black mould in a property. The World Health Organisation made clear in their 2009 report that the cause is excessive moisture in the air from a number of potential sources. They are such things as:

- leaky pipes;
- rising damp;
- water ingressment;
- leaky roof, windows;
- blocked guttering or drainage; and finally,
- condensation.

This is where excess moisture in the air forms water droplets which help the mould in the air to grow on surfaces. Whilst there is no definitive list of where this comes from, actions such as boiling water, cooking, bathing or showering, drying clothes inside, heated aquariums and of course, breathing in and out but only where there is insufficient ventilation to cope with the amount of moisture being produced. This applies to the work, the home or indeed, the school.

NHS website states that babies, children, elderly, those with existing skin conditions such as eczema, those with respiratory problems such as allergies and asthma, those with weak immune systems are more susceptible. So yes, whilst disrepair is one of the factors in the cause of the black mould, it cannot be taken into isolation. Equally, other groups and vulnerable people as well as the young are susceptible to the problems of black mould.

Mayor

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

Councillor Smith

Yes, sure. Regardless of the source of the black mould and these issues, we have a duty to these children. Could you confirm for me, that Council do everything, regardless of the source, to eradicate and put these problems away? And have there been improvements in these areas over the past 12 months?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Smith for your supplementary question. Yes there has been improvement across there. When I first took the portfolio shortly afterwards, we moved the way that we deal with damp mould in residents' properties. We now ensure, especially surveys done, rather than just going along and slapping some paint on there, the treatments on minor works are done so things like triple vents are put in and make sure that where major works are required that are done and where they are not required, that it's explained to residents how to operate these factors to decrease the amount of moisture in the air. As I say, where there are works that need to be done, they will be done in line with the major works programme and then ultimately, to advise the tenants to help reduce and prevent some condensation that happens because that is one of the major causes of damp and mould. So it's not just about the fabric of the building, it's about how they are occupied and what we do inside them.

Mayor

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

Councillor Smith

Yes. So, when we come back to Council in November 2018 and I come back to this question again, can I expect further improvements?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Hopefully, in November next year, if I'm still Leader and I'm still here, you're still here and asking the same question, yes I would love to be saying, 'yes there is a massive improvement.' Obviously, every single property that we go to and we get it right and we get it right first time, that makes it an improvement. We do have the outcomes of

the Stock Condition Survey, not going to go into them right now because they're at the preliminary stage.

I'm surprised at how low the amount of damp and mould issues actually are compared to what we get as Councillors in the form of complaints. But we will be using that to work out how best to put the resources in to ensure that everybody's getting a good service when it comes to clearing up these problems of black mould and the associated problems that that causes.

4. From Councillor Collins to Councillor Gledhill

Could the Leader outline the rules affecting Officers and Members on the extent of their party political activities?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Collins. The answer for this is very quite long and I won't say uninteresting, obviously interesting for those involved. Basically, there are significant amount of guidance in relation for Officers involved in political activities. A lot of this revolves around those in politically restricted posts and the Local Government Officers (Political Restrictions) Regulations 1990 the Council is under a duty to draw up a list of politically restricted posts to ensure political neutrality; and to prevent advice and decisions from being made improperly or influenced by separate loyalties.

The Officers of the Council owe a duty both legally and in managerial terms both to the Council and to Corporate bodies as a whole to ensure they give a fair and equal service to everyone irrespective of their own political thoughts.

When it comes to elected Members, there are no restrictions on political activities, surprisingly enough, of elected councillors beyond those within the general framework of acting within the local Code of Conduct for Members and discharging their official duties. We'll get a very long and uninteresting lecture on this when we first become elected Members. We get very interesting updates, sorry, when the law changes but basically, these have remained very similar for the past five or six years.

Mayor

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

Councillor Collins

I do Mr Mayor, thank you very much. Councillor Gledhill, unfortunately, my original question prepared, to what we see down here tonight, it would be difficult and a

follow on question. But do you feel, it is right, that when elected Members on whatever level, share platforms with extremists or help support those who take part in terror activities, that action should be taken against them?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Unfortunately, well say fortunately, unfortunately, when the Standards Board for England was disbanded, the sanction of removing someone from Office went with it. I do personally believe that these kind of activities, should be made public, invariably they are made public. Should action be taken against them? Unfortunately, now that's just solely down to the individual group for political parties but I'm sure all political parties act accordingly and would take the right actions in those circumstances.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Collins, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Collins

I do Mr Mayor. I too, like Councillor Snell, saw the reports in the Daily Mail about giving former terrorists and jihadists preference on the council housing list among other things. Would you say this would be sharing a platform against those who do not have the UK interests at heart?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank Councillor Collins for your supplementary. I will be supporting Councillor Snell's motion just to make that very clear from the start. Obviously, the report in the Daily Mail was a report in the Daily Mail. Do I think that supporting jihadists and people working against us, not really my place to say. But, as I say, I will be supporting that motion and hopefully, everyone else in this Chamber will do.

5. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Will the leader give us an update on discussions about a devolution deal for South Essex?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. I am not entirely sure to what Councillor Kent is referring as there's been no discussion about any devolution deal for South Essex. However, one of my first actions as Leader in May 2016 was to attend a debate at Essex Leaders Forum which involved a proposed elected Mayor model for a devolution deal across the whole of Essex. The outcome of the vote was that the majority of the Essex Councils rejected it and that was by one vote. That includes my vote so it's just as well I had turned up there since had I not, we would be looking at a devolution deal across Essex with an elected Mayor, something that I personally could not stomach.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor J Kent, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

Mr Mayor, it has been the policy of this Council, I thought, across administrations that we wanted to work more closely with authorities along the Thames Gateway South Essex area rather than working across the whole of Essex. Our travel to work area, our geographical locality along South Essex makes more sense. Is the Leader suggesting that that is no longer the case?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. That couldn't be further from the truth. Since approximately July 2017, I've been in discussions with colleagues across South Essex on work in the South in South Essex Vision 2050. A strategy that's along the Thames Corridor, one that makes economic sense for all of us. This is not a devolution deal, a city deal, a merger, a takeover bid or any other version or a form of arrangement that would take decision making away from the individual authorities. It is solely about ensuring that we are working collaboratively across those lines on the map that sometimes act as hurdles to progress.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor J Kent, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

Yes. I'm grateful for that and I think that gives a lot of comfort. I think one of the difficulties that we will have is that we haven't been given updates on the devolution, locality, whatever we want to call it, since Councillor Gledhill became Leader of the Council and I would ask that there are more regular updates so that we actually know what's going on. Clearly, one of the big issues here is about the pooling of business rates. We read in the local press that there was an attempt made to put Thurrock in a pool with the whole of Essex, something that would have really been financially damaging to this authority. Can the Leader just give us an assurance that that is now dead and give us an update on where we are with pooling the business rates.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. You're quite right, we've always said we want to work locally with our South Essex colleagues and not with Essex as a whole. The plan that was put forward by Essex, we did withdraw from that as soon as I found out that was being suggested that we were going to take part in it. Quite frankly, that deal isn't its deal. It is a dead deal, it isn't going to happen.

Where we are with pooling rates, we are looking to extend the pool from the following financial year to ensure we get to keep more of our business rates just to make sure that the pilot that has been suggested and supported by Essex County Council may have seen 100% of the business rates across the whole of Essex being brought in. Unfortunately, there is no detail at all as to what extra responsibilities or indeed what extra grants we would lose, so you're quite right to point out that probably would have been somewhat detrimental to us in Thurrock. Nobody wants to see a return to a pre-98 even though I wasn't a Councillor, we still lived here, we still experienced the problems. Thank you Mr Mayor.

6. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

What work has been done by the council to understand the potential impact of Universal Credit on Thurrock residents?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish. Universal Credit went live for new claimants on the 25th October 2017. According to DWP there have been 134 new claimants since that time. We have contacted them to offer support and advice from our financial inclusion officers.

We have set up a fast track APA (alternative Payment Arrangements) with DWP to support vulnerable clients so the rent comes direct to the rent account. Once Universal Credit is in payment we will be encouraging tenants to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments if they have any shortfall in their housing costs.

Personal budgeting support is being made available to tenants via the financial inclusion officers. We will be encouraging claimants to request an advanced payment to help in any delay of the first payment of Universal Credit.

