

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 25 November 2020

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Johnson

Over a number of years the Council has been carrying out a programme of installing double glazed windows in Council rented housing. Can you assure residents that these windows meet with current health and safety regulations, particularly with regard to escape/rescue in the event of fire?

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Mr Perrin and good evening long time no speak. Thank you for your question. The Council have always installed windows that would comply with the applicable regulations at the time of installation either via an approved contractor scheme known as FENSA or through building regulations applications therefore I can confirm Mr Perrin that I am confident that windows and doors installed in council housing stock do meet building regulations as appropriate including where applicable fire regress hinges for means of escape.

Mayor

Mr Perrin do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Mr Perrin

Yes Mister Mayor. Thank you. I asked my question having in mind the shocking revelations of disregard of health and safety regulations with regard to Grenfell Towers these windows have a maximum opening of 12 and a quarter inch, 310 millimeters, I have tried to exit my council rented property by way of the window and found it impossible to do so. Are you able to give it any assurance that in the event of an emergency for example a fire and the window was the only means of escape the fire service will be able to speedily rescue people especially those living in high rise buildings. Would you consider a further report by the fire services on the suitability of these windows.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Mr Perrin and with regards to the high rise buildings I believe that the windows with the correct ingress statement in them, our hinges are correct and are installed in them. I am perfectly happy with that, I wish you hadn't tried to get out of your building by the window it's not very, quite dangerous Mr Perrin but I am happy that the fire service would be able to release you from a building of your size. If that was the only escape route in the event of fire but I am willing to look at any or look again at any report that you think may make residents of Thurrock feel even safer but at this present moment in time I am quite happy that those windows are correct. I mean it is not always possible to install a new window into an old house to meet all current regulations in regards to fire escape because you'll have things like the window sill height or the actual size of the opening may not meet the latest regulation requirements. But in these instances you know as long as they are not impeding the opening size anymore but you know we would accept them under the regulations but I will ask someone to look at that again if you saying that it's impossible to get out of your property through the window.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Johnson.

Item 13 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that the question received to the Leader of the Council and question 5 from Councillor Kerin to Councillor Coxshall had been withdrawn.

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 Johnson

In the last year, how many homeless Thurrock households have been rehoused outside of the borough?

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Mister Mayor. Thank you for your question Councillor Kent. During the previous calendar year of the 345 household who were placed into emergency temporary accommodation approximately 56% were placed in Thurrock and approximately 44% placed outside of Thurrock. Just to put some context to these percentages of the placements outside of Thurrock

over 90% were placed in neighbouring authorities of Basildon, Havering or Southend.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor. Freedom of information request 10289 tells us that is in fact 188 Thurrock households that have been rehoused outside of the borough and of those 188 households, 145 of those were households with children. You know that kids that have been taken away from their schools, taken away from their support groups, taken away from extended family. Mister Mayor this is reaching a crisis point so can I ask the portfolio holder what firm plans he has to make sure that no more Thurrock families are rehoused outside of the borough.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Councillor. The calendar year I was referring to was the 1 of January 2020 to the 31 March 2020 according to my figures it is actually 218 that were placed outside of the Thurrock area. I haven't got the figures to hand how many of those included children and I must state here and now that I really don't want anybody placed outside of Thurrock certainly those with children. We have made strides towards getting this better. We recently brought Brookhouse back into working order which I think gives us 10 units. With the recent proposal for Alexander Court where that will eventually give us something like 40 units of emergency temporary accommodation so although that does not count for the amount of people that we have got outside of the borough it certainly goes a long way to help but I think we have to take the word emergency into real context here Councillor Kent it is emergency temporary accommodation so whilst we try everything to get people accommodated within Thurrock the word emergency then takes over because if that isn't possible they need to be housed so we will look to house them wherever we can but I assure you we're working as hard as possible to try and increase those numbers of emergency temporary accommodation we have within Thurrock.

Mayor

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

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor, I am grateful for the clarification from the portfolio holder that he believes that the majority of these households that have been placed outside of the borough were placed there as an emergency so therefore only short term. Can you tell me how many of these were actually emergency short term and how many of these Thurrock families have ended up living outside the borough permanently?

