

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 29 June 2016

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

One question was submitted from members of the public.

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Gledhill

Do you consider it wise to task tenants of Council rented housing with responsibility for carrying out maintenance work on gas boilers installed in their homes? I ask the question as it appears tenants of Bruyn Court, a new build in South Ockendon, are required to do just that.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and Mr Perrin.

Thank you for your kind words and sensible words. Excluding my size and weight I can assure you I am a very gentle with 15 years as a special constable makes you a much nicer person than some people might think.

On to your question. No. It is not wise for tenants either here or within any council property to be carrying our repairs to their gas appliances. In this specific case, Willmott Dixon have responsibility for the repairs and servicing for the first 12 months of the opening of the Bruyn Court and beyond that the Council will take up full responsibility of both servicing and repairs.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Gledhill

Mayor

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

Mr Perrin

Taking account of the potential danger resulting from an improperly maintained gas boiler, I ask that the Council does not merely assume that the contractor is complying with its statutory duty regarding the maintenance of gas boilers, but is seen to be doing so?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Perrin. Yes. That is a very good point to make sure that every single contract within the council is undertaken with an outside supplier is followed up whether it be gas boilers or indeed any of our other housing repairs or indeed road repair contracts. I will be liaising with officers to make sure this does happy and will write to you to assure that this will take place.

Item 12 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 5 questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee had been received.

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

1. From Councillor Smith to Councillor Gledhill

How many appointments have Thurrock Council's repairs contractors missed in the last municipal year 2015/16?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill, could you respond?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor, and thank you Councillor Smith for your question. From the information collected by Mears, 1,668 appointments were missed by the contractor and a further 789 were missed by residents who had been notified of works. This is 8.66% of appointments missed by the contractor and those fall within the contract target of 10% that were missed. My personal opinion that is far too high, that does equate to somewhere between 6 and 7 a day over the whole year, and I can assure you that we are looking at this to see how this can be improved further from the results at the back end of the year.

Mayor

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

Councillor Smith

Yes, thank you Madam Mayor and a bewildering number. I have received a number of complaints citing broken appointments by TBC contractors, considering the previous portfolio holder painting a somewhat rosier picture of the figure. Interestingly, and Councillor Gledhill spoke about ideas of how we can improve that, he touches on something that I found interesting recently when dealing with a multi-national energy provider I was surprised and delighted to learn that if their engineer did not arrive within the 2 hour booked appointment slot they would compensate me, which I thought that was quite good. Could we expect Thurrock Council's housing repairs supplier to offer the same quality of service, and would the portfolio holder agree that compensating residents for missed appointments is something worth exploring?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you, Councillor Smith and Madam Mayor for allowing that supplementary. You raised very good points there. Other contractors for other services outside do put clauses within their contracts that people will be compensated if there are missed appointments. Obviously, the contract was set up under the previous administration, personally I think 10%, as I said, of missed appointments is too high a target to just accept that 1 in 10 is going to be missed and we do need to do a lot more and if that means putting a lot more pressure on our suppliers to do so then I'm more than happy to use any technique or anything that we can do within the contract to make this happen. Our housing residents should come first in this, not our suppliers. I do know that our suppliers and indeed our officers are working closer on a much better working relationship to decrease that size, but in my opinion 10% is too high, indeed in my opinion 5% is too high.

Mayor

Councillor Smith, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Smith

Does the portfolio holder think we have the right systems in place to look after the homes of our residents and can you advise if there are protections in place to renegotiate or potentially end contracts where a supplier is not delivering?

Councillor Gledhill

There is always the option to end contracts where suppliers are not delivering, but as I have said a number of times already, they had a target to meet of 90% so therefore 10% of missed appointments. They're falling at 8.66% for the whole of last year but towards the back of the year it had reduced to 7.51%. Personally, as I say, that's still way, way too high, anything we can do within the contract framework obviously we will do, and nothing will ever be left out of the scope of making this a much better service including, should we need to, ceasing the contract, but I would much rather work with our contractors and with our officers and with our residents to make sure that this 92% is increased way, way up to the 97-98-99%.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Stone, would you please read out your question.

