

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 24 July 2019

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

2 questions were submitted from members of the public.

1. Question was withdrawn prior to Council.
2. **From Mr Perrin to Councillor Little**

Some Councils have expressed concern that they will be unable to meet their statutory obligations with regards to the provision of Social Care, that is to say, Child care, care of the elderly and adult social care. Does Thurrock Borough Council have any such concerns?

Mayor

Councillor Little

Councillor Little

Thank you Mr Perrin and good evening and thank you once again for your question.

Yes, it's recognised nationally that adult social care perhaps needs to be looked at more thoroughly etc. But within Thurrock, can I reassure you, we've got some ambitions about how we deal with the elderly and how we look after them. And through some of the initiatives that we've done, I can assure you that they are well and truly looked after. And regarding the Children's Services, yes, again, it's because of the population growth etc. And some of the children coming into care, particularly in my part, have more complex needs etc. But we, as a Council have invested a further £1 million pounds into the service to help sort that out.

So thank you Mr Perrin, yes I do.

Mayor

Mr Perrin do you have a supplementary question?

Mr Perrin

Thank you Mister Mayor.

Councillor Little, I believe a privately owned care home, namely Ladyville Lodge, South Ockendon, went into administration in April this year. Can you tell me what happened to the residents, does the Council have a legal responsibility to provide care for residents who are at risk when privately owned care homes go into administration or are found to be longer fit for purpose?

I pose this question with some slight reservation. Some of you may think I have a veterinary interest going to my head.

Councillor Little

We probably do. But as I say, I don't particularly know that we had anyone in that particular home at that time. But yes, I've been looking into homes and what happens. You know this Whorlton Hall that they've had all this trouble with etc where people were being cruelly treated. First thing I did, before a Panorama team even went out and even have it on their news programme, was check with Officers was 1) we didn't have anyone looked after by that particular care organisation and no one in their care. So we do take this quite seriously.

I know if we have anyone and has gone into care that we do the best we can to support them etc and keep them because very often, elderly people don't like change. They like to stay where they are and as you know, I never met an elderly person who has said, 'I want to go into a care home.' So that's why I work so tirelessly to keep people at home. So if you have any particular concern about a particular resident, if you would let me know, I would be more than happy to follow it through for you. But I can assure you I check regularly that our residents are safe and it is as well with the Children's so I'm sure they all are. Thank you.

Item 13 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 2 questions have been received to the Leader of the Council and 5 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 Akinbohun to Councillor Gledhill

There is open buying, selling and use of drugs at Chafford Hundred Station, especially on Friday evenings. It is a shocking experience for my residents and they cannot understand why this is allowed to continue. What can the Portfolio Holder do to reassure my residents or have the police given up on drug crime?

Mayor

Thank you Councillor. Councillor Gledhill please respond to the question.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mister Mayor. Thank you Councillor Akinbohun for your question.

The Council works closely with the Police and have in fact funded additional activities to help tackle ASB across the area including Chafford Hundred. However drug related issues and crime are a matter solely for the Police.

Chafford Hundred station is the jurisdiction and responsibility of the British Transport Police but there is a multi-partner working group which includes the Community Policing Team, British Transport Police (BTP), Intu and ourselves.

In addition to the two police teams and the community protection officers, we also conduct litter patrols with uniformed officers from the Council. It does act as a visual deterrent.

However, in response to ASB and the other issues that you've raised, Officers from the Community Policing Team have initiated a dedicated operation called Operation Cluster. This is a branch of Operation Sceptre, a dedicated operation aimed at tackling offensive weapons and drug related crime in Thurrock.

Operation Cluster up until the 8 July 2019 has seen a number of successes. These include:

- 57 Police intelligence reports have been submitted and are being actively progressed.
- 26 persons have been stopped and searched.
- 41 people are being investigated as involved parties in this operation and 25 vehicles have been identified for proactive stops.
- 2 suspects have been arrested for possession of bladed articles (knives).

- 4 suspects have been arrested for possession with intent to supply class A drugs.
- 1 suspect has been arrested for possession of class A drugs.
- 1 suspect has been arrested for driving whilst disqualified.
- 1 suspect received a Cannabis Warning.
- 2 vehicles have been seized for no insurance.

Whilst there have been 48 recorded incidents to Essex Police and the BTP, for the railway station and access in the last 12 months leading to Lakeside, only 3 of those reports were in relation to drugs.

