

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 26 January 2022

Item 6 – Questions from Public

The Mayor informed the Chamber that three questions had been received with question 1 being withdrawn prior to the meeting.

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Hebb

Mr Perrin

Can you tell me the full amount the Council has borrowed from outside sources, for example other Councils, over the past 5 years i.e. the “financial years 2016 to 2021”?

Mayor

Councillor Hebb

Councillor Hebb

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Mr Perrin and happy new year. So all councils borrow and lend for many reasons and borrowing funds as capital projects as well as investments and also refinancing some hard and historic debt. Capital projects are for things like school building, school expansion, road infrastructure and so on and that obviously speaks for itself. There are capital projects that are deemed invest to save so for example when you invest in upgrading the light circuits up to LED lighting and so forth, that is deemed a invest to save initiative. It produces electricity use and so forth.

Council borrowing is all repayable and are all paid when expected and as is expected. In 2016/17, all 49 Members, Conservatives, Labour and UKIP groups who later became the Thurrock Independents, consented to borrow £453.7m and Thurrock subsequently received £3.6m worth of income into Thurrock and £1m of income from lender bodies. In 2017/18, all 49 Members of Conservatives, Labour and UKIP groups consented to increase the Council’s borrowing up to £509.3m so an increase of £55.6m and Thurrock received £10.2m of income into Thurrock and £2m in income to the lender.

In the extraordinary paper in October 2017, all 49 Members of Conservatives, Labour and UKIP groups consented to an expansion of the investment approach to increasing the consented borrowing level of up to £859.3m which was an increase of £350m. In 2018/19 all 49 Members of Conservatives, Labour and Thurrock Independent groups consented to increase the council’s borrowing envelope up to £887.12m, an increase of £27.8m. Thurrock was then received £28m of income into Thurrock and £6.5m to the lenders. This reflects the uplift of the investment approach. In 2019/20, all 49 Members of Conservatives, Labour and Thurrock Independent groups consented to increase the council’s borrowing envelope up to £1.353b, an increase of £466.2m or up to £2b up to 3 years later over the life of the paper. That’s what all Members voted for. Thurrock then received £39m in terms of income into Thurrock and £10.8m in terms of income for the lenders. In 2020/21, the

divergence began. The Council consented to the Council borrowing £1.58b and Thurrock received £35m worth of income into Thurrock and £8.5m income to the lender. In 2021/22 all 49 Members of the Conservatives, Labour and Thurrock Independent groups voted to cut borrowing down to £1.5b thus ending the beginning of the investment approach. The economic approach that the Conservatives, Labour, UKIP/Thurrock Independent groups that all supported has helped earn over £144m over the last half decade. That's how long the investment activity has been going on. This isn't new. That's £115m for Thurrock, that's £29m for other external sources. And that helps all other areas and we live in a place that we're proud of.

So, now whilst borrowing will go down, the income that we received from the approach that we all voted for will drop off over a period of time, over the next few years as the investments become less and less as they mature. This means that the council will now have to cut the size of its cloth and become a leaner council.

Mayor

Mr Perrin, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Mr Perrin

Yes Madam Mayor. Councillor Hebb, I admit I find this a bit mind boggling for a member of the public and I'm not dealing with money of this kind. We're talking about a colossal amount of money. Can you assure me that if creditors suddenly requested loads to be paid back with interest, that the Council would remain solvent and capable of fulfilling its statutory liabilities without imposing prudent cuts, financial increases or worse going into administration as a bankrupt council?

Councillor Hebb

Thank you Madam Mayor and Mr Perrin for your question. This is a complicated matter and that's why we have produced a new website page to consolidate this for anyone who wants to have a read and doesn't want to go through various documents and public papers and so forth. It's meant to consolidate it to make it simpler to understand. But even then, it's still complicated. In terms of the interest, the answer to that question is yes, everything has been repaid will be repaid. The interest that you mention, that figure that I just gave you – the £115m and the £29m is actually after interest. So after everything that is said and done, after all borrowing is taken out and repaid and interest paid to those who are owed it, this scheme has earned £144m.

And the other thing, what it did allow us to do, is to increase our reserves position by 300% from what we inherited in 2016. We were an £8m reserve level and we went up to £24m. We've just gone through a 22 month adult centric health pandemic of epic proportions that nothing or any of us could have ever foreseen. We've been able to use that without then having to go into reserves without being one of those councils that you refer to. So yes, we are in good stead and it continues to perform estimated about £30.1m of income this year but like I said, it will start tapering out subsequently.

2. From Mr Rikowski to Councilor Mayes

Mr Rikowski

I live in Parker Road, Grays. On our street and surrounding areas we often detect a strong pollution that smells like washing detergent. I believe this comes from nearby factories or industry, and has been a concern for a number of decades. These strong chemicals trigger my asthma, cause my partner to suffer migraines and there is the wider concern for public health and air quality. What can be done to stop this issue from continuing to pollute the air for local residents?