Mayor

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

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thurrock food banks have sounded the alarm on the impact that Universal Credit might have on some of our poorest and most vulnerable residents. Does the Leader share their concern on the impact that Universal Credit might have?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish for your question. There have been many organisations indeed. Members of the press have sounded the alarm on a number of different issues on Universal Credit, some of them in which I share and some of them maybe hyped indeed as I saw at the weekend. One of the journalist apologising saying actually what he put forward was perhaps a bit too harsh, slightly skewed what was happening. I do share some of the concerns as said, we do need to ensure that people do have enough food to feed themselves. There are statutory requirements for them to pay debts, that's why we got our financial inclusion officers helping them out to make sure what money they have go further and that they can get the money in as soon as possible to ensure they themselves do not go hungry or lose their homes.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. I think one of the issues here is that when we talk about juggling the money they have, one of the issues here for these residents is that they

simply don't have any money to juggle. One of the things that neighbouring Basildon is considering, is a scheme run by the Council that leaves hardship residents who are out of pocket while they are waiting for Universal Credit. Is the Leader considering, or could consider any scheme here to help our residents in a similar way?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish for your question. As I say, the advanced payment system that's already in place should be the default situation where residents are in a particular circumstance where they need money now and won't have to apply for Universal Credit and we are supporting that. If you feel there is something specific from another local authority that may help, please feel free to pass it on to myself or indeed, Councillor Hebb who is absent this evening to see if it something that we could implement. But of course, what people must remember is that this is not a gift to people, at most, it would be a loan to get them through that first hurdle so would need to be paid back. Thank you.

7. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

As the Lower Thames Crossing saga continues, is the Leader satisfied with the approach and performance of Highways England?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish. Short answer is no. No I'm not. As you know, all three group leaders met with Highways England earlier this year and set out expectations that were agreed by them. This included a week's notice about any letters or communication that would be sent out to our residents, details of consultation including documents that would be provided in advance and so on. However, since that meeting, I've been made aware a couple of times that meetings have taken place on very odd subjects including robo-technology and how the Lower Thames Crossing will improve this industry plus other meetings with business stake holders. Again, first I found out of that was a general invite to everybody. I know that my Deputy Leader attended the meeting in my stead with yourself and Councillor Snell, it was agreed that if this kind of approach continued, we will write to the Secretary of State to outline our concerns again. As you know, a letter setting out concerns of the Council has been sent about the approach former to Highways England on the Lower Thames Crossing that was signed by all three group leaders and indeed, the Chair of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force on Monday 20th November. I do look forward to the response on that one.

Mayor

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

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. I think first of all, I would just associate myself with the remarks made by Councillor Gledhill on the performance of Highways England and I'm sure all Members in this Chamber would agree with the principle that actually they need to be much better in terms of the openness and clarity in the way in which they are working at the moment. Clearly, Mr Mayor, it's important to challenge and question government and government agencies on their approach and views on the Lower Thames Crossing. Can the Leader tell us what is said to challenge Michael Gove who said during his recent visit, the new Thames Crossing would be good for Thurrock?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish. Obviously, just to reiterate, everything that happens on Lower Thames Crossing, affects Thurrock the most. It doesn't affect the Kent County Council or the Kent authorities or indeed any of the other Essex authorities. So, you would have thought Highways England would be putting in an awful lot more resources and information and actually working with us downside closer than they are indeed, with other local authorities. As to what Mr Gove said when he was here, at the time he made that statement, I wasn't within earshot so I couldn't have responded.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. I just wonder if the Leader will undertake to take up correspondence with Mr Gove to put him right. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Gerrish. I don't know why I should stop at Mr Gove, I will be taking it up. Obviously, right across the board, everybody

knows what we feel as a united group in this Chamber and indeed, outside of this Chamber, we indeed as well. This is just a disaster that has been thrust upon us and it's not about managing it out, it's about managing it not to happen.

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

1. From Councillor Allen to Councillor B Little

Does Council accept the problem of vehicles parking on footpaths and pavements has become a serious issue here in our Borough?

Mayor

Councillor B Little?

Councillor B Little

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Allen for your question. The Council are aware that parking on the pavements and obstruction to the footways is an ongoing issue. Parking restrictions are regularly considered and investigated, also though, we have to be conscious that sterilising parking provision could push parking into further surrounding roads.

The parking demand from local residents in some locations vastly exceeds on-street provision, in particular properties that were built at the beginning of the last century, where road width is such that if residents do not mount the kerb, then they park on the street. They would obstruct traffic movement if that was the case.

Officers continue to consider options on a localised basis and enforce in areas that have yellow lines and Traffic Regulation Orders in place. Otherwise enforcement of pavement parking lies with Essex Police; under obstruction legislation.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor B Little. Councillor Allen, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Allen

If I may. Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Little. I'm not sure whether you are aware that since 1883, it has been illegal to drive on the pavement under section 72 of the Highways Act 1835, it's in our current highway code. Can I ask you, Councillor Little, to keep me informed of any further action on this matter so I can keep my residents in the know regarding Council's actions in supporting this very problem of pavement parking?