2. From Councillor Stone to Councillor Tolson

Thank you, Madam Mayor. In the Grays Thurrock ward we have had many complaints from residents in the Arthur Street / William Street area about the black sacks of rubbish being dumped in the car park which also has cars which look like they have been abandoned. Can the portfolio holder tell me

and the residents what will be done to keep this car park clean and stop the fly tippers using Thurrock as a dustbin?

Mayor

Councillor Tolson, would you like to answer the question please?

Councillor Tolson

Yes, thank you Madam Mayor. Well, Councillor Stone would know that I don't like fly-tipping because we sat on the same committee. You probably, may be aware Councillor Stone that the fly-tipping was identified to two local individuals so they will be being dealt with by Environmental Enforcement Officers. Four cars were left there, two have been scrapped, one has been reclaimed and one, what happened to the other one? Oh yes, one has been removed from the car park.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Stone, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Stone

Thank you, Madam Mayor. Yes, your administration's commitment to residents is "clean it, cut it and fill it". Have you seen the length of the grass Councillor Gledhill has to pass every day in Grove Road when he walks to the Council and what can we do about it?

Councillor Tolson

I'm not sure that is a supplementary for this but I will happily answer it. The previous portfolio holder, during his term, last October sold a significant amount of cutting equipment for our parks and green spaces, significant amount and it has had a major impact and what that's done is it has meant that when we have incurred a problem, which we have, namely the spearhead being put in for service last November, being looked at in January and not being worked on finally until the 12th May this year, it's had a massive impact for our residents. So, people that want to play in the parks have had long grass and we're playing catch up. So whilst the team I've met are doing a sterling job, one of them really, really disappointed, he takes a great deal of pride in his work, he's worked for us for a long while he's never seen it like this. So unfortunately there wasn't any future provision and we can't even perform an elementary task like cutting the grass in Thurrock but I have to say I've spoken again recently with them, they're more upbeat, we've hired equipment in and we're getting on top of it.

Mayor

Councillor Stone, do you wish to pose a secondary supplementary question? Okay. Councillor Victoria Holloway, could you please read out your question as on the agenda?

3. From Councillor V Holloway to Councillor Halden

Will the portfolio holder commit to seeking a reduction in the health inequalities and life expectancy between Tilbury and Orsett?

Mayor

Councillor Halden, could you please answer the question.

Councillor Halden

Thank you, Madam Mayor. Yes, I can give a commitment that we will seek to reduce health inequalities, but I have to address this myth that was always perpetrated that there was a difference between the life expectancy of areas like Orsett and the life expectancy of areas like Tilbury because of relative affluence or other reasons. It was always used as a bit of a sop, a bit of an excuse. The reasons are more complex than that, they're generational, they're educational and that's what we've got to tackle. So yes, I've already met with colleagues on the CCG to discuss primary care; I'm going to be meeting with colleagues on the Health and Wellbeing Board where we will be taking forward the Health and Wellbeing Action Plan which will include specific actions for Tilbury. I am meeting colleagues from Basildon Hospital to discuss the type of care that the people of Tilbury have to access at the Hospital because they don't have it at the primary care stage, I'm in fact going to be visiting Basildon Hospital late at night on a Saturday evening with the deputy Chief Executive to see it at its worst, but that in itself isn't going to deal with the issue. It is generational, there are complex educational issues, that's why I have also met already with the Head Teacher at the Pioneer School, at the Herringham School, at the Gateway Academy, visited two of those institutions in person because we've got to bring education and health together in the early years to make sure we don't see these same issues cropping up again in 50 years' time. We need to prepare children who are fit for adulthood. That's what this administration is going to do, we're going to bring education, we're going to bring health together, this Conservative administration is going to show Tilbury some love. Although, I can't get away with talking about Tilbury without talking about the issue of access to GPs and primary care. When you've got a situation where GPs are allowed to apply for funding to do things like health living disability checks and they don't do them, quite clearly, we have to be quite frank we're saying that some GPs are failing the population, I have got my team working on Metrics, we are going to hold these people to account, there's going to be absolutely no question of when there is poor access to primary care actually naming it and shaming it.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Holloway, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Holloway

Thank you for your response Councillor Halden. I agree that there are complex reasons for the inequalities; however I probably don't agree that it's just age and education. However you did highlight that health and education was one of your key areas to look at; it would be very interesting to know your other key priorities for your Health remit of your portfolio.