Reports keep coming in to the Council in relation to drugs and ASB, but as I say, the drugs issue does fall solely under police. Recent reports have been flagged with the Police only to establish that little or no information has been received prior to what's come to this Council up until that point. I really, again, echo what I said at the beginning of this evening which is if residents see crime, if they're a victim of crime, to report it to the police or to Crimestoppers. Without that information, the police will not take any action. So on the last comment on has the police given up on drug crime, I think the list of activities says quite clearly, no they haven't.

Mayor

Councillor Akinbohun, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Akinbohun

Yes Mister Mayor. I really don't know where all that data came from because about 2 weeks ago, I went to Chafford Hundred station by myself around 10.30pm at night. I sat there trying to know what is going on within this gang and I was able to witness 2 dealings with drugs. And within 5 minutes that I was there, a police officer came in a van, 2 police officers actually and within about 2 seconds, they were about to drive off. I talked to them, I introduced myself and I told them about the dealings and the numbers of the vehicles that I have taken myself.

What I really don't understand is that we don't need deterrent or police in Chafford Hundred anymore. We want people that are ready to work, probably non-uniformed officers that has gotten to that level, probably non-uniformed officers that will come to Chafford Hundred, go round, do their job properly. Not short of, not short of vehicles and arrest criminals. That's what we want in Chafford Hundred. Thank you Mister Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill?

Councillor Gledhill

I kind of got a question from that Mister Mayor.

The data came straight from the police. We don't just make these figures up, I can assure you. In relation to non-uniformed officers, I'm not going to tell you when a non-uniformed officer goes out as you can imagine, but they have been out, if you follow all the activity that we've done for the C-17 gang. You'll know there was a significant amount of operational time spent without uniforms on and to say for the police to go out and do their job properly, I find a bit of an insult as a former special constable. And I'm sure that most police officers who go out and do their job on a daily basis whether they be in a uniform or not, believe they do an adequate, if not fantastic job. So I'm sure you'll be apologising for those remarks at some point.

However, there are police operations in relation to this. You had questions about the station, it was good of you to go and identify yourself to the police officers and indeed to tell them of a crime being committed. I'm sure it was one of those reports that I referred to earlier.

Mayor

Thanks Councillor Gledhill. Councillor Akinbohun, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Akinbohun

No Mister Mayor, thank you.

2. From Councillor Okunade to Councillor Gledhill

What urgent procedures and processes are you putting in place pending the presentation of a report to General Services Committee on the recruitment of a permanent Director of Children's Services (DCS) to protect the discrete roles and responsibilities of the DCS, undertake local test of assurances so that the focus on outcomes for children and young people is not diluted and ensure clear lines of accountability are maintained?

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Gledhill please respond to the question.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Okunade for your question.

To support the interim DCS arrangements, two Interim Directors have been appointed from the existing Assistant Directors for Children's and Adult's. Both have many years specialist expertise in their respective fields and will provide valuable operational leadership which will allow the DCS to focus on the strategic nature of the role. This will ensure that leadership capacity is not diluted and there remain clear lines of accountability to the Chief Executive, Portfolio holder for Children and adult social care and Leader and indeed all Elected

Members. In addition, all commissioning services have been moved to another directorate to ease the pressure.

Without pre-empting the discussion and outcome of the GSC, practical arrangements have been put in place to commence any steps necessary to implement the GSC decision.

The Council will continue to receive assurance as to the effectiveness of Children Services in improving the outcomes for children and young people through the usual presentation of reports to Cabinet, Corporate Parenting Panel and Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The impact on service provision of options for the DCS role going forward will be further considered at General Services Committee as you've outlined.

Mayor

Councillor Okunade, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Okunade

Yes Mister Mayor. Thank you very much Leader for the answer to my question.

I know we had a lot of questions at the last meeting of Full Council where we made it clear to the powers that be that there's need for a permanent and dedicated DCS. Going forward, I just want your reassurance that when we do have that General Services Committee, that it's going to be an open minded meeting, that it's not just going to be a rubber stamping on the proposal put forward.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Okunade for your question.

I always go in open minded to any of the Committees whether I chair them or otherwise. So yes, there is that commitment there, that it will be a full and frank discussion, it will be in line with the roles and responsibilities of us Elected Members to make those decisions and we will make those decisions accordingly.