Mayor

Councillor B Little?

Councillor B Little

I will keep Councillor Allen informed on anything that we are doing but I would also ask him if there are specific areas that he would like to be looked at that we haven't looked at previously. If you would let me know, I will look at that as well. But, it is an issue and it's not going to go away. I'm appreciating the fact that we are generally growing this problem, it's not reducing. Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor B Little. Councillor Allen, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Allen

Yes please Mr Mayor and thank you for your reply with that Councillor Little. I'm aware that the law surrounding pavement parking is a complete grey area in the UK. But, in London, where the rules are with the Highway Code stating that drivers must not do so. The rule 244 of the Highway Code again states, 'you must not park partially or wholly on the pavement in London' and you should not do so elsewhere unless signs permit. Now, is it possible, that we can, in problem areas where we are facing this pavement parking, can we look into implementing such things, in all 32 boroughs in London that currently do?

Mayor

Councillor B Little?

Councillor B Little

We can look at things obviously. The Highway Code is not the law and one of the other parts of this is that people, at the moment, parking on pavement, causing an obstruction, should be able to be penalised by the police. And that's not happening very well and I have had some discussions about how we can start to look at our enforcement officers with police officers starting to go round and doing things. I think that is probably a more pragmatic approach than trying to put legislation in that we haven't got.

London is a separate entity in terms of Transport for London and how they manage to do things. For instance, I tried to get a yellow box junction on junction 31 and I put the last yellow lines on there and I want to enforce it but I can't because I don't have the powers to within Thurrock. So there are issues round what we can do and what we can't do. I take your points on board and it's something that we are working on. Thank you very much.

2. From Councillor B Rice to Councillor Watkins

As part of the clean-up promised by Councillor Gledhill, will you give a commitment to undertaking a full assessment of all the waste bins situated in our wards to see if we have adequate numbers and that they are where they have the most impact?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. I like this question because I get to talk about the public street bin review. You probably all remember that in July when I waffled on, don't worry, not again. My report has actually already gone to Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny which was in October which was outlining the public street bin review.

As outlined in this review, we will be commencing to main stages. Stage one has actually already been completed which is looking at the current location of every single bin, condition of every bin, the types of bin we have. Also how much rubbish has been accumulated next to and around them and how many times they have been emptied.

Stage two, we would be looking at what new bins we could purchase to replace the old, damaged stock, we got much of that in the Borough. What types we would need and also we'll look more at what dual purpose bins as well. As we've already shown with the ongoing Big Belly Bin pilot, if we need to invest in something, we will invest in order to get the better ones out for our residents.

I have obviously highlighted in this, we would working closely with Street Services to kind of work out what the best types of bins will be. Those are the teams who are cleaning out and emptying the bins out every single day so want their input and expert advice on what we believe will be the best ones for the Borough. And yes, we will also be looking at the current locations, if they are in the location or if they need to be moved.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor B Rice, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

Yes please, thank you. Of course, it's very welcome that we are having a review of our bins and sooner rather than later because it appears bins are in a very, very poor state. A lot of them are rusted and I noticed in the foyer by the lifts, the battery bin's been overflowing for weeks, we need to get that sorted out. Batteries are on the floor in there, it doesn't give a very good impression when people come in.

Apart from that, the other thing I was going to ask the Portfolio Holder is, on our sports playing field, when we give – I've got two nice new bins, thank you very much, the Officers who has put them there on Orsett Heath. The Heath is looking in general, very nice especially with the park run. And the park run actually clean up their rubbish afterwards.

However, some of the football teams don't and I just wondered what we put in place for our football teams when they use our pitches? Is there something where we can say, 'you must clean up after you'. Otherwise, it's penny pounds foolish because we're getting money coming in for the pitches but we're having to clean up after them. So welcome an answer.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor. I've had two Councillors comment now about Clean It, Cut It, Fill It so thank you very much for that. And I'm glad you can also see the investment we are making is making a good difference to the Orsett Heath. Also, again thank you for informing us and being grateful for the bins on the site. Basically, there is an expectation for teams that do rent out spaces to clean up after themselves. Again, if you've got individual cases, let me know, we'll make sure we do something about it.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor B Rice, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor B Rice

No.

3. From Councillor Spillman to Councillor Halden

Is the Children Service's aftercare team fit for purpose?

Mayor

Councillor Halden?

