

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 24 February 2016

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

Two questions were submitted from members of the public.

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Worrall

Are you entirely satisfied with the quality of the work done by contractors such as Mears and Wates including sub-contractors employed by them and do you consider such work to be value for money?"

Councillor Worrall

Thank you Mr Perrin, am I entirely satisfied with the quality of work done by contractors? No not every single time over the last three years our transforming homes programme has refurbished over 5,000 Council homes a responsive repairs contract handles over 40,000 repairs a year, well over 100 a day on average. To say that each of these would be delivered perfectly every single time would just be unrealistic. Am I entirely satisfied that when issues are raised through the correct channels they are taken seriously and officer work hard to address those issues? Yes I am. Repairs satisfaction levels are carried out independently of this Council, this means that people with no housing department bias are involved with asking the questions, those responses are reported at every cabinet meeting as you know Mr Perrin as you are a regular attendee of Cabinet you will know that these figures consistently show satisfaction level of above 85% and this year they have been better still around 88%. But as always I will push this further to see what we can do as a Council to get this above 90% and I would like to take it to 95% I announced in the January Cabinet meeting that I would get a cross party working group together to look at this, this group has now been formed and we will begin a series of meetings and visits throughout March, this starts next week and a report of the finding will be finalised in April.

Deputy Mayor

Thank you Councillor Worrall

Deputy Mayor

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

Mr Perrin

I ask this question, yet again, as your recent claim to an 85% satisfaction rate for work done by Mears, Wates and Keepmoat appears to be at odds with the number of dissatisfied tenants making complaints to their respective Councillors, just ask some of your fellow Councillors what they perceive to be the highest cause for complaints by tenants and they will tell you it is to do with the standard of work carried out in the home, which is still ongoing. I am

also given to understand that yesterday you were made aware of serious flooding in the home of Mrs Dierdre Lodge, caused by faulty capping of water pipes after the removal of a water cistern. I believe that the method used to calculate the satisfaction figure is at best spurious, at worst deliberately misleading or you are in denial that any problems exist. Do you accept that the standard of work is equally if not more important than cost and that if repairs and maintenance are carried out to a high standard at the outset, in the long term, the cost will be less than that of a papering over of the cracks job which will probably have to be redone in a matter of months rather than years. Can you assure tenants of Council housing that quality and a high standard of workmanship will be the main criteria for awarding contracts and that any lowering of standards in order to cut costs will not be accepted?

Councillor Worrall

We have a governance structure in place for each of our contracts which closely monitor their performance across all aspects of delivery. This includes a monthly review of customer satisfaction, quality of works, cost and timeframes. This approach enables us to quickly identify if any aspects of delivery that might fall below target so they can be promptly addressed with a contractor.

Headlines from performance to the end of Quarter 3 are as follows:

- The Transforming Homes programme has achieved a resident satisfaction of 81% good to excellent rating, which is 5 percentage points higher than the 2014/15 outturn.
- Resident Satisfaction with the Repairs Service averages 88% in 2015/16 which is 4 percentage points higher than 2014/15 and 6 percentage points higher than 2013/14.

In addition to this, over 30% of the contract spend is within the local economy, with 120 jobs and 27 apprenticeships having been created across the housing delivery programmes. 32% of the delivery workforce is based locally and over 300 of the subcontractors are registered in Thurrock.

We are committed to stringent contract management that ensures that housing programmes deliver value for money, the necessary improvements to our housing stock and improve the lives and opportunities of our residents.

2. From Ms Webster to Councillor Worrall

Councillor Worrall. Does Thurrock Council have any plans to review the scope of which HMOs are within its mandatory licensing policy so that HMOs under three or more storeys are brought within the policy - this may help to alleviate the poor living conditions experienced by some of our most vulnerable people, who feel they have no other choice but to accept the poor conditions they are living in when renting from unscrupulous private agents/landlords?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you for your question Teresa, firstly I should explain to those that are here this evening what this is really about, what is a HMO. A HMO is a house in multiple occupations, a home occupied by more than two that who are not all member of the same family. Minimum standards applying to HMOs are set out under the Housing Act 2004, national regulations and codes of practice. So Local authorities like us cannot legally require or enforce on landlords to comply with a different standard. The government published a consultation paper in November last year about changes to the mandatory licensing of HMO's in England. And its proposing to change the definition of HMO's to bring smaller properties under mandatory licensing which would be the two floors that I'm sure you are alluring to there. The consultation period ended December 2015 and we await that outcome. However I can say as an authority we promote good standards in privately rented accommodation through a Landlord Accreditation Scheme. We would encourage any concerns relating to conditions in private rented accommodation to be brought to the attention of our Private Housing Team at the Council.