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

1. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Maney

What is the reason for the delay to the implementation of the Zone H resident parking zone?

Mayor

Councillor Maney, please respond to the question.

Councillor Maney

Thank you Mister Mayor and Councillor Kent.

To start with Mister Mayor, for clarity, permit parking area H covers a number of predominantly residential roads in the south of Grays. Roads where the properties have very little or no off street parking and where residents have complained for a number of years over growing commuter non-residential parking so the zone is designed to tackle that.

Mister Mayor, the delegated decision report was signed in October 2018. The physical work needed to enable the zone were completed on 22nd May this year and the scheme became live on the 1st of July. It turned into the actual delay that Councillor Kent questions, I understand there were a number of late representations received by the Council which Officers felt necessary to investigate before the zone was fully approved or become live.

It must also be said that there was, unfortunately, an administrative oversight which meant that there weren't enough permits for the anticipated start date so more had to be ordered before it could become fully live. Thank you Mister Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor John Kent, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

Yes, I'm grateful for that response, the fact is the scheme is now in and it's given a lot of help to residents who are covered by the scheme. But there are however a couple of anomalies.

One is that two roads were inexplicably left out of the scheme. They are Gypsy Lane and Charles Street. Residents in Charles Street has told us that they have had to park as far away as Bradley Avenue because every street around them is now covered by the resident parking scheme. This, Mister Mayor, as far as Gypsy Lane is concerned, Gypsy Lane is one of those late representations that were made by local businesses which means that Gypsy Lane was taken out of the scheme with no reference to Members and no further reference to local residents. My question Mister Mayor, is that I've raised this with Officers and I was told the earliest those streets can be included in the scheme is October and frankly, that isn't good enough for those residents who have literally been stuck with nowhere to park. Will the Portfolio Holder use his good offices to get this scheme done as quickly as possible?

Mayor

Councillor Maney.

Councillor Maney

Thank you Mister Mayor. Thank you Councillor Kent for your supplementary question, actually, I'm very disappointed to learn of the hardship this has caused residents in the roads that Councillor Kent mentions. The schemes are constantly being looked at to see if minor amendments are needed and to make sure they are embedded with as many people as possible in mind. There are people who aren't happy with the precise detail and we will of course try to accommodate everyone as far as we can.

In answer to Councillor Kent's question, of course, I would always want amendments to be implemented as swiftly as possible especially where they have profound implications. I wouldn't want to do anything which undermines the integrity of the process or the scheme itself. So if Officers are saying it will take that long, before I give any commitment, I would like to know why they are saying it needs to take that long. There is a statutory process, we have to follow that.

As I say, I wouldn't want to undermine that. But if anything can be done to move it along as quickly as possible, then of course I will lend my thought to that. Thank you Mister Mayor.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Maney. Councillor Kent do you have a second supplementary?

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor, Officers have brought forward the delegated decision report very quickly for which I am grateful. That's now gone to local Councillors for consultation. That should mean that we can shortcut the process. I also understand that there are powers that the Officers have to implement schemes for a limited amount of time without going through full consultation. It should be possible to do that to take us up to October deadline.

My second supplementary is in regard of the very few people that live above shops in Bridge Road. Because these people have a postal address that is outside the zone, the only place they've ever been able to park is now no longer available to them. So again, they are left with absolutely nowhere to park.

I know that the Portfolio Holder has received a petition from both the shopkeepers and the residents. Again, Mister Mayor, I would be grateful if he would give an undertaking that he will encourage Officers to use their imagination to find a way of resolving these issues for these very few people.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor. Councillor Maney.

Councillor Maney

Thank you Mister Mayor. I can assure Councillor Kent that process has already started even before this meeting. I've already spoken to Officers, I've met with Officers and their issue has been raised with them. Again, I don't want to see anything done which undermines the integrity of this scheme.

When you consult on something and then you go and change something, the people who have responded to this consultation might feel a little bit hard done by if they then haven't had the opportunity to consult on something which wasn't in the original scheme.

With that in mind, yes, we want to accommodate everyone but there might be other people who may have comment on that. The whole point of a resident's parking scheme is to enable residents to park in the roads they live in. If you then let Non-residents Park in a road they don't live in, which now comes under the zone rather undermines the resident's parking I fear.