Councillor Halden

Thank you Mr Mayor. Obviously, as statutory service, it undergoes a number of investigations. No parts of the service are in special measures so by definition, yes it is a fit for purpose service. Obviously, the majority of cases this department sees tend to be some of the individuals in some of the most desperate circumstances. So of course, it is one of those departments that is under the most pressure and is facing some of the most tragic circumstance. So, yes it is a fit for purpose department but be under no illusion, it is not an easy to run department, I'm assuming you have somewhere to go with your supplementary.

Mayor

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

Councillor Spillman

The Portfolio Holder must understand how many individual failings must have occurred for people supposedly under the supervision of the aftercare team who are under council properties to be falling under massive rent arrears facing warrants of eviction that I have to intervene in without any action being taken, any meaningful action being taken by Children's Services. And without any meaningful communication being had with the rent department and the benefits department. Can the Portfolio Holder please assure me that I won't be seeing any more cases of care leavers that have been placed in council accommodation as a transfer from care to independent living coming through my door with massive rent arrears that just haven't been picked up due to failings of supervision in the aftercare team. Thank you very much.

Mayor

Councillor Halden?

Councillor Halden

Thank you Mr Mayor. Ok, the question is in two parts. Clearly, the social care team's job is to administer good social care for children, it is not to try and provide budget housing advice because they are not the experts. Equally, it is the housing department's job to provide housing advice and not to try and administer social care, they are not the experts. And there should be a very, very clear line of demarcation, in fact, a statutory line of demarcation, the incidences that Councillor Spillman is referring to.

If an individual comes into the council service and they are being seen by the social care team and it is obvious that they are falling behind in their rent payments, that they may be perhaps housed in inadequate premises. And if they are then only seen by the social care department and a referral isn't made to the housing team, then clearly, that is wrong and it is not acceptable. We have got all the skills in this building to administer these different services and we need to see people when they come through our front door as a whole person. They don't come through the front door as a social care case or a housing case. They come through as a whole person and the Council needs to see them as a whole person.

I know I've had conversations with the Director of Children's Services and he's looking at the type of joint resource that we put in place which will be the Child's Social Care Department and the Housing Department and the Aspire Team that does the aftercare service when people leave care which is under my portfolio, hence me answering the question, to make sure that there is that good join up. So while I don't think that the social care team or housing team should be trying to make decisions about each other's department because they are not the experts and that could cause great problems to the family. Clearly, if someone presents themselves

with acute housing issues and the social care team are not making those appropriate referrals, clearly that is not acceptable and it needs to change.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor S Little. Councillor Spillman, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Spillman

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you for that answer, I think the Portfolio Holder understands the problem and what we need to do to improve. One of the most profound things I've noticed is when – I'll come out of it, I'll ask this, what this administration is doing about it? We've got evermore specialist services who are specialising in certain areas and yet there seems to be this ongoing culture of compartmentalisation, where people are just not talking to each other, departments are just not communicating. And not only is it dangerous for people when those departments aren't communicating but it ends up wasting a lot of council money. These inefficiencies, can we please drive home the importance of proper communication and proper cooperation between departments?

Mayor

Councillor Halden?

Councillor Halden

Thank you Mr Mayor. Yes absolutely, the correct communication between departments is vital and as I say, that's why the Director is looking up what joint resource we can put in place between the housing and social care team to make sure the right people get the right advice at the right time.

And in terms of joint up service and you ask what the administration is doing about that, one of the undertakings that I gave and we had the debate over children centres, I said that the reason I wanted a policy of purely building better services is because I wanted a more joint up service between the health and education team to try and push up, the amount of children that we see. That the old social care – the old children's services, Children Centre Scheme, only saw about 75% of eligible people. Well I understand now that we are bordering on the 94% of eligible families in those reach areas are now registered with their children's centre. 94%, so that is what this administration is doing.

We're trying to push past old outdated systems, fewer buildings, better service, making sure that the people who need support are actually registered with the right services. Because as you say yourself Councillor, if a family actually has to look at severe housing changes to make sure they can look after their child, there's no way we should be making decisions that could possibly push up their rent arrears.

We need to be intervening faster and it's schemes like this, 94% of eligible families register with their children's centre making the Council more connected and the key

to doing that is making sure we see somebody as a whole person and not just as a social care case or a housing case. And that's the undertaking I can give you.