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

The sources of the odours referred to are historically associated with two factories in West Thurrock, Procter and Gamble (P&G) and Industrial Chemicals Group Limited (ICGL). Odours detectable at distance are invariably the result of chimney stack emissions rather than “fugitive” or building odours. Both factories have the potential for producing similar odours associated with the production of household detergents and geographically they are situated adjacent to each other. Procter & Gamble operates under a permit issued by The Environmental Agency not Thurrock Council. Odour complaints in respect of these premises are dealt with by the Environmental Agency who request all complaints to be logged using their 24/7 Freephone incident hotline number 0800 807060. Environmental Protection Officers from Thurrock Council liaise with the Environmental Agency and will make them aware of the concerns being raised. The Industrial Chemicals Group Limited have previously been the subject of the installation of odour abatement equipment. This oxidises the process odours prior to discharge to atmosphere. Oxidisers are an effective method of odour control but no method of control is 100% effective. The Council has responsibility for the investigation of the emission of odours from Industrial Chemicals Group Limited. Industrial Chemicals Group Limited’s abatement plant constitutes the current best means of odour control. Providing the abatement plant is operational, it is unlikely that further process operational controls could be required, however in response to this question, Council Environmental Protection Officers will investigate the concerns raised to ensure that the best practical means of odour control are being used and will liaise with the Environmental Agency as necessary.

Mayor

Mr Rikowski, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Mr Rikowski

Yes please.

In October 2019, Thurrock joined Parliament in the motion of declaring a climate emergency. I fully support this decision. My question now to Council is to clarify what

action is now being taken? What plans are in place to meet the challenges of this emergency, not just for council operations but also for local communities, infrastructure and businesses?

Mayor

This question is not related to the original question. Thank you for your question.

Item 17 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber one question to the Leader had been received and 10 questions to Cabinet Members.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER

1. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Councillor J Kent

Does the Leader of the Council believe that the council, and his administration, act in accordance with the Nolan Principles of Standards in Public Life?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor. I will give a shorter answer than the one prepared so that we can try and get through a few more of these questions. So the simple answer is yes, the seven Principles of Public Life, known as the Nolan Principles, apply to anyone who works in public office this includes all those elected or appointed to public office, both nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the Civil Service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, non-departmental public bodies and in the health, education, social care services. The seven principles are Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership. Of course there are part caveats to this so for instance where someone may hold information that is confidential and would be unable to disclose it that would be covered within our code of conduct and of course elected members up and down the country are entitled to a private life.

Mayor

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

Councillor J Kent

Thank you Madam Mayor. The first of those principles is selflessness – it says “Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest”. Does the leader believe that we have just acted solely in the terms of public interest in agreeing that we don’t finish the business of this meeting this evening?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor J Kent for your supplementary question. Yes there is a good reason for us to come to an end and to bring this big agenda and we normally run to time and we should have done on this one so yes I do believe we are acting in the public interest as it would cost us more to keep this open as we go through an extended meeting.

Mayor

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

Councillor J Kent

Madam Mayor we will move onto Openness that “Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing”. The last time we met I asked the leader why the council was spending public money appealing against a verdict of a judge led tribunal that said the public has the right to know the detail of how Thurrock Council borrowed and invested more than £1b of tax payer’s money. Since then that appeal has been lost however the council is once again refusing to comply and is instead looking for further grounds to appeal. How does that square with the Nolan Principle that information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor J Kent for your second supplementary question. I am not going to make any comment on a live actual court case and on an appeal that we have got going. It is not in the public interest as we have argued repeatedly and indeed since that last meeting we have now put up a significant amount of more information in relation to our investment strategy which is widely open for anyone to see.

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

1. From Councillor Muldowney to Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Muldowney

Can the Portfolio Holder tell us what action he has taken to address the issues with missed assisted bin collections in Chadwell St Mary?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor Muldowney for your question. Reports of assisted missed collections are investigated and resolved, usually this involves a conversation with the resident either by telephone or through a site visit. Once the issue has been resolved Team Managers continue to monitor the property for a four week period to ensure regular collections are made.

Mayor

Councillor Muldowney do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Muldowney

Yes thank you Madam Mayor. The portfolio holder will remember that back in November he agreed to work with me to address the issues of bin collections in Chadwell. I have become pen pals with many residents, a lot of them are elderly and not in good health, in Chadwell who are on assisted collections. Since October, for example, 95 year old resident of Halton Road has had repeated missed collections during October, November, December and now January this year. Apart from replying to me to ask whether residents were reporting these issues and me providing evidence that they were reporting these issues I have heard nothing back from Councillor Jefferies. I have also had other requests come back saying that the reports could not be found that had been given to me with report numbers so is there a problem with reporting getting through to front line services that are dealing with these issues.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Muldowney for the question. So from the 18 May to the end of the December, 10 reports of assisted bins were missed and these complaints were received from yourself. One of those was actually during strike action and only one of these, is a repeat one, however I believe the particular case that you were talking about hasn't been dealt with properly and I would like to apologise to the resident for this and I have asked officers to look into why the response to this particular one, just this one complaint, was so poor and obviously I will reply back to the councillor when I get an answer to it.

