

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 24 February 2016

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 Councilor 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.