4. From Councillor Spillman to Councillor S Little

Would the portfolio holder agree that only offering accommodation to the children of homeless families, where no homeless duty is owed to the family and no other welfare issues are of concern, would be inhumane, unethical and potentially place children at threat of serious harm?

Mayor

Councillor S Little?

Councillor S Little

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you for your question Councillor Spillman. That's actually incorrect. Children's social care do offer accommodation to families and not just to their children under section 17 of the Children's Act. Duties for families have been found intentionally homeless, we do help. And we have 15 families on our books at present. So that's incorrect, we do help them.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor S Little. Councillor Spillman, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor Spillman

I'm afraid there's been an attempted – maybe without your knowledge, there's been an attempted shift of policy from the sort of casework that I have been seeing. I'd just like to ask, can the Portfolio Holder, whether she considers the following acceptable:

- Families told to leave the Council by social services when they've got young children without social services having any idea where these children will sleep that evening.
- Families being told that the only option would be to give their children up if they accept help.
- Families being offered privately rented accommodation in Clacton, Southend, North East of England.
- Parents being told that if they can't find a property, then they risk their children being taken away.
- Families being offered privately rented accommodation by social workers in Southend that aren't remotely affordable due to Children's Services having no knowledge of the local housing allowance.
- Children's Services spending over £10,000 because they didn't realise the family could claim housing benefit when they were paying the rent for them.
- And a family that's already been dumped in Thurrock, now this Christmas face being evicted.

I don't think this is acceptable behaviour and please tell me this Portfolio Holder doesn't either.

Mayor

Councillor S Little?

Councillor S Little

Thank you for your reply, Councillor Spillman. What I'm beginning to get strong overtones for is that this is a specific case that you are talking about or several. Because, I've had 15 families on the books for quite a long time that we've been paying the rent for, supporting them and even offering to pay a month upfront for their deposit etc, to get them on the right road. And some of these people just will not be helped. Now, I'm sorry, I think what's happening is, these people now, was part of the 15, and two of them have now found further accommodation. Now, I know you have been speaking with the Director of Children's Services, but you haven't come – and I haven't had one email from you telling me what specific cases you have. And, I've been supporting quite a lot of these cases for well over a year. So, if you'd like to give me their details and the exact cases, or pick up the phone and say, 'Hi Councillor Little, can we meet up unofficially?' Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor S Little. Councillor Spillman, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Spillman

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Little. Will the Council please give a promise that this administration find the thoughts of losing your children has a means to gatekeep and reduce demand on services to be extremely dangerous, unethical and inhumane? And please explore all means to find a solution to this problem without this shocking, shocking potential policy that is – this change of policy that I'd seen in several cases as part of my casework?

Mayor

Councillor S Little?

Councillor S Little

Thank you Councillor Spillman, I'm glad you're going to take my offer up. No, this is incorrect. I haven't seen any cases where this has happened. So please bring them to me and I will look at them but there has not been a change in policy. Thank you.

5. From Councillor Allen to Councillor Watkins

Councillor Watkins, following our site meeting in Tilbury last month to look at the litter and abandoned cars, could you give me an update on these car parks and could your response also include the unmaintained land that divides Sycamore Close and Albany Road?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. First of all, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to come out and meet with you on site. As eluded tonight, it's one of the best ways to get some action done. And thank you also for bringing it up before coming to Full Council meeting rather than just sitting on it for four weeks and then trying to get action on it afterwards as we see sometimes.

As you may have seen in a recent press release, 20 vehicles were flagged up by the DVLA and we will be ensuring these vehicles will be removed if they are not claimed. Even if they are claimed, all owners are getting fined with £200 each individual car for leaving vehicles in abandoned conditions. We will be monitoring very closely what happens and of course, if we see more abandoned cars. Thank you for your input and if you could continue to give that input to us as well, we will make sure that action again is swiftly followed.

Alongside this, once we had obviously met, the car park had a deep clean, I was there the day it was happening, had another walk around with the team to make sure everything we had discussed was being followed up on. I'm really glad to see that was the case and also, fortnightly, cleaning will be taking place on that. The electric company next to it who obviously have the fenced off area have been reminded of their cleanliness and maintenance. And if we need to, we will take enforcement action which is known as a Community Protection Process.

Again, going back to the areas of private land, whether this has been the case, we are making sure we are informing them of their responsibilities and again will be taking action against those should we need to. Further information as well based on it, I unfortunately have seen to have been across of town, shops were checked for their trade waste, documents which I'm glad to see most of them had. We're keeping a close eye on the commercial business around to ensure trade waste bins are in their designated areas and are maintaining their cleanliness standards which are expected and are using the land as they should be following on from obviously, what we saw that day. Along with this, as I've said, we've already had our enforcement officers.