Mayor

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

Councillor Muldowney

Thank you Councillor Jefferies for that undertaking to look further into that particular instance, I appreciate that and so will the lady in question I'm sure. Another lady with heart problems in Waterson Road, because the lady in Halton Road is not the only one. Not only were her bins now collected but her neighbour's bins who weren't on the assisted collection were left over her drive, trapping in her home all day until her neighbours came home from work and were then able to move them. It was investigated and we were assured that it would not happen again as we have done time and time before but yet again there were more instances in November and December and now in January. So can we at least have an apology tonight from the portfolio holder for the stress and inconvenience caused to those who have had multiple missed bin collections? Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Muldowney for your question. Of course I apologise if bins are missed and for any stress or concern that it has caused to residents if their bins haven't been collected. However what I would say to the councillor is please when people have a missed bin collection there is a process that they need to go through. Not just for it to be reported by councillors. If it is reported online or they telephone the call centre and report the fact that bins are missed it then goes into a log and can be investigated properly and also with assisted bin collections we have the additional thing where they are monitored over a period of time and we make contact with those people that have had their bins missed.

2. From Councillor Byrne to Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Byrne

Can the Portfolio Holder tell me about the aims of the No Mow Policy?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Byrne for your question. I would like to make clear there is no No Mow Policy, "No Mow" is number of mechanisms that will be used as part of the Land Maintenance Strategy, in appropriate areas, e.g. meadow planting, leaving areas to grow to provide natural habitats. The strategies aims are to provide more efficient and effective land management and increase biodiversity and habitats.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Byrne

Yes. Can you inform the chamber what maintenance programmes will be implemented, will there be in line with RHS recommendations for looking after wild flowers. You may already have read an article in the telegraph about it.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Byrne for the question. I actually use the BBC App to find out all my news. If you look at land maintenance strategy one of the things that we have said there is that we will be reviewing each area so it is not just a blanket where we are going to plant wild flowers in that area or in that area, trees in that area, cut that grass, we are going to look carefully at all areas and decide what is the best policy for that area and yes of course we will be following all the advice from organisations like the RHS provide.

Mayor

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

Councillor Byrne

Yes please. As a result of this plan will there be any, as Councillor Hebb calls it, reshaping, some call it resizing, I just call it plain English will there be any job losses.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

I am not in a position along with any of my cabinet colleagues to be able to say there will be no job losses in the future, I don't think any organisation can say that at all. But obviously they will be kept to the minimum obviously and we will look carefully as I said earlier our front line services and make sure they are protected and maintained as much as possible but unfortunately any organisation in today's economic situation have to look at job losses I am afraid.

3. From Councillor Byrne to Councillor Mayes

Councillor Byrne

Is the Portfolio Holder satisfied, from the Council's position as a partner to the project, in the progress of the Corringham IMC?

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Byrne for your question. The Corringham IMC is a North East London NHS Foundation Trust building and the programme is being led by NHS partners. The building is on track to open in spring 2022 as planned and my understanding from the NHS Thurrock CCG's Alliance Director is that it will contain a GP practice and a wide range of other community health and wellbeing services. Council Chief Officers continue to work with the NHS and third sector partners through the Thurrock Integrated Care Partnership to design new models of integrated care that will operate from not only the Corringham IMC but will benefit all Thurrock residents through the integrated medical centres.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Byrne

I didn't get an answer to the first one, I only asked if he was happy. What I see from the IMC what I am not happy with is the travel plan for sick and elderly to walk or take a bike to the Corringham IMC as there are no provisions for parking. We're moving in the worst performing GP in Thurrock whose reports are so low it doesn't get graded, we are still unsure whether any services will actually be there and doesn't come close to living up to the expectations of promises to cover the services at Orsett Hospital so, again, are you happy with what is going on at the moment at the Corringham IMC?

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Byrne for your supplementary. The meeting which I believe you are referring to, other colleagues went to as well and obviously by the sound of it, it wasn't in a position of what we would have liked it to have been. However as you may or may not know it is for the NHS to decide who goes in there, we can't pick a GP. I know from speaking with colleagues there are issues with that GP surgery but that is for the NHS to deal with. In terms of being happy it is on target and there is a wide range of services that will be running from there including COPD, diabetics, older adult services, Thurrock MIND will be in there, Inclusion Thurrock, IAPT, AMC community midwives and parenting sessions just to name a few. So yes it will deliver be part of the bigger wider integrated medical centre programme so in fact yes it is the first step, I am happy with what we have heard so far and obviously want to continue on the IMC programme. Thank you.

Mayor

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

Councillor Byrne

Is it still written in stone that until all the four IMCs are open that Orsett Hospital will stay open, is that like cast.

Mayor

Councillor Mayes

Councillor Mayes

Yes.

Questions 4 to 10 fell due to the timing of the meeting.