

**APPENDIX A**

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (ITEMS 6 & 13)**

**ITEM 6 – Questions from the Public**

There is 1 question from a member of the public.

**1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor J Kent, Leader of the Council**

**Mayor**

“One question has been submitted and accepted by the Monitoring Officer, but sadly Mr Perrin has been unable to attend the meeting. He has requested that a written answer should be sent to him. I will now request that the portfolio holder for housing would please send him a suitable reply.

**Councillor Morris-Cook**

OK.

**Item 19 - Questions from Members to the Leader, Cabinet Members, Chairs of Committees or Members appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee in accordance with Chapter 2, Part 2 (Rule 14) of the Council's Constitution.**

There are 2 questions to the Leader and 8 questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee.

**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE LEADER**

**1. From Councillor Anderson**

"At full council in November you advised council that an investigation was ongoing into Councillor Kiely's attendance and public statements, and stated that you were no longer prepared to "defend the indefensible". Has the investigation been completed and can you advise the chamber of what action is being taken as a result?"

**Councillor John Kent**

Thank you Mr Mayor. No, the investigation has not been completed so it would be inappropriate to comment further.

**Mayor**

Councillor Anderson, do you wish to propose a supplementary question?

**Councillor Anderson**

Yes thank you Mr Mayor. It is evident from the empty chair here again tonight that a rather distressing pattern appears to be setting in. It appears that Councillor Kiely's clear intention is to take his £8,000 of tax payer's money, attend one brief Council meeting every 6 months to avoid any statutory powers to get rid of him and that this should become the status quo for the remainder of his term. The Leader of the Council has already said that this position is indefensible, I agree with him fully that this position is indefensible and can you please give me an indication as to when some action will be taken about this.

**Councillor John Kent**

Mr Mayor, there is an investigation ongoing and it would be inappropriate to comment any further.

**Mayor**

**2. From Councillor Anderson**

"In tackling the budget deficit left by the last Government, Thurrock Council basically has two choices. It can either reduce council spending to balance the books, or raise council tax on local residents by enough to avoid making any cuts at all. Which approach has the administration chosen to adopt in its current draft budget?"

### **Councillor John Kent**

Thank you Mr Mayor. Mr Mayor, the coalition government has cut funding to Thurrock by £11 million over the previous 2 years and intends to cut a further £12 million over the next 2 years. At £12 million Mr Mayor it is the equivalent of £200 for every Thurrock household. Quite frankly you cannot make that up via council tax increase, such as the one that Councillor Anderson is suggesting in his question. Mr Mayor, that would be an increase of 20%. It may have escaped Councillor Anderson's notice but council tax increases are being capped at 2%, so what we are doing is trying to put in place a mix of sensible savings attempting to protect the front line wherever we can and a small Council tax increase that would still leave Thurrock with the lowest council tax anywhere in Essex.

### **Mayor**

Thank you. Councillor Anderson, do you wish to propose a supplementary question.

### **Councillor Anderson**

Yes, thank you Mr Mayor. I am delighted by Councillor Kent's succinct explanation of the position. Unfortunately that's an explanation that doesn't seem to be fully understood by some of his own Cabinet Members. There's one of his backbenchers which has been made clear that he is not here tonight because he is busy organising protests and uprisings about cuts, at the last Cabinet one of his Cabinet Members said nobody around this table wants to do this but we have no choice, to which Councillor Kent replied we don't have an option as to whether or not we make savings, we only have an option as to where we make the savings and on twitter a Cabinet Member said force him to make hard decisions about budgets tonight because of Tory lead government cuts. Are he and his Cabinet Members in fact aware that they do have a choice, they can either stick to their socialist principles, approach the electorate in the local referendum for a significant council tax increase, turn Thurrock into a high tax high spend local authority and therefore not have to make one penny of cuts to any of our Council services if that's what they believe is the correct thing to do or alternatively they can do their bit to help the country balance the books, rectify some of the mistakes of the previous Labour government and ensure that we have public sector which is actually sustainable and affordable in light of the taxes we collect. If that is the approach they intend to take as Councillor Kent has indicated then perhaps they should accept some responsibility for it, stop moaning about it and get on with it.

**Mayor**

Councillor Kent please.