After investigation again, of the bigger piece of land we saw, again, had a long site visit, saw some unfortunately, horrible stuff on that site as well, had to be very careful where we were all walking. We are making sure that the land owners again, are completely responsible for their actions and again, enforcement action will be taken. But please, continue doing what you've done and again, good work. Thank you.

Mayor

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

Councillor Allen

If I may, thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Watkins for the update. First of all, I'd like to thank the officers enforcing the abandoned cars and I would appreciate that if the Portfolio Holder can assure Members that further and ongoing investigations will continue in regards to these two locations, thus keeping these two areas clear of both rubbish and abandoned cars. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor for your supplementary. I can inform that, obviously, in recent months, we were given more responsibilities and powers to go off on untaxed vehicles so that forms into part of the enforcement action that we do follow up on those sites as well. But 100%, we're doing that and we're doing that across the Borough as well.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor Allen, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Allen

Thank you and I will keep you informed Councillor Watkins. Thank you.

6. From Councillor Snell to Councillor Hebb

The Money Advice Trust, as part of their Stop The Knock Campaign highlighting the trend in increased use of bailiffs by local authorities, recently sent in a FOI request for information about the use of Bailiffs by this Council. Unlike most neighbouring Councils, Thurrock did not respond. Can the Portfolio Holder explain why?

(Councillor Hebb was not present to answer this question so the question would be deferred to the next Full Council meeting).

7. From Councillor Collins to Councillor Watkins

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm what is being done to improve recycling in Thurrock please?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. Obviously, it's environment night tonight. As I stated in my annual report this evening, we have been hard at work cleaning this Borough up, bringing it back from the neglect and mismanagement we saw under the six years of Labour. One of the priority areas is recycling, it's something we would be really looking into in 2018. One of the things that I wanted to mention is something of my recent investigations. Recycling rates have seen the biggest dip between 2013 – 14 to 2015 – 16, we went from 42% to 37% which was again, under the former administration and then looking at the annual reports and then hoping to do one better tonight because it seems to be on two separate reports. The only line is, we need to improve communication.

For those who don't know, we have to reach 50% target by 2020 and as I've already alluded to, this is something that I really want us to make headway on in 2018. Also for the fact is, it does use taxpayers' money due to increase in disposal costs. There are few quick wins we will be undertaking for the remainder of 2017. We will have a WEE amnesty over Christmas to ensure small electrical items are disposed of quickly and correctly. Additional clear recycling bags will be available for residents across the Borough in areas such as libraries so we will be allowing side waste of recycling across the Christmas period. And we will also be instigating greater communication over the social media channels to try and again encourage recycling. But also safety as well which is obviously key at Christmas time with people leaving boxes out, obviously, it can show people what they've had.

However, this is not enough. A project group has been set up with research being carried out over the last few months so we can go deeper and produce more direct messages to areas we see the worst recycling rates in. This communication will be going live from January and it will be a communication plan which will also continue to evolve. Last week, myself and Director in Communications met to go over a lot of new ideas we will be instigating again in 2018. A little too early to be mentioning those tonight, it will be coming back, please do ask me. I think there will be some very great ideas where we will be working with all members of society including Children for Education.

In regards to that as well, the 28 new waste vehicles will each be individually named by schools of our Borough so we will be actively working with the schools doing some photos, encouraging early education about recycling, about obviously, putting litters in the bin and obviously will be fed back to the parents. There is more to do to get recycling rates up, it is a main priority of 2018 and I welcome what we will do.

Mayor

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

Councillor Collins

I do Mr Mayor, I'm afraid to ask. Can you very quickly give us more information on the developments of Linford Waste Site? It was touched upon in O & S.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor. In response to the Council over there, you already asked me a question about the Portfolio Holder report anyway so I think it's only fair if other Councillors have got questions that should be heard.

Obviously, as I've already alluded to tonight, there will be a series of changes hopefully going forward with the Linford site to improve access, accessibility for the residents and to stop trade waste abuse. We obviously procured the site in June of this year and a survey took place to see what was going on and we saw multiple times, trade waste abuse.