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

The honest answer to that is I don't have those actual figures in front of me but I reiterate that it is emergency temporary accommodation and if emergency temporary accommodations lasts longer than one day, two days, three weeks, four months then the accommodating of that resident is far more important than where it is in my opinion as I can't reiterate enough to say we are doing everything we can to and we will always look to try and accommodate people for an emergency temporary accommodation within Thurrock but I can't get away from that word emergency and you say if that if you put into temporary accommodation because of an emergency that means we can't just move you back willy-nilly so if it does go on longer than as I said one week, two weeks, three weeks I am afraid that is something that just has to happen. We will look at the people safety and security above where they actually are.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Johnson.

2. From Councillor Byrne to Councillor Coxshall

Can you enlighten the Chamber on the timed out £600,000 of funding from LG/DP world that we forgot to claim for the Stanford station?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

I am just happy to go into the explanation but not here today about the negotiations between them all but it's important from the LDO passed by this council and right the way back from their London Gateway have an obligation under the section 106 to a requirement to design and construction of the bus turnaround. Since this has happened we were then we decided to do improvements to the trains station and improvements and connected to the

bus turnaround and as you were aware we've had to review these and add significant enhancements to proposals to the bus turnaround and to the station to give a much better residence parking, a much better experience and a better station. The council has brought before these contributions today and still bringing through the contributions with this at were in dialogue with the one with that London Gateway and DP World for the resize turnabout and securing their future and we expect DP World will stick to their commitments made in the 106 and the LDOs agreed by this council and so in the spirit of law and in spirit as well. Now as for the Thames Enterprise Park as that moves forward into a planned application we will then leave that until it comes as a planning application comes forward for Thames Enterprise Park and see what happens at that point. As we said the 106 commitments and the planning department will deliver one of the commitments around what happens there and if there is a 106 and a transport commitment coming out of Thames Enterprise Park as it goes through planning that will come forward at due course.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Byrne

Oh yes please, the small parcel of land purchased opposite the three million pounds against a much larger plot at the Stanford car park that was sold at £280,000. Does this three million represent good value or as its owned by a the UKIP supporter were you done up like a kipper by a kipper or was the car park grossly knowingly undersold.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

I would say it was grossly undersold at that sort of money I think in the end after the conservative councillors in Stanford objected there we got there was an extra hundred thousand pounds I think it went for 350 in the end. It was vastly under-priced for 21 units there and a shop and the loss of parking around in Stanford that should be a shame on the opposition who did deliver that through there and that's why we brought in 2016 to review and make sure we release fairly into the open market and you'll be seeing that coming forward very shortly in a paper to cabinet of it this doesn't happen as I've always said what we need in these in sale of land and assets of the council is we should have sunlight is the best disinfectant in policy changes and we shall shine sunlight on all that land that we are selling and what we are going to do with it and hopefully that will never happen again. As for the three millions pounds I like your joke about the UKIP whoever owns the land or wherever their political allegiances lie it was ideal for us it made the better opportunities to deliver a fantastic parking facilities and fantastic new train

station and turn around so I think the three million pounds there instead of building into the river and extra works that the residents didn't want on that side there. This is an opportunity it's a shame it wasn't done four years earlier but at that point we weren't in administration.

Mayor

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

Councillor Byrne

Yes please when Councillor Ralph was with the TI he had a story ready for the press naming and shaming the very people responsible for letting Stanford down on this station project and the interest of learning from our mistakes as you stated last night probably the A13 with ample time to give and to pause and review and come out of in a better place will you allow Councillor Ralph to publish that story only then can we hold the correct people accountable for the invisible project management of this station project and a long term suffering course of commuters.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