**Councillor John Kent**

Mr Mayor, I think Councillor Anderson in that rather odd rant forgot the one other part of the jigsaw. We have spent the last two years rebuilding the Council's finances from the rampant overspending of the previous Conservative administration, an administration that managed to overspend the budget by over £4 million in one year and anew the Council balances from over £8 million down to around £2 million. You know if had, as many other authorities have up and down the country, the luxury of significant reserves inherited we would have been able to shield people further from cuts. As it is, we have had to rebuild balances, get some proper financial rigour into the budget setting process and into spending through the year as well as coping with £4 million worth of in-year cuts, the first time that this happened in the history of local government in this country and cuts to our budget of a further £23 million ever since. I don't think I have heard myself do too much whinging and moaning about this, I think what we have been doing is getting on with it and doing it in a sensible way. All I have heard from Councillor Anderson, be it through the newspapers or through the radio saying that we aren't cutting enough and hard enough and that seems to be the Tory mantra, be it locally or nationally.

**Mayor**

OK. Councillor Anderson do you wish to put a second supplemental?

**Councillor Anderson**

Yes. The current administration and previous administrations of any colour are obliged to balance the local Council's book, that's law. If only the same restrictions had of applied to the previous Labour national government then perhaps we wouldn't be in the mess we are in. No further questions.

**Mayor**

It's not a question is it? OK, let's go onto the next one.

**Councillor John Kent**

Mr Mayor, although there wasn't a question I do feel that I should have the right to respond.

**Mayor**

OK. So you answer it.

## **Councillor John Kent**

Us in this Chamber are responsible for the running of services in Thurrock and the good stewardship of budgets in Thurrock. What remains clear and obvious is the previous Conservative administration could not run the budget in Thurrock competently, that is why they have overspent by half a million pounds every two months, that's why they denuded the reserves by £6 million pounds, that is why they overspent by £4 million at the end of the year. Mr Mayor, they should never be given the opportunity to do it again.

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

### **1. From Councillor Wendy Curtis**

“Thurrock Council are committed to contribute an annual amount of £150,000 annually to the Lea Valley Water Park.

Could the Portfolio Holder tell me how long this contract will continue and how many schools within Thurrock have used this facility in the past year and are there any schools participating this coming year?”

### **Councillor Gerrish**

Thank you Mr Mayor. The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority is an independent statutory public authority established by an Act of Parliament. The authority is also financed from a levy calculated from the council tax base of Hertfordshire, Essex and Greater London. The levy provides about 60% of the parks budget of £20.5 million, the rest is raised from commercial income. The levy for 2012/13 amounts to £2.87 per Band D equivalent property per annum. To be clear, Thurrock Council does not have a contract with the LVRPA, it is required to raise a levy from residents to help fund the park. In terms of participation by Thurrock schools, Gable Hall School and William Edward Schools attended the schools festival at the White Water Centre. Pupils from William Edwards's School used the Lee Valley Athletic Centre during 2011/12 and had previously received a Sports Development Grant for gifted and talented athletes to use LVAC. The 60 pupils and adults made use of the Youth and School Service at events throughout the year, pupils from Thurrock have attended the open farm Sunday event, pupils have also attended the Wild About Wetlands event at Abbey Farm House and the Council sent information to schools about the park and we will send a reminder so Thurrock children benefit from a resource that is funded in part by our residents. Families can of course independently access the park which is a very nice resource for Thurrock residents.

### **Mayor**

Councillor Wendy Curtis, do you wish to propose a supplementary?

### **Councillor Wendy Curtis**

Yes please Mr Mayor. Thank you for that Councillor Gerrish. I am led to believe that the other Councils such as Hertfordshire, Greater London Council and I think it is Enfield, all have seats on the Committee, but Thurrock has none and I am wondering if you could find out why we haven't got a Council representative sitting on that Board so that we could have a bigger input into what goes on, because I do feel that we are not sending as many children as we possibly could, at £150,000 a year that's a lot of money and not many children attending, so if we could have a Council representative I think we would have a voice.

### **Mayor**

Councillor Gerrish?

### **Councillor Gerrish**

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Curtis for your supplementary question. We must of course looked to value for money for our Thurrock residents and I will therefore pursue this matter to explore the available options.

### **Mayor**

Councillor Wendy Curtis, do you wish to propose a second supplementary question? OK.

## **2. From Councillor Halden**

"Is the cabinet member satisfied that his department is making the best placements for our young people in care?"

