

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 23 March 2016

Item 18 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 1 question had been submitted to the Leader and 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 THE LEADER

1. From Councillor Ojetola to the Leader

Please inform residents of Thurrock what type of ‘purdah’ (as in communications restrictions) will be in place in the Council in the run up to the referendum.

Councillor J. Kent

Conduct of the referendum on the UK’s membership of the EU is governed by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) as amended by the European Union Referendum Act 2015 and The European Union Referendum (Conduct) Regulations Act of 2016. Can I thank Mr Lawson for making sure that I got that right.

The actual Purdah period for the referendum will run from the 27 May to polling day of the 23 June, and the statutory restrictions also relate too, in the way that we are used to for local government elections. So obviously we won’t be able to put out anything that deals with any of the issues raised by the referendum question or gives arguments for or against a particular outcome. However what is different for the EU referendum is that restrictions will also apply to materials designed to encourage people to vote so where as for local government elections and parliamentary elections one of the roles of the returning officer is to encourage as high of turn out as possible. Interestingly for the referendum we as a Council will not be allowed to provide any information which is designed to encourage people to vote at the referendum, other than that I understand that the regulations are very similar to those we are used to.

Mayor

Councillor Ojetola do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Ojetola

Thank you Madam Mayor and indeed yes thank you to David Lawson for the details and aid after the question I think our discussions with the Head of Legal in terms of my position as chair of Standards and Audit O&S we had gone through every asset and detailed discussion or email discussion about purdah. I think the key thing Madam Mayor is about social media which is very rampant now a days and is to ensure that where possible through the

leadership of the Council that we don't either one way or other use social media to sway the votes to sway peoples opinion or as Councillor Kent just said to sway to influence in any way shape or form, I received this leaflet in my door way very recently but I'm pleased to see that it wasn't promoted by the council nor is it promoted by any particular Political Party, at least not as straight forward as that. It's just really to encourage people to be as neutral as possible when so that integrity of the Council is not put to distribute.

Councillor J. Kent

Madam Mayor frankly I'm lost on how to respond to that, firstly of all if Councillor Ojetola wishes to talk to the Officers that are experts in this as he already has, I don't know why he bothered to put in a question. If what he wants to do is make the statement he has made he would have been better putting a motion than a question and wasting everyone's time.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Kent.

Councillor Ojetola do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Ojetola

Madam Mayor, there is no point.

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

1. From Councillor Halden to Councillor B Rice

Do you agree that it is worth exploring the idea of key worker housing in terms of attracting young GP's to practice and stay in Thurrock?

Councillor B Rice

Thank you Madam Mayor well I have to say Councillor Halden I'm a little but perplexed because we had this discussion in the Members room and I told you then that you were a bit behind the times and I tell you now you're a bit behind the times. We have already discussed this subject both at Cabinet and indeed at the Gloriana meeting, where your colleague actually was at Cabinet and that was Councillor Brian Little, so I am surprised he didn't tell you that it was agreed that Council would further explore the possibility of a percentage of builds especially Gloriana being offered to not just doctors but essential key workers, doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers and other important key workers. So the answer again Councillor Halden is yes unless you have a supplementary which is totally different to the question.

Mayor

Councillor Halden do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Halden

Thank you Madam Mayor asking if one is behind the times when ones married to Council Gerrard Rice is a bit rich, the reason I asked the question Councillor Rice is when we discussed this on Committee obviously officers have advised us it is the whole package we need to offer to GP's and specifically why I am asking about young GP's is because as a part of key worker housing we need to consider outreaching to Medical Universities to attract young doctors, we need to consider each stock of current doctors we have here that they can work with and learn their trade, the type of surgery's that they have got and whilst they are here we attract them here with the promise of key worker housing making sure we communication with NHS England that key worker housing is a part of an offer if they serve a certain amount of years in the borough of Thurrock. So could the Portfolio Holder explain further conversation that she has had with NHS England to broaden out the conversation past key worker housing to make sure it is a part of a comprehensive offer.

Councillor B Rice

Thank you very much Madam Mayor, okay, the package that is being discussed in Thurrock for new GPs goes far beyond talking to NHS England it is a comprehensive review of exactly what we have now, what we need to have and as you know without exemplary the director of Public Ian Wake we are privileged to be able to look very in-depth at our requirements for our GPs he has really you know sort of over turned every stone to find out exactly what is going on. So I can say that his is not just about me having a discussion with NHS England, although I must say that NHS England do come down to our meetings at the health and wellbeing board, they come down to cabinet they come down to overview and Scrutiny where they are robustly scrutinised by Councillor Snell, and there is an overall package it is not just a discussion between a portfolio holder and NHS England. So I just have to say to you Madam Mayor that this is in train and we are working very very hard across all groups, across all parties to make sure that this happens for Thurrock and that our GP compliment is increased. Thank you Madam Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor Halden do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Halden

No.