This is actually really important, you can laugh it off Councillor Rice but this costs the Council a lot of money, taxpayers a lot of money, people abusing this site. So this is something we are putting a stop to. There will be a permit system in place so vans and lorries can only access the site 12 times per year and they have to be residents of this Borough as well. If not, they will be turned away. As I say, this is coming to Cabinet in December, it will go to Planning for approval, to get their views and thoughts. Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor Collins, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Collins

No.

8. From Councillor V Holloway to Councillor Huelin

Why have volunteers in Purfleet hub been told the hub can only open and operate when paid staff are present?

Mayor

Councillor Huelin?

Councillor Huelin

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. Not actually sure where you got this information from, it's not correct. They haven't been told that volunteers can open and operate a hub without paid staff being there.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Huelin. Councillor V Holloway, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

Councillor V Holloway

Well that's a great response and that's what I want to hear. I was told directly by volunteers themselves who had been stopped on a couple of occasions from opening the hub when they were available. They were told on one day that because no staff member was present, they weren't able to open even though they were there. In following up with Officers, I was told this was because there were people at meetings and they couldn't open the hub and there was no follow up to my question about why volunteers weren't allowed. I just wanted to ask, that bearing in mind that, basically, what is happening, why have they been told this? Are there new rules in place with volunteers? I'm sure Councillors will agree that hubs have been a fantastic success and they're really important to a lot of our communities. The volunteers and I are concerned that the hubs not opening mean that the communities aren't involved in their environments when they should be. Can I ask if you are taking the hubs from volunteers?

Mayor

Councillor Huelin?

Councillor Huelin

Basically, on that particular occasion in question, it wasn't volunteers, it was a volunteer. And unfortunately, it's fantastic that she or he, I don't know which, wanted to volunteer but there wasn't any available staff that day and there wasn't another volunteer to go with them. Now we have a duty of care and health and safety to protect members of the public as well as staff. We can't have one volunteer opening a public building on their own, it's not safe to do so which why they were unfortunately, turned down that day. But when there are volunteers and what we are doing to make sure we get more volunteers is that we're in the process of recruiting a volunteer co-ordinator. That way, we can help to grow the number of volunteers and make sure that we can open more often.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Huelin. Councillor V Holloway, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor V Holloway

Thank you. I am concerned obviously, that there is misinformation and I am minded to believe, obviously our volunteers who came to me who were quite distressed even though we had different versions of what happened in that instance. Volunteers are obviously key to our hubs and staff aren't, shouldn't be essential to their running.

Can you promise our Officers are upholding the principle of the hub for communities, run by communities for the community?

Mayor

Councillor Huelin?

Councillor Huelin

I kind of thought I did when I said volunteers can open a hub without paid staff being present but if you feel that's not happening, then by all means, I'm happy to meet with volunteers, we'll talk with Officers, we'll make sure that is definitely in place. But I've been reassured by all Officers, Directors that it can open, but with volunteers, not volunteer.

9. From Councillor Redsell to Councillor Watkins

It was great to see officers cleaning around the war memorial at Little Thurrock just before the service. The memorial itself was still in need of a clean, can the cabinet member explain why it was not cleaned before Armistice Sunday and who organised the clean up after?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins?

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor for your question. Firstly I would like to thank you for your kind comments about cleanness and I will make sure they are passed on to the team who took great pride in making sure that it was cleaned around Armistice Day. I am not going to go into details that we have already eluded them already this evening but I can confirm that it was Councillor Gledhill who made the initial approach on Armistice Sunday to make sure that the memorial was inspected on the same day and it was him that ensured that the clean-up was followed on and standard plans are in place for next year.

Mayor

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

Councillor Redsell

Thank you Mr Mayor, I have read with disgust that other political parties have tried to grab headlines and take credit for works that from what you see, or what you say, were justifiable delay and something that the leader took immediate action on. It was good to see the editor of Thurrock independent newspaper not only attended Turps Corner ceremony but to make clear the

difficult circumstances in relation to this particular memorial and promote the action to be taken over the next year to bring each and every war memorial up to scratch. Can the Portfolio Holder tell me when any other enquiry was made about this memorial.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor, other than the one obviously made by Councillor Gledhill on the Sunday I do believe the only other reported enquiry was on Tuesday by then tests had already been completed on the memorial site and the clean-up had already begun and all most finished.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Watkins. Councillor Redsell, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

Councillor Redsell

Thank you Mr Mayor, I don't want to score any cheap political points, that aside, can you outline any other memorials that had had works already to improve them since the Leader's announcement.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor for your supplementary. Very quickly I can confirm that the Council will be picking up the costs of the new flagstone at the bottom of the memorial site.