Mayor

Councillor Halden?

Councillor Halden

Thank you, Madam Mayor. So, at the moment we've obviously got the situation where the NHS is going through a period of change, trying to consolidate the links between primary care and acute care, hospitals and GPs essentially, it's called the STP (Sustainability Transformation Plans). I've met with colleagues on the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board, on the Southend Health and Wellbeing Board, the Leader of the Council of Southend to look at how we can best gel together these services because obviously the Success Regime, which is looking at improvements in acute hospital care, Southend, Mid Essex and Basildon. We're fortunate that our STP footprint happens to be exactly the same as the Success Regime, so we have got real scope to bring primary care and hospital care together in that really knitted way. That's why I've gone out of my way to get out of this building and to meet with partners to see how we can best do that whilst clearly articulating what is a political priority of mine, that we will work with you, we will get these things right, we will improve primary care, but at the same time we will not be subsumed into some sort of pan-Essex body. We will protect the integrity of the Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board, the Thurrock Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Thurrock CCG and the Thurrock Cabinet. We will not be absorbed into some sort of large leviathan that will essentially be an old PCT in all but name, that's not going to serve the people of Tilbury and I won't be allowing it.

Mayor

Councillor Holloway, do you have a second supplementary?

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, could you please read out your question as set out on the agenda.

4. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Tolson

Would Councillor Tolson set out her priorities for the Environment portfolio and when she expects to achieve them?

Mayor

Councillor Tolson, could you please answer the question.

Councillor Tolson

Madam Mayor, thank you very much.

Can I just say, do you think it's hot in here? Can we get it sorted out for next month? I know it's not your job but whose job is it? I have asked for somebody else to do it.

Thank you, Councillor Gerrish, for your question. As alluded to earlier, the first thing I need to do now is sort out the equipment. We need to give our staff the equipment to do their role so that we can again shine in this borough, because we do have some lovely open spaces, we're nearly at the 6 weeks holiday and we all want to enjoy the good weather while we can. That's going to take a little bit of time; I didn't expect to have to do that. That's the first priority, and once we get that cut in we want to maintain it, make it look good. Second thing, there's far too much litter on the floor, but we have plenty of public bins to put it in, so we are going to have a littering campaign in the borough this summer. Point 3 is we're going to have some greater enforcement against fly-tipping. Fly-tipping has a few different facets; there's criminally organised activity, there's residents that do it and get prosecuted and they get caught, but if I could just say one thing directly to homeowners, homeowners and residents that forego the Thurrock bulk collection service, because of the cost or whatever, for whatever reason and they employ somebody to take that rubbish from their house they need to have a waste-transfer license. That person taking those goods from your house has to have a license and it has to have a booklet in triplicate: a copy for the homeowner – what they're taking, a copy for the driver and a copy for the CA site because you may pay that person to take that rubbish, but does it get to the CA site? So, third point just to reiterate, greater enforcement against fly-tipping because the homeowner may be paying twice through council tax too, because we have to clear it up afterwards. Point 4, as people will know the A1089, it has improved, I don't know whether people have been going down there, I have to say it has improved, but equally we want the A13 as well clean so it's keeping an eye on that, making sure that people that are working down near the port don't have to look at all that litter in those laybys, as the residents do as well, so let's just keep it tidy because we want business to come to Thurrock and we want it to be a clean borough. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, do you have a supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you, Madam Mayor.

I was about to suggest that if she couldn't handle the heat...but I think I'll be more generous than that and say welcome to the role; and obviously there's a lot to be getting on with in Environment. Clearly I support those priorities and I would say in particular that rubbish and litter is a key concern for residents, certainly in West Thurrock. As Chair of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Committee I want to make sure that plans to improve our borough are given the priority they need and on that she will have my support. In order to achieve this though, does she envisage any in year changes to the budget that she abstained on in March, and will there be any service reorganisation or changes and if so what will those be?