I think you're confused, I think your confusing two things here. I maybe a bit confused are you talking about the parking in the town centre which was not in this administration and that the people there, some of the councillors are no longer elected councillors and some are no longer members who are actually involved in that so and I obviously as a previous administration wouldn't be privy to the conversations of a previous cabinet, why that went forward. As for this long long process of maybe 15 years in the process to deliver this there is a lot of people involved in this. I think the designs that were taken over to try and you've got to work and pause and reflect which has come in on the learning of the A13. I think sometimes you have to in public building you have to stop relook at what it is, instead of carry on building the wrong thing that residents want. Residents weren't very happy with the position that the council were proposing, there was a pause and reflect and once you reflect you do make changes and I think we've got a better scheme coming out of that. As for naming and shaming people I think as I said to go back and do what would you let sunlight is the best disinfectant if we've made mistakes in that you can't learn without giving getting that and I am very happy for anyone like that and just like in any projects in my department I think that improves the position, improves the area and improves what the residents actually want. Blindly carrying on going down alleys isn't the right way and I think what's improved by pause and reflect out of the learnings of A13 is a great scheme that the people of Stanford and Corringham will be very proud of once we get through planning.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Coxshall.

3. **From Councillor Muldowney to Councillor Johnson**

Can the Portfolio Holder tell us when this administration will finally sign off on building some new, genuinely affordable housing for Thurrock residents?

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor for your question. Can I begin by reminding the chamber that we do have a housing development programme in place which is regularly shared with Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in which we continually look for further delivery opportunities and in this regard the Housing O&S committee recently considered a report that was presented by myself and Councillor Coxshall pointing out the further mixed approach the Council will take to increase provision for new homes for our residents with good community engagement but in direct response to your question I am very pleased to report significant progress in delivering affordable homes for Thurrock residents with 29 units handed over in June 2020 at the award winning Alma Court site in Grays which has generated a high level of satisfaction with regards to its quality of design. We are currently in the process of taking hand over of 53 unit site in Claudian Way in Chadwell St Mary which completes very very soon. It is part complete at the moment .There is also a 35 unit scheme for older persons housing at Calcutta Road in Tilbury which we hope to conclude by late summer 2021. All of these schemes will deliver 100% affordable homes and I can also report that earlier this evening at cabinet I presented a report seeking approval to tender a construction contract at Loewen Road, Chadwell St Mary to build a further five three bedroom family homes to be rented by the housing revenue account. There is also the scheme at the Culver Centre which as I mentioned in my report is getting very close to coming to fruition with 173 properties where 35% of those will be affordable homes.

Mayor

Councillor Muldowney do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Muldowney

Yes thank you Mister Mayor and thank you portfolio holder for your answer. What your answer didn't mention was the first three schemes that you claim as your own were actually signed off under the previous administration so today my count is that just tonight, just before this meeting, you've managed to sign off five houses to be built in Loewen Road. A really appalling record

after four years in power but I am going to move on. Can the administration let us know when are they going to actually put spades in the ground to deliver the council houses that they've been promising for well must be nearly two years now since I've been a councillor.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Councillor Muldowney I started off my first answer with you making the point by reminding the chamber of the housing development programme that's in place. Once all parties engage in this and don't keep throwing things in its way then hopefully we can get a lot more of these sites ready, up and running. There are plenty of affordable homes going to planning this year but I really I am not going to go any further than that as to say they are there they will be done. Thank you very much for your compliment about four years and only getting five houses done.

Mayor

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

Councillor Muldowney

Yes thank you Mister Mayer it wasn't really a compliment its appalling that you've only managed to now bring forward five houses after four years in power but let me go back to my original question and affordability. Will local residents be able to afford any of these new council houses if they're ever built? I note that in your report on page 51 tonight you say that rents and service charges are being set subject to a local housing allowance cap however in a recent housing scrutiny report it stated only that the council will try to ensure that it does not set the level of rent and service charges above the local housing allowance level. Will Councillor Johnson give a cast iron guarantee that when these houses do come online, whenever that may be, housing rents and service charges will not exceed the benefits limit.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

I think you answered the question yourself Councillor Muldowney, every effort will be made to make sure that happens.

Mayor

Thank you.

4. **From Councillor Muldowney to Councillor Mayes**

Can the Portfolio Holder tell the Chamber how many GP surgeries he has visited since taking up his portfolio in January and that's January 2020?

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor for your question. Since taking office unfortunately I have not been able to physically visit any GP surgeries obviously due to the coronavirus pandemic however I have been meeting with partners in health just to make sure that we are working together for the best outcome for Thurrock without this pandemic.