Mayor

No, thank you very much.

2. From Councillor Aker to Councillor B Rice

How many complaints did Thurrock Council receive regarding outside private suppliers contracted in to provide adult social care since April 2015?

Councillor B Rice

Thank you Madam Mayor, thank you Councillor Aker, I can confirm that 17 complaints were received over the past year. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Aker do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Aker

I do thank you very much, the Portfolio Holder would be aware that Temp Exchange Limited was part providing home care to Thurrock residents, during care quality commission inspection initiated in November 2015, Temp Exchange Limited staff were integrated into the council workforce. The publication of the care quality commission report in February 2016 states that Temp Exchange Limited recruitment process was and I quote inadequate and unsafe as recruitment checks had not been completed on all staff before that commenced working at the service. Is the portfolio holder aware that the Temp Exchange Limited was running an inadequate service and does she approve of the decision to integrate Temp Exchange Limited staff into the council's workforce?

Councillor B Rice

Well thank you very much Madam Mayor, so I am going to give an answer that incorporates that and a few other things, fact not fiction. I would like Madam Mayor to sincerely thank first of all our in house social care team who have really gone the extra mile in recent months to ensure our vulnerable residents receive a good service even through a very very difficult time of transition as Councillor Aker has referred to. To illustrate the excellent service Madam Mayor we should first of all look at the number of complaints in relation to the number of hours of care provided, each week we have 65 providers, ok, that we could potentially receive complaints about, we've got 49 supported homes, home and living skins for adults of working age, 13 older people's homes and up to a few months ago 5 externally commissioned home care providers until 2 as Councillor Aker refers to one of them was brought back into house. This is when the majority of the 17 complaints were received, one provider gave back their contract as it was not financially viable for them and the other was providing a poor service so we brought this service back in house. This gave us approximately 1550 hours of care to provide from our already stretched in house team. This is where I would like to say again well done to our teams who have frankly worked over and above what they were

contracted to do. It is regrettable that some of the work force that transferred to the council despite being given training did not perform at the level expected and therefore were not taken on permanently and I can ensure this chamber that every person that came over did not go out unattended without a DBS check, these checks were made in the first month of all people being transferred and in depth training was provided hence our own staff went out to provide care in their own time I have to say. The figures speak for themselves Madam Mayor, we've got over 5000 hours of care being provided a week by external home care providers that 260,000 hours a year with 17 complaints in a year Madam Mayor. We are one of the best performing authorities in the eastern region for adult social care, the percentage of complaints is 0.85% not 1% Madam Mayor 0.85 those complaints are indeed regrettable but being they are such a small number and there are 17 I have personally been in contact with 3 already out of those 17 and by the end of the year I will have gone to see them or discussed with them on the telephone to make sure they are satisfied. We have an excellent service Madam Mayor its second to none, one of the best in the region and we should applaud our adult social care, Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Rice.

Councillor Aker do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Aker

I do thank you very much, when one of the complainants is the care quality commission statistics sort of pell because they are the investigating body of the care industry and I know the portfolio holder is very proud of her portfolio and has done some excellent work, my question was no way a dig rather than whether she was aware that a company that was providing an inadequate service was brought in mid-way through an investigation that ruled the care of all of their workers inadequate if you have a problem with that I would take it up with the care quality commission, but care is not improving if these workers were providing training I permission to read this out from the family of someone who is receiving care, this gentleman is being fitted with two catheter bags and he is repeatedly falling, he is being fed meals everyday of dry crackers, he's catheter bag is being emptied into lemonade bottles which are being left in the kitchen and bathroom full, these residents have filmed footage and photographic evidence of this. So rather than be bullish and I am proud that we are one of the most better performing authorities, because you read so many scare stories and horror stories of the care industry but rather than celebrate the 99 % that are doing well let's focus on the very small minority who deserve much better care than they are receiving.

Councillor B Rice

Of course we always focus on anything we are getting wrong in the adult social care and all departments of the Council but this is one of the best

performing departments in this Council and any other council in the east of England it is very regrettable when things go wrong and instead of waiting for grand stand in full council I would only hope people would come and approach me and tell me these problems I haven't had no discussion Madam Mayor with any Councillor about this although I do get a full report of everything single complaint that comes in although it's anonymised which I discuss regularly with my director and discuss the best way forward, ok, I do not accept poor quality standards for any of our residents. Thank you Madam Mayor.