But if the boundary of the scheme can be extended to cover part of Bridge Road, I think that's a sensible idea and I have to say, I can only repeat the process has already started and I've asked Officers if they can accommodate the wishes of those residents and businesses, then they should do.

2. From Councillor Fish to Councillor Coxshall

Does the Portfolio Holder have confidence in Thurrock Regeneration Limited (TRL)?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall.

Councillor Coxshall

Thank you very much.

Yes. But as always, with the caveat, Thurrock Regeneration Limited has to achieve its wider regeneration goals when it has set up its 1,000 homes by the end of 2023 with 350 of them being council homes.

Mayor

Councillor Fish, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Fish

Yes please Mister Mayor. Thank you for that response.

The reason I raise the question is because of Thurrock Regeneration Limited's involvement in the Belmont Road allotments problems which has caused anger and upset for the residents of Parker Road and the surrounding area. So what lessons has the Portfolio Holder learnt from TRL's involvement in that debacle?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall.

Councillor Coxshall

Before I start, I may be asking them because I am a resident of that immediate and very close vicinity. So obviously, I am there with a different view slightly but I understand the concerns because obviously I've seen it, I've been there. I understand it and I live there.

Now, what we can say is that Thurrock Regeneration Limited is a private arm of this Council. Obviously, we can't force them to do what we want. I'm sure the Board have understood the concerns we have had on this. So in the involving thing in the building industry, every site is very different and what we want to do is every scheme is constantly involving and changing and making it better.

I'm sure that TRL are giving these concerns and they will on the next schemes going forward, they will have a better process and understanding of what they are doing. But I do take the point that this hasn't been the best of our Thurrock Regeneration Limited.

Mayor

Councillor Fish, do you wish to propose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Fish

No thanks Mister Mayor.

3. From Councillor Potheary to Councillor Hebb

Can the Portfolio Holder please outline the process for deciding fees and charges for community and voluntary groups to use Council spaces?

Mayor

Councillor Hebb, please answer the question.

Councillor Hebb

Of course Councillor Potheary.

As you may recall in your own period as a Cabinet Member there are some 1,093 fees and charges that go through a process every February. That goes

through a formal budget setting process concluding at February Cabinet. The mechanism for changing is that obviously all the charges increases, decreases and business cases and so forth go into the relevant Overview and Scrutiny set. That feedback comes back out and therefore, Cabinet can reflect and take guidance as a steer and ultimately make a decision.

You've asked specifically about community and voluntary groups. A discount rate is always applied in the details as scheduled in the respective rate cards that are available publicly. As I say, there are 1,093 fees and charges in the current scheme. I have a feeling there may be one in particular you're going to ask me about so either I'm going to look very silly or well informed. We'll find out.

Mayor

Councillor Potheary, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Potheary

Yes please. You are correct Councillor Hebb, I do have two that I want to raise very briefly.

So on two occasions in recent months, I've been contacted directly by local community groups facing astronomical increases in their rents. In one case, the council wanted to double the hourly rate and then the other increase it fivefold. When I challenged these hikes to relevant departments, have either reconsidered or said it was an error and then they have come back with more sensible or sustainable price increases.

However, the period of uncertainty created caused a great deal of distress to those community and voluntary groups, worry and instability for them with them once actually looking at how they are going to wind down what they do because they just simply could not afford a doubling of the hourly rate.

Can we try in future avoid this by having a clearer process of how we communicate fees and charges, particularly the increases to voluntary and community groups?

Mayor

Councillor Hebb

Councillor Hebb

Absolutely, you have that full undertaking. A layer of context that needs to be established is if we're talking about in terms of a particular one around the corner of the college Councillor Potheary, the college performed a number of changes outside of the process. Therefore, when the Local Authority was made aware of that, it was able to put a ceasefire on that and say that we need to follow the recognised process.

I would add that there is a caveat for exceptional out of process fees and charges that has to go through a very structured process and it hadn't gone in this instance. So that doesn't answer the question about the anxieties and concerns. That issue has been ceased in particular. It is an exception, not the norm.

That said, if there are any particular anxieties left unreconciled, by all means, let them reach out either to myself or by you, however you want to do it and I'll happily meet. The Chair and I have had discussions and will happily do that. But as I say, exception rather than norm and anything they want to put forward will go through the usual spending budget realm.

4. From Councillor Okunade to Councillor Little

In view of the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding arrangements, how do you ensure the council contributes effectively to safeguarding Thurrock children?