Councillor Tolson

Well, as I have just explained, we are going to have to go and buy equipment, or hire or do something in that area. That's going to have a budget implication and I will be bringing a report to O&S and I hope that I do have your support, and other Members', I know there are some older Members on that Committee with experience and I know there are some newly elected Members, but at the end of the day we all want a cleaner borough because we all live in it and we should not have to be looking at all this litter which has a cost implication either in council tax one way or another. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you, Madam Mayor. Yes, I will do just briefly. I think we've heard from Councillor Gledhill's comments this evening and from the press release that was issued on the 28 June "our mantra is clear, clean it – we want litter free, clean streets and open spaces". Madam Mayor that's certainly something that I would agree with and I'm sure we've all seen this beautiful graphic distributed by the Conservative Party that the Conservative Council will "clean it, cut it and fill it". Madam Mayor, what is crucial in this is I think that the administration has some comprehending of the amount of money that it takes to run a full service, to make sure that our streets are entirely litter free because that is, after all, what they've promised, so Madam Mayor can I ask the portfolio holder when she will be bringing forward those proposals to make sure that our streets are entirely clear, and more importantly when residents can expect our streets to be entirely clear of litter as she's expected? After all I do believe that "clean it, cut it, fill it" is a good idea, I don't want it to become "wing it, fudge it, dodge it".

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Tolson, could you please respond.

Councillor Tolson

Unfortunately, Councillor Gerrish, some people's behaviours are so entrenched that they don't realise when they toss that cigarette onto the floor, or throw that wrapper on the floor, they just don't realise they're doing it. So through education it hasn't worked so there's got to be a financial penalty brought in and that's going to be in the enforcement document, and I really hope you're going to have it for October's meeting. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, would you please read your question out to Councillor Little as on the agenda please.

5. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor B. Little

Would the Cabinet member for Transport and Highways confirm the commitment of the new Administration to the former Labour Administration's Lower Emission Zones HGV management scheme.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Brian Little?

Councillor B. Little

Thank you Madam Mayor, thank you for your question, Councillor Gerrish. Yes, we are committed to tackling the conflicts between HGV traffic and our residential communities. This year's transportation and highways capital programme includes the development of a range of new projects to help manage HGV's, using camera enforcement of HGV bans, which will help deliver the objectives of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. I have also asked officers to develop further plans to tackle congestion across the borough. Keeping traffic moving can bring about significant reductions in emissions, as the recent DEFRA-sponsored study on Elizabeth Road has highlighted. We have recently been out to consultation on further transport measures to support the Thurrock Air Quality & Health Strategy, with the intention of bring action plan proposals to Cabinet in September.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Gerrish, do you have a supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thanks, Madam Mayor. Yes, I do and I do thank again the portfolio holder for that response. In my view air quality is a hugely important issue in Thurrock, certainly in the West of the borough and I know through recent reports that we've seen how much of an issue it is in the East as well. I've always felt that we should expand this trial and seek to turn Thurrock into a fully-fledged Low Emissions Zone to better protect our air quality. Is that a direction the portfolio holder would support, and if so what would he be doing to advance that ambition?

Councillor B. Little

At the moment we are considering our options, as you would probably think that we would need to, but there are two new zones that are going to be developed very shortly through emissions issues and there will be monitoring going on and there are a number of action plans determined for the zones we currently have problems with. So, at the moment we are looking at what we can do and any possible actions in the future we will look at as well.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Gerrish, do you have a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you, Madam Mayor, and I would welcome that response. Certainly it's something that I would be very keen to see pursued, I hope that that will be something that the portfolio holder comes to as well. Madam Mayor as well as the HGVs on our roads, general congestion, as has been alluded to, also contributes to poor air quality. I wonder if the portfolio holder could update us on when we can expect to see the first set of actions starting to emerge from the congestion task force?

Councillor B. Little

Thank you for that supplementary supplementary. Our congestion task force met, I believe, in April. It's a very large group of people; there's another meeting set for September this year. We are currently looking at, within Thurrock, setting a group up for Thurrock Council that looks at congestion and tries to push along some of the items that are being suggested and proposals that are being suggested. I don't think, we're not going to fix them all and other people need to support us to be able to fix some of the ones we want to fix and also, in conjunction with some of the big agencies, we need them to work towards some of the objectives that we need as well. So there will be a group set up, I hope it's going to be cross-party, and we'll get a reasonable monthly push on where we want to go rather than it being meetings that go on for a number of months or waiting for diaries to be free and things like that of people that have got other jobs so watch this space. Within the next couple of weeks we will have a proposal.