3. From Councillor Aker to Councillor Worrall

How many property sales have been completed through the right to buy social mobility fund since the scheme started in 2015?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you Councillor Aker, there are two important points to know regarding the social mobility fund, first and most important is that the Tory Government pulled the plug on it early this year. Second I'm sorry to say this is the housing team didn't cover themselves in glory a proposal which may have been if it was intent was not simply implemented quickly enough to overcome the governments U-turn. As Councillor Aker is no doubt aware this year the government announced it was stopping the scheme early having originally said that the social mobility fund would be available till the end of the next financial year the 31 January 2017, they have now said that it will close next Thursday the 31 March. For those that don't know or can't remember what the social mobility was, the government invited councils to submit bids for a local scheme with a one of payment of up to 20,000 pounds to allow eligible tenants to buy a home on the market in place of their right to buy discount. It meant that tenants would have an extra option when trying to get on the property ladder instead of the right to buy they could take a 20,000 pound deposit half from the government and half from us and buy a home on the open market , meaning that the council home would remain available for people on the waiting list. It seems a trifle unfair doesn't it getting peoples hopes up then dashing them like that with little or no time to complete their purchase, however I can say that while nobody has yet been in a position to complete their property purchase one applicant is at a very advanced stage and will very likely complete before next Thursdays deadline, and while Councillor Aker will no doubt concentrate on the negatives and I will await his follow up questions with interest, I do want to say that because the government was wrong, we have agreed to step in and help those applicants who cannot meet the governments deadline but who are already in our system. Because the government will no longer fulfil its promise to fund half of the 20,000 pound, we will step in and fund the whole amount to allow those sales to go through a letter has been sent to each of these residents to advise of this and to follow up telephone calls have been made. A promise is a promise and while the Government may feel it's okay to break people's hearts and hopes in this sly and devious way we do not and I intend to ensure that we will honour the promise we made to our tenants obviously we cannot take

on any new applicants or help those who were just thinking about doing it. But we will not allow the families who have gone through all the trauma and trouble of trying to buy the home to be left in the lurch.

Mayor

Councillor Aker do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Aker

I do, and first of all I would thank Councillor Worrall for answering my third question along with the first. Having made investigations I have discovered despite being in position to set up the scheme from July 2015 when the single application was processed until January 2016, why?

Councillor Worrall

I think that I simply answered this in the first question but, let me go back over it the Tory Government pulled the plug and left us with unrealistic timescales, long gone are the days when we had the money to employ specific teams for projects, but we will step in and support those let down by the Tories all those that we in the process have a letter and telephone call from the housing department, we will give them an extra 4 months to complete the process if their purchase falls out of the timescale we will support them on an individual basis, nobody that is in the process will be let down. I made a promise and I keep all of my promises. So while I accept that officers could have acted more quickly, we must not lose sight of the fact that the problem is down to the Tory Government scrapping the scheme, they may be ready to abandon these people but I won't. And let's be clear what the role of a portfolio holder is I take a report to cabinet and it is passed by cabinet it then turns in to be implemented by officers, the day I found out that the government had pulled this I met with officers, I also met with the leader, I met with the chief executive I've met with the head of housing and we've got the financial agreement that we would not leave these people in the lurch, we've had the money put by the HRA and that is the role of the portfolio holder to act when something goes wrong I am not an officer I am not here working day in day out, but something goes wrong I make sure that I don't sit on it , there isn't no way I am sitting on anything, so I find it really hypocritical of Councillor Aker would try to play politics with this issue. These are people hopes that he was playing with if he gave a damn about these people he would have raised this with me weeks and weeks and weeks ago. We could have worked together to reassure these residents instead he has waited until this evening treating these people like little pawns in his game.

Mayor

Councillor Aker do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Aker

I would love to thank you very much ..

Mayor

Could I just say that the people in the public gallery I would like respect for the meeting that is going on here whether you agree with or not otherwise I will have you evicted from the room. Thank You. Councillor Aker please ..

Councillor Aker

I will take no lessons on playing politics it's quite something to tell people not to have a right to buy then buy your own right to buy. But let's talk about craniology about this. Let's talk about craniology about this if she can dish it she can take it as well ..

Mayor

Excuse me, excuse me sit back down for a minute please. We are here tonight to represent the people of Thurrock and I will not have ramblings going across I started the meeting saying that I'm not going to have talking across and rambling and I won't have it, I will expect respect for each Councillor that is in here otherwise I will stop the meeting. Thank you. Councillor Aker would you like to continue but I would like you to show a little bit of respect. Thank you.

Councillor Aker

A bit of craniology for the portfolio holder the scheme was set up in July 2015 and it was announced that it would be going to conclude in January 2016 the first process was the 28 January 2016 a week after the government announced it was being suspended. What oversight or what did you do to actively see that these people get their homes purchased through this scheme, it's all well and good blaming the government for this but there was a 6 month window to see that a process was in place to get this policy sorted.

Councillor Worrall

Look I am not going to go over all that's happened he has had the report he knows what the report is he has picked out the bits that he wants to. But let's just say that what he did, this wasn't about social mobility tonight, this was about him raising my personal life in this chamber again.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Worrell.