Mayor

Councillor Muldowney do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Muldowney

Yes thank you Mister Mayor. Of course you will know from your conversations with our health partners that even before COVID there had been widespread problems with people being unable to see their GP. With the pressures brought by COVID can you tell us what conversations or meetings you have been having to ensure that Thurrock residents can see their GP when they need to?

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you for supplementary question Councillor. I met with the CCG, Head of the Thurrock CCG, as myself as well as with Councillor Halden and other partners to discuss how whether it was physical or virtual GP appointments that were being handed out. I was pleasantly surprised that actually there was a large amount of face to face appointments however that does not get away from the fact that people do find it difficult to see their GPs and obviously that was spoken about. I know they are trying to work very hard to see people in a COVID world and COVID secure as such as possible obviously they have had to change the same as

everybody else to meet the demands of what we're facing and they have our full support in doing so.

Mayor

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

Councillor Muldowney

Yes please Mister Mayor. Given the issues which obviously you acknowledged that people are having with seeing their GPs for everyday ailments and also the recent issues with the rollout of the winter flu vaccination are you 100% confidence that the roll out of the COVID vaccination which is so important for us getting out from underneath the cosh of this deadly virus that this roll out in Thurrock will proceed smoothly.

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Mister Mayor, thank you for your supplementary question. I have faith in our health professional and our colleagues within and partners within the health care they are working around the clock extremely hard with extremely difficult circumstances whether its trying to deal with general health care issues as well as the vaccination as well as the flu vaccination so in discussing it with them they are actively rolling out vaccinations as I was very very happy to hear a 107 year old resident of Orsett got vaccinated in Stifford Clays last weekend and lots of different people being vaccinated so that we can get out of this pandemic as quick as possible so I believe we will get through this, I believe there is a lot more work that the GPs are doing to build up the ability to vaccinate. It is logistical beast as I am sure everybody can imagine but they are working around the clock to ensure that people get vaccinated so we can get out of COVID as quickly as possible.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Mayes. We will move onto question 6.

5. Question was withdrawn.

6. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Johnson

When does the Portfolio Holder anticipate the electricity supply issues affecting, some residents of Airey Neave Court will finally be resolved?

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Mister Mayor. Thank you for your question Councillor Kent. The loss of electricity to any home is obviously very upsetting but we can confirm that the issue with the power supply to the selected properties in Airey Neave was fully restored last year. We do understand however how disruptive this is especially in the case of our sheltered housing schemes and therefore it is key that we work as quickly as possible to remedy any faults when they occur. Council officers will continue to work constructively with third party organisations to improve communication and service delivery in the future to ensure critical infrastructure such as the supply of services to homes in the borough is repaired and maintained when issues do arise.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent to you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor J Kent

This question I initially put to October meeting and clearly the issue has now been resolved but it did flag up some other issues so there were a couple of elderly vulnerable residents who were left without any electricity for a couple of days. In that time they had no way of heating, no way of cooking, no way of boiling a kettle, there was no lighting provided for them. These people are living in a sheltered accommodation because they need some extra support, extra support which unfortunately they did not and I now glad the issue has now been resolved but can I ask the portfolio holder if he will instigate a review or ask the scrutiny committee to instigate a review that can help us to make sure that when things do go wrong in our sheltered complexes the system kicks in and makes sure that people are properly looked after because I really don't think it happened on this occasion.

Mayor

Councillor Johnson

Councillor Johnson

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you for your supplementary Councillor Kent, as I tried to say in my response in there, well you've called it a review, but this is already taking place by officers and they are ensuring that this, I can't say this is never going to happen again because loss of service can happen, but they are working already to ensure that there is a process in place that means that vulnerable people will not be left well certainly not for two days without any heating or lighting.

Mayor

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

Councillor J Kent

Now I am grateful for that response it is helpful and apologies if I didn't quite understand you from the first response I got. I understood that to be a look at the way the Council dealt with other agencies such as power supply and our power supply company and our contractors. If I misunderstood that I apologise but I am glad that there is, as the portfolio holder called it, a look into this.

Mayor

Thank you.