### **Councillor Gerrish**

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Halden for your question. Finding the best possible placement for a looked after child is probably the main factor in a child benefiting from being in care. Many factors are considered, the child's age and understanding, siblings, long term arrangements or a realistic prospect of returning home, are they close to school, do they have contact with birth family members, foster placement or residential provision as the preferred option. We develop long term working relationships with our own in-house foster carers, we have deep understanding of their skills base and their capacity and potential to meet the need of any individual child. However, we need to expand our numbers of in-house carers, although in a highly competitive market this is not straight forward.

When in-house care is not possible we use placements provided by the independent sector, for example when we need to keep siblings together or we require a specific ethnic or cultural match. You will know that in our Ofsted inspection last year we were judged good on our work with children in care and the report of that inspection should give Members confidence in our practice. We expect an inspection by Ofsted of our fostering service in 2013 and I will of course report to Council on the findings and outcomes of that inspection. I am for the moment satisfied that the Council is striving to do everything it can to make the best possible placement for every child and young person in our care although of course I am not complacent and we will continue to strive to improve our service and of course to follow the Ofsted action plan. My confidence is affirmed by the Ofsted inspection, but this is clearly an area for constant vigilance.

### **Mayor**

Councillor Halden do you wish to propose a supplementary question?

### **Councillor Halden**

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Gerrish for your answer. Obviously we both serve on Corporate Parenting with each other. I have been constantly critical in Committee that we foster almost 50% of our children out of the borough; it is not ideal for children and is vastly expensive for us. We have had a £3 million overspend in child social care and in a top ten care placement list that I was provided, one single care package was over £280,000, on this list the cheapest care placement was actually £170,000, if you consider that cheap. I keep on asking why we foster so many children out of borough and I keep getting an extremely vague answer and every now and then somebody mumbles about this very sensitive and can't really discuss this, and I keep on asking what we are doing to try and ratchet this £3 million down to try and ensure it doesn't happen again, every now and then I get a vague answer, this is very sensitive. So I would like to ask you what are we going to do to try as he says to increase the in-house stock of care so the external placements where all the money goes we can try and drive that down and is he personally aware of why we have got one placement that costs us over a quarter of a million pounds?

### **Mayor**

OK, Councillor Gerrish.

### **Councillor Gerrish**

Thank you Mr Mayor. Clearly I am not going to discuss any individual children's cases, although I obviously can discuss the matter further with Councillor Halden afterwards. I think clearly the key issue for us in terms of driving down costs and quality is to improve the number of in-house foster carers that we have got if we got circa 260 looked after children in Thurrock below a 100 foster carers we need to redress that balance slightly and make

sure that we have got the ability to meet the increasing levels of demand that we are seeing and that demand has generated the levels of overspend or the levels of pressure on the service that we have seen over the last year. We do know that budgets aren't unlimited and we do need to achieve the best value we can.

We are part of the eastern region contract arrangements to control quality and cost and we also recruited to a new post in September of 2012 to develop and proactively market manage our relationship with a wider range of independent providers to really try and control those contracts and make sure that we drive down spend with them.

### **Mayor**

Thank you. Councillor Halden do you wish to propose a second supplemental?

### **Councillor Halden**

Thank you Mr Mayor. Councillor Gerrish really has hit the point on the head. He mentioned that he did not want to discuss an individual case, that is quite right, I don't want to discuss an individual case either, we would both be in breach if we did that, but that is why we have the Corporate Parenting Committee. We set up the Committee so we could have these discussions no longer under the disguise this is too sensitive to discuss Councillor. A £3 million growth overspend, we have supported the growth is roughly 5% on the council tax we cannot continue to do this, we've to ratchet it down and obviously some of the placements do have match fundings from the PCT.

I have asked are we positive that we are robust enough to make sure that we recharge the PCT to the correct value to ensure that we are not paying costs that we do not owe, again I have only been given vague answers, but I am not asking to discuss an individual and that is the point we can't have this sensitivity around the issue, when we actually publish plans to take a proactive step and say we want to increase in house provision by X amount to drive down Y costs. When are we going to do that.

### **Mayor**

Councillor Gerrish?

### **Councillor Gerrish**

Thank you Mr Mayor. I think we have got a very strong drive and priority in terms of driving down costs. I think what is remiss of me to say we can put a specific number around that. I mean if we look at the increases we have seen in terms of the looked after children population over the last few years it has increased dramatically and clearly with those kind of increases I think certainly from my point of view the expected continuation of that trend to put ever further pressure on our services, it think it would be wrong to commit to a



specific savings style target in terms of the way that we place our looked after children because we do have that duty of care for those children and we must make sure that we meet the demand as it surfaces.