Deputy Mayor

Thank you Councillor Worrall

Deputy Mayor

Ms Webster, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Ms Webster

Thank you Councillor Worrall, I would like to ask because that in the interim there's no dates set for when the mandatory two story licensing is going to come in, is whether Thurrock Council will impose their own additional licensing on the two story properties given the poor conditions that I have identified with approximately 47 properties in East Tilbury?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you, I have has this conversation with Officers on many occasions and I think that is there is very little that we can actually do outside of the law, we have to operate within the guidelines that are set, So I think that first, if you do know of anybody that you believe is living in conditions that are not what you expect them to be, that you would either send them to me or to a member of the team and we can get the well homes team to go out and visit them, as well as inspecting and holding landlords to account, they could also offer them advise on benefits, making sure that they are getting everything they are entitled too. This is a service that is paid for out of the health budget and I encourage you to use, I think that secondly we need to wait and see what comes out of the consultation, there's nothing much that we can do to encourage to do anything outside of that, we have to hope that really this government recognises that there are unscrupulous landlords out there and

so I would hope that they do bring them in line with us as the private landlords should be brought in lined with us as the social landlords, we wouldn't get away with it as the Council so why should landlords, and so I think that once we have seen what actually comes out of it. If it doesn't go far enough I encourage you, yourself to write to our MP for her to put better pressure on this government, she obviously has better contacts in the government than we have accrued, and us a Council should also write. So I think we need to wait, there is nothing that we can do, you would literally have to go street to street and consult with every resident in that street on every HMO that still in there and we would still need to go to the government for agreement that we could have those licenses there.

Item 18 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 1 question had been submitted to the Leader and no questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee had been received.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE LEADER

1. From Councillor Aker

Given Highways England's reluctance to send a consultation pack with freepost reply envelope to every resident in the borough, will the leader of the Council look into using the £30,000 fighting fund to see each resident is sent a consultation pack and given a chance to object to the Thames Crossing going through Thurrock.

Councillor J. Kent

I think here are a couple of things we need to be absolutely clear on. First of all the responsibility for publicising and supplying information for the Lower Thames Crossing rests with Highways England. However as it seems that they are not sure what they are consulting it is important that this council helps to keep local people informed about what is being consulted upon where information can be found and where best is to respond. Since the New Year the Council has encouraged residents to be aware of the issues and then to take active part in the consultation exercise. Councillor Aker was at the Orsett Hall public meeting and that was in fact before we knew when the consultation would start, before we knew option A was being consulted upon, of course we now know that option A is now back on the table. So I think the council has done its best through traditional and social media to make sure that as many people know about the consultation as is possible, and I think actually we have not done a bad job of that. I got to say Councillor Aker refers to a £30,000 fighting fund and he's not the first member tonight to refer to a fighting fund I think we need to be clear that there isn't a fighting fund, I don't think such a fund would be legal, I'm not sure if we would be allowed to do it. What we have done Cabinet, we have put forward the proposal of a £30,000 pot of money that would allow us to bring in experts that would support our case, as our own staff are busy running transport and regeneration and doing their best to try and find some spare time to look at the effects of these proposals might have. It seems sensible and of course Council this evening has now agreed that a small sum of money should be set aside so that we can both get independent people to look at the proposals to look at how our plans for growth and hope for free flowing traffic will be impacted by a crossing, provide us with expert opinion to counter what is being put forward by the government and then if the crossing were to go ahead to be ready and be well prepared to support them residents that would be affected when it comes to helping them get the best mitigation measures that are possible against the noise and pollution that would follow. So I think in short madam mayor, I don't believe that we should be using council funds to do the job of Highways England.

Deputy Mayor

Councillor Aker do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Aker

Thank you Councillor Kent for clarifying the position with regards to the £30,000, has any talks with highways England, has the point been raised that only a few wards actually had these consultation events going on, when my ward doesn't have a consultation event, but all wards are going to be affected if this crossing goes through, have you had any conversation with them and have they explained why they are limiting their consultation events to only a few places in the borough.

Councillor J. Kent

I think at the outset of the consultation, I argued very strongly that the council agreed and argued that to start with an 8 week consultation period for a scheme that would possibly spend £6 billion is ludicrously short, I think we have all been unhappy with the geographic spread of the kind of expedition and consultation events Highways England have run for instant events in Maidstone but not an event in Aveley, I entirely agree with you. As for whether Highways England have heard what we have said, if they have they certainly haven't decided that they are going to do anything different, I would remind everybody that we do have a further public meeting tomorrow with highways England and two members of parliament have promised to come and I think it would be appropriate if people put that question directly to them then.

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

No questions received.