Mayor

Councillor Little

Councillor Little

Thank you Councillor for your question. I should make it clear from the start that while the Local Children's Safeguarding Board has changed to a Partnership this has not changed the practice level of approach as you probably realise. The Children's Safeguarding Partnership has adopted many of the previous standards used before the Children's Safeguarding Board and we now have a rotation of three independent chairs so they come from all different agencies so that will roll on the effects and will also have a peer review etc to make sure that it is all being done correctly and actually I was sitting here thinking about it. I am not sure but I don't know if I will be able to invite you along to one of the Children's Safeguarding meetings and then you could see the process yourself because I think this would be a good thing for you to come along to. Ok. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Okunade do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Okunade

Thank you. Thank you Councillor Little. You do know, don't you, that we actually work together obviously on this as this is a matter of children and you know we are corporate parents and just want the best outcomes for our children and I would be happy to come along to the meeting if I am invited but my supplementary question is particularly as I know you used to attend the safeguarding board and I know we are not going to have independent chairman

for the new arrangement and I just wanted to find out how you personally get involved in this as the portfolio holder.

Mayor

Councillor Little

Councillor Little

Thank you Councillor. Yes I personally get involved. I go along to all the meetings. I speak frequently apparently I have been one of the most vocal councillors at these meetings. To start yes I am. So regarding the children on what happened as portfolio holder I hold the service to account all the time, I am always up there asking questions perhaps sometimes I go a bit I should remember to be a bit more strategic and not so involved, but I do. I just can't help it when it is children. I have oversight of all the business plans, the children's services and local safeguarding board, I have direct and frequent visits with officers at all different levels, you know, at least fortnightly if not more often usually about once a week which I know sounds a little bit but they are our children and that is what I would do if I were a parent. I have performance updates monthly; I benchmark them against comparative authorities I always look to other authorities to see what they are going. If they have best practice and I will say "can we not do this, can we not do that". I have started up the development board which you probably know now has been up and running for 18 months. This is again when we meet up every 3 months and this is when we have peer officers come along and actually say what is happening in their departments and what they are good at, what we need to look at, what we need to make better. I think I am, well I know I am, the first portfolio holder that insisted that on a Friday evening I have an email sent through to me, I don't care if it comes through at midnight, I always answer it, even when I am away. Which will tell me if any children are missing, what's happened to them but not only that but why they have gone missing. Because I want to know. Are they unhappy in their placement or are they just being little teenagers. I always want to know. So I meet with the children quite often they all have my email address and I also, as you know, sit on the fostering and adoption panel so I get feedback from foster parents on what the children are doing and I have been on loads of training courses which brings me nicely to the fact that I do hope that all members have done their corporate parenting training. It is important and well worthwhile. So if you haven't could you please do it as soon as possible? Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to add?

5. From Councillor Van Day to Councillor Maney

Can the Cabinet Member outline what work is being undertaken to tackle the problem of HGVs parking up on Sandy Lane and using it as a rest area?

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Van Day for your question. I will start Mister Mayor by saying that I know the whole issue of HGVs parking in Aveley or HGVs traveling through Aveley in contravention of the weight restriction. This is a real concern to the local community, the community forum and indeed for Aveley's conservative councillors. I have already been heavily lobbied by Councillor Churchman on this very issue and I am due to meet his soon to discuss these issues. So my message to the Aveley community is that you have a strong voice in your local conservative councillors and the council is doing what everything it can to tackle this problem. Turning to the issue of Sandy Lane, Mister Mayor, in 2018, 28 HGV's were found to be parked there in contravention of restrictions. At the same time the conservative administration recognised there was a borough wide problem with HGVs and therefore decided to invest in extra enforcement activity. I am pleased to say that as a result of that extra investment it has enabled additional patrols including crucially night time patrols and as a result of that this year alone I can advise Councillor Van Day there has been no fewer than 108 HGV's were found to be parked in contravention of the restrictions in Sandy Lane and all of them issued with fixed penalty notices and by way of reassurance I can confirm that these patrols will continue and in deed hope to step them up and the message needs to be got out to HGV drivers in Sandy Lane and in deed anywhere their parking contravention of the restrictions that the council are prepared to take whatever action is necessary to tackle this menace. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Van Day, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Van Day

No thank you Mister Mayor.