That said, I think we are in agreement that we do need to look to make sure we are placing those children as efficiently as possible, we need to make sure that as a first line of defence we have got a very strong large pool of foster carers in house that we can call on, failing that we need to manage our contracts with those independent foster carers in a better way and Mr Mayor, I think clearly there needs to be that robust challenge within the various committees and processes that we have set up in the Council and I think there is clearly sensitivity there around individuals and I think when we are still having meetings that are recorded and set live for the public you couldn't go into too much detail even in those meetings, but I am perfectly happy to meet with the Opposition Member and explore areas where we could give that level of scrutiny to individual or group cases without the need to bring it to committee and have a public forum.

**3. From Councillor Kelly**

"On New Year's Day 2013 BBC News reported that a known sex offender has been working in nearby Southend Hospital, despite a CRB check being undertaken by the worker's agency employer. What will the chair of Health Overview and Scrutiny do to ensure that processes in Thurrock hospitals are robust and eliminate the potential for sex offenders working in our hospitals?"

**Councillor Wendy Curtis**

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you for your question Councillor Kelly. As a grandmother I was appalled when I heard of this case that was reported in the media. Overview and Scrutiny, Health & Wellbeing meeting has not met until next Monday 28<sup>th</sup>. As Chair of that Committee I have already spoken to the officers and asked them to write to all Chief Executives that operate NHS services within Thurrock asking them to ensure that CRB compliances are robust. It is the Council's aim to keep residents, children, vulnerable people safe in Thurrock and a CRB check is essential and there is always somebody who is going to try and get through that net, but as long as we have a robust service in place to ensure that those CRB checks are there then so be it. I hope this answers your question Councillor Kelly.

**Mayor**

Councillor Kelly do you wish to propose a supplementary?

**Councillor Kelly**

No thank you Mr Mayor, just thank you for your response and I look forward to the outcome of that meeting. Thank you.

**4. From Councillor Ojetola**

"I read with interest another recent success at Havering council in prosecuting a staff member for housing benefit fraud, and other work related fraud issues. Could the portfolio holder outline what provision Thurrock council has for the prevention and detection of any type of fraud by staff or councillors?"

**Councillor Phil Smith**

OK, thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Ojetola for the question. What I would like to assure the Chamber is that this Council does have a robust policy of prevention and detection of fraud. This is not just for internal, this is also for external. These teams investigate any allegations of fraud throughout the Borough. We made no distinctions as to whether these are members of staff or members of the public this process is carried out whichever that person happens to be. There is a regular monitoring report sent to the Director of Finance. Thank you.

**Mayor**

Councillor Ojetola do you wish to propose a supplementary question?

**Councillor Ojetola**

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Smith for the response to that question. Basically it is just really more of a yes or no thing really, I just want you to give us that assurance whether you could outline what the Council does in the prevention section of fraud of staff and councillors and you are saying it is quite general and there is no discrimination but we have seen this success in Havering and I am looking for that type of success here. Are you able to assure us that we can get that kind of success here?

**Councillor Smith**

I think you are aware of some of the processes that actually take place; I think you actually sit on one of the committees that is responsible for this. It's not normal practice to actually lay out every thing we do to detect and track fraud, because if we actually did that all the people that are committing the fraud would do is avoid those tracks or those areas that we are investigating and are watching, so all I can say is we do have a robust policy, we do use all methods that are available to ensure that fraud is detected.

**Mayor**

Do you wish to propose a second supplementary?

**Councillor Ojetola**

Yes please Mr Mayor. Maybe I should make it a slightly clearer in this. You are also responsible for FOIs and very recently FOIs in your area ask about this. More recently FOIs in your area ask specifically what we are doing about

this and whether there are various exceptions or various arrangements Members or Officers have and the response to that was a negative.

Councillor Smith, my question really then is, if you are not able to answer it here, are you not also able to answer FOIs clearly. I have the privilege of visiting the team involved in the FOI today and I know they work very hard in that area and complements to them there. However, Mr Mayor, when FOIs are asked for, we want clear honest answers and in cases where that is not given that is why I am asking the portfolio holder now, but seem not to get an answer. Councillor Smith, are you able to answer this question?

### **Councillor Smith**

I'll answer the question which, it just seems weird. Does the freedom of information requests we get and the freedom of information requests are answered as laid down within the Council's Constitution and as laid down by Law, so they are answered, they are answered correctly as they are asked. Are you actually, from your body language, are you suggesting that when we answer freedom of information requests we are lying? The information that we quote on freedom of information requests is correct.

### **5. From Councillor Johnson**

"Under what circumstances would the council write off money owed by a person, and could the portfolio holder outline what happens when a person who has money written off by the council is traced?"

### **Councillor Phil Smith**

OK. Thank you Councillor Johnson. I would have thought that you would have known what the right policy was, but if you actually go to our fair debt policy and appendix 3 you will see it is laid out there. To be clear, the Council does not write money off lightly, it only writes the money off once we have carried out all robust processes to see whether there is any means of collecting that money.

One of the other reasons for writing money off is that if we carry loads of money that we are unable to collect and it just distorts the accounts and it actually makes the accounts cleaner and it is a normal accounting process.

A lot of the times that these are written off is because we are unable to find where the debtor actually is, so rather than spending loads of Council money chasing people round and round the country with all the ensuing Court costs, the money is written off. If that person is ever found back in the area, then we do seek to pursue them.

### **Mayor**

Thank you. Councillor Johnson, do you wish to propose a supplementary question?

**Councillor Johnson**

Yes please Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor. So if a debt is written off and you do trace them, you did say only if you trace them back in the area, but I hope if you trace them in any area, I guess the amount would be written back on. If that is the case can you tell me how many have been written back on this year and how much of that has actually been collected and how many defaulters that have been traced have not had their write offs reversed please?

**Mayor**

Councillor Smith?

**Councillor Smith**

To give you the details you request that partly will have to be a written answer.

If the debt is there we collect it and I think what we should point out is the reason we had to write off so much debt over the last couple of years is because of the amount of debt we inherited from the previous administration. I know you laugh but when you actually look at the statistics and that is all we go on, under my stewardship and Councillor Gerrish's stewardship, we have achieved over 99% collection rate. Under your stewardship you were actually the lowest collecting Council in the area. This just doesn't help anybody.

**Mayor**

Ok. Councillor Johnson do you wish to propose a supplementary?

**Councillor Johnson**

If you actually listen to what I said Councillor Smith, I didn't say anything about how much had been written off, I asked about the people who have had their debts written off and written back on, what do we do about it? But anyway, are you telling me that our current computer system can't reallocate old council debt and therefore you would have to create a sundry debt for collection purposes and in doing so failing to properly, what can we say, the performance figures are not exactly correct?

**Mayor**

Councillor Smith?

**Councillor Smith**

Performance figures, the whole Council runs on performance figures. Now if we are actually saying that the performance figures are incorrect then please put that forward at the relevant scrutiny committees. Performance figures are

what we have, performance figures are arrived at from Government legislation and what is laid down in law, so if they are wrong it is actually the Government legislation that is wrong and I think we know who is in power at the moment.

**6. From Councillor Gledhill**

"Could the portfolio holder outline how much the authority has paid out to repair properties damaged by an outgoing tenant over the past 2 years, what is done to recover that cost, and how much money has actually been recovered as a result?"

**Councillor Morris Cook**

Thank you for the question. In April 2010 to April 2012 there were 559 invoices issued at a rate of £278,580, out of that there is £47,000 outstanding and from April to December this year there are six invoices at a total of £1,256.

**Mayor**

Councillor Gledhill do you wish to propose a supplementary?

**Councillor Gledhill**

I do. Obviously thank you very much for your response there Councillor Morris Cook. Obviously damage done to properties by tenants on the way out leaves these properties empty for longer. They are not just smashing up a property, not causing minor damage they are stealing the next person's home for weeks at a time. Could you assure me that obviously not just collecting the money from them is one way of doing it, that we are discouraging people by perhaps pursuing it in different way, including stuff like criminal damage and possibly even burglary to a certain extent, certainly when these damages start getting into big figures? Thank you.

**Councillor Morris Cook**

Yes, and actually I sort of can go a step further than that. When I became the portfolio holder for housing, I looked at this because I had actually had a couple of people come to me saying that they had moved out of the property and were asked to take down curtain poles, take out laminate flooring and doing things like that, which actually then the Council has got to go in and make good and providing that the laminate flooring and maybe decking in a garden, it could be curtain poles it could be different things, different doors, providing they are compliant, they reach the required standard and obviously the standard that is required by the Council, we should not be asking previous tenants to remove them because actually it is added cost and it is an added time to avoid, so I think you can see that is why since April to December there has only been 6 recharges.

It is something we do look at, it is something we take extremely seriously and to be perfectly truthful if someone was to smash up a property they certainly

would not be moving into the next one, and it is something I think if you look at our new tenancy policy that comes quite loud and clear that if you don't toe the line and you aren't a good tenant either by paying your rent on time or by the way you treat your property you will not be getting another Council property.

**Mayor**

Ok. Councillor Gledhill do you wish to propose a second supplementary question?

**Councillor Gledhill**

No I don't Mr Mayor, but obviously like to thank Councillor Morris Cook for her response and it is good to see that we are looking after our properties and where other people looked after them we are not going to hit them but where they don't we will.

**7. From Councillor Anderson**

"On Sunday 13th January, one of the main security doors at the Freemans Court OAP complex failed. It required interventions from both elected members and senior council officers before an urgent repair was initiated. Does the portfolio holder feel that the response provided by the council's out of hours service to vulnerable residents is adequate?"

**Councillor Morris Cook**

Yes, and to be honest I apologise for the confusion that has arisen on this. I have investigated the case on this because obviously I have heard about it and it was logged originally with Members but realistically it didn't fall within the emergency criteria that is currently set down because the external door entry system could be opened and wasn't stuck.

There was no damage to the individual front doors as such, the individual doors are judged to be secure and as this was out of hours the current repairs policy sets a response time to within five days, my understanding is that repair to the new door was actually installed and completed on the 17<sup>th</sup> which did fall within this, but I thought you were probably going to say you know what does constitute and obviously we do need to look at people that are vulnerable and that we do feel at risk especially as out of hours, so what we would say the emergency repairs that should be carried out within 24 hours what they would do is emergency repairs to make safe and secure pending a permanent repair.

The following count as emergency repairs, electricity and gas and that is total loss of electricity, unsafe power, lighting, switch socket, total loss of gas supply, heating, total loss between the 1<sup>st</sup> November and the 31<sup>st</sup> March. Total loss outside of office hours, a provision of temporary heating maybe installed within 24 hours all year round. Water, total loss of water supply, blocked drains, stack, toilet and only toilet is in the property, uncontrollable leak from pipe tank or system, security insecure ground window door or lock,

so that is what constitutes an emergency repair, and obviously you know what I would like to see and I am sure that you know obviously when we are going for a new contract and looking at what we expect from our new supplier he will be working with us, is to say that you know lets use best use of time so if we have actually got a team out and obviously we are looking at some of the ideas is probably to have a handyman that is on call.

If we have got a team that are out mending property and an emergency call comes in, I think it is important that if there is a team currently out doing a repair specially out of hours and another call comes in you would expect them to go and do that and I think to me that is common sense and it is making best use of the team that is on call that is currently being paid to be on call and they would actually then fill their time and their time sheet up. So I hope that's covers your point and I do understand that the out door wasn't secured but the internal doors were and if you have got any other information you need to share I'm more than happy.

**Mayor**

Thank you. Councillor Anderson do you wish to make a supplementary question?

**Councillor Anderson**

Yes, thank you Councillor Morris Cook and I can assure you that is entirely a non political issue.

The situation at Premium Court is that the security door got damaged on the close and it meant and it wasn't that you couldn't open it, it was that it couldn't be closed, and obviously that then leaves the internal parts of that part of the block free to access and egress from anybody, so the individual flat doors in that block are fairly lightweight, they are not security doors by any means, and there were elderly people who felt vulnerable.

Now common sense would have said that actually these are vulnerable individuals, their main security door and entry phone system is broken so it can't be closed and something needed to be done about it urgently on the day. Common sense did in the end prevail but it took the involvement of multiple members and relatively senior Council Officers in order to make that common sense prevail, so it is just about making sure we can, I think all Members would agree the right thing to do was get somebody out to fix it and actually probably the people on the phone system had common sense they would realise that too. Can we delegate the application of common sense to an appropriate level?

**Mayor**

Councillor Morris Cook?

**Councillor Morris Cook**

To be honest I think you will find that the reason that the repair was actually done is the reason that I have actually said, that there was actually a carpenter that was actually out that was able to go and make the property safe and obviously the full repair was completed by the 17<sup>th</sup>. The difficulty is what one person will construe as an emergency and as I say you know the outdoor was obviously broken but the internal doors and whether you say they are lightweight or not they are substantial Council doors that do have to meet a required standard, you can't just push them and they will open.

So going forward as I say with the new contracts that we are looking at we are looking to have handymen, obviously there is an on call team, they will look and if there is work to be done and there are no other calls why wouldn't you go and do something like that, but to be truthful the reason that did get repaired is my understanding is there was a carpenter that was out doing another repair and did have time on his hands and was able to go and support that.

## **8. From Councillor Hebb**

"Following recent bad press, and a critical report by the CQC into paediatric care, residents of Thurrock are understandably concerned about the performance of Basildon and Thurrock University Hospitals (BTUH). What actions will you and your committee be taking to hold the hospital to account over promises of improvement, and when do you next expect to bring representatives of hospital management in front of the committee to update members on progress?"

### **Councillor Wendy Curtis**

Thank you Mr Mayor. At the last Overview and Scrutiny of Health and Wellbeing, it was decided that Thurrock Overview and Scrutiny and Essex Overview and Scrutiny, Basildon and many other councils would come in as a joint committee to Thurrock Council Chamber and invite Claire Panniker who is the Chief Executive, the Nursing Officer, Diane Sarker and the Chair of Governors, Ian Luder, to attend this chamber so that questions could be asked relating to the very bad CQC report.

This was a public meeting where questions were asked directly to the Basildon Thurrock University Hospital representatives and the questions had to be answered there and then, not having to wait many weeks for a long term reply. Sadly none of the Conservative Members of Thurrock Overview and Scrutiny attended this meeting. CQC are currently in the hospital this week for several days, they arrived on Monday unannounced, inspecting the issues which have given them cause for concern and also ensuring that all systems are in place to ensure that our residents are receiving a first class service. The recommendations of the joint committee meeting that was held on Monday were to await the outcome of the current CQC inspection and also be given the independent report commissioned by the hospital. It would then be appropriate to invite the Trust members back to Thurrock Overview and



Scrutiny and Essex and other members and decide what action is to be taken, if necessary, I hope this answers your question.

**Mayor**

Councillor Hebb, do you wish to propose a supplementary question?

**Councillor Hebb**

Yes please Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Curtis for your response. Sorry I am going to give a bit of a history lesson since I am in my third role as a history teacher. In July of this year my colleague and Deputy Leader of the Conservative Leader .....

**Mayor**

Councillor Hebb please ask the question.

**Councillor Hebb**

I am getting there. Councillor Gledhill requested of your committee Councillor Curtis, that we invite Basildon Hospital or the Trust to the committee to review the failings and make sure the hospital is functioning as needs be and that the process is sound. It has taken six months, do you agree that is no good for us as a local authority demanding superb public account and it is no good for them in our critical trend we need to make sure that the partnership is working? Do you agree that six months is far too long and again another failure of this administration to react of the motion that happened in July 2010?

**Councillor Wendy Curtis**

I think a day is too long to have something done, but at the same time there was also another CQC inspection which was even worse than the previous one, hence the meeting on Monday. This Council's biggest concern is about sustained improvement, because we have been there before we have been there many times. I can remember two year's ago that I visited the hospital with other representatives from here, so you know nothing has changed. We have a new Chief Executive, Claire Panniker, we have a new Chair of the Governors and I simply hope that the CQC inspection that is being done at the moment shows that there is improvement now. I cannot say, Ok something happened in July, you know it is hard to get these people to the table, the new Chief Executive didn't start until September 17<sup>th</sup> so we did have a problem.

**Mayor**

Ok. Thank you Councillor Curtis. Councillor Hebb would you like to make a second supplemental?

**Councillor Hebb**

I do Mr Mayor and it's slightly off the subject we have discussed. With the assimilation of public health duties coming under local authority control you will be aware that the Health and Wellbeing Strategy is currently put in plan for its second or third draft now and would hope to be approved by this full Council in the next couple of months. Will you commit once this is enacted to make sure that our part of that strategy is deployed to make sure the absurd hospitalisation rates that we experienced during Christmas 2012 never happens again under the watch of this authority?

**Mayor**

Councillor Curtis?

**Councillor Wendy Curtis**

I cannot guarantee, but at the end of the day I am here for the residents of Thurrock and I wish to ensure that they are safe when they visit a hospital and that everything is in place and everything is robust in order to keep our residents safe from harm.

**Mayor**

Thank you Councillor Curtis.