Councillor Worrall

Thank you. I need to go on. I need to go on. So thank you I don't think that he realises the difference in different politics.

Mayor

Please Councillor Rice, I will not have it.

Councillor Worrell

What I've come to realise in this chamber is that there is different sort of politicians in this chamber, and there is some politicians that will do anything to get a headline or a newspaper article, some politicians enter this chamber to be good councillors and I've been in this chamber for 8 years and I would like to think that I have got respect in this chamber and to have my life put over this chamber by the same person twice is just not the right principle that this chamber should be going by, but Councillor Aker there is another sort of politician and that is one that enters this chamber as a stepping stone just to become an MP, and that is the difference between us, and you have demonstrated that that is your stepping stone here from last year.

Mayor

Councillor Worrell, please.

Councillor Worrell

I will sum up Madam Mayor but I'm sure that for him to be questioning me and my morality in this chamber, I have stood really firm on why I am a councillor and I do consider my position as a councillor as I'm sure Councillor Aker has to in his time too, and just last week Madam Mayor I was asked to reconsider my position again, just last week the last time I was with members of the UKIP Group, who asked me to leave the Labour Party and go to be with UKIP, why? Because they like my stewardship. Because I've lead this chamber in housing, so that is what they have done, because I have been good in this chamber. But I told them I will tell this chamber tonight there is no way that I will leave the Labour party and go to UKIP, why? Because I would never be part of a group of where Councillor Aker poisonous brand of politics is allowed to thrive and go unchallenged.

4. **From Councillor G Rice to Councillor Potheary**

Please will the portfolio holder tell the community in Chadwell what plans the Council have with the Police to deal with the anti-social behaviour on unlicensed motor bike riders in Chadwell St Mary?

Councillor Potheary

Okay so I would to thank Councillor Rice for his question and I know you have been working very very hard on this issue Councillor Rice for the residents of Chadwell and I do appreciate the impact that this kind of thoughtless

behaviour has. We should all be able to enjoy our local parks and open spaces like Orsett Heath without this kind of level of disruption, noise, danger and antisocial behaviour it is a menace to our communities and needs to be tackled. On that basis we have been pressing the police and I know you have been partied to some of them conversations to take the issue more seriously and it will feed in to the Thurrock community safety partnership where the police and council work together to solve problems for the benefit of our community. This is an issue where both the Council and the police have to get it right together, in this case options to invest in cost effective targets hardening measures are being actively explored to try and stop this type of thing happening on the Heath, obviously we need to do this sensibly no one wants to turn our open spaces into fortresses. I understand that the head of environment is meeting with Essex Police tomorrow to look at target hardening measures around the heath and see what may work best. But this does have to be a partnership response and the police can't advocate their responsibilities on this one, there is only so much we can do. Essex Police have conducted successful enforcements operations in the past against this type of activity and have undertaken to consider further operations in the future should circumstances' warrant I believe at this point they do. My concern that Essex polices response to neighbourhood crime is becoming weaker and weaker as their position shifts according to budget cuts. Again I urge all residents in Chadwell and Orsett Heath affected by this to report each and every incident to the police using 101; we have to make sure that the data the police are looking at reflects the real magnitude of the problem.

Mayor

Councillor Rice do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor G Rice

Yes Madam Mayor the reason I bring this up was on mother's day I was processing up Chadwell Hill which I have known since the age of 10 and I was met by 8 and I was astonished 8 quad bikes, they raced around Linford Road and they raced down the Chadwell Hill, and I was very concerned for my safety and other residents that were sitting in their cars because these aren't isolated cases and what I would like to know is in view of the cuts the conservative government have made to policing how are we going to get the police to actually do an action plan in Chadwell because I'm very concerned.

Councillor Potheary

Again thank you for your question, yes my answer focused on what we can do as a council in terms of securing our own land and that's all in hand, but yes there have been incidents were this generally the road being used illegally by these unlicensed motorbikes, the answer is that we have to keep using the channels that are available to us to put that pressure on, and that is something that as portfolio holder I am keen to do, in terms of the police budget cuts people in this chamber will be fully aware of my attitude towards the police budget cuts, and that I do think there is a direct cause and affect

going on between the budget cuts and the police suddenly backing off of certain types of crime I something that I deplore, it's something that I think is counterproductive, I think that by announcing that you are going to be backing off of an entire subset of crime that give the completely wrong message to both offenders and Communities in terms of reporting these problems if people just feel they are going to be fobbed off people won't report and that is again why I do keep stressing that we do need to get the police to understand the problem and what they are looking at the moment is the figures, so even if your auntie down the road has reported it your neighbours reported it everyone in the house pick up the phone and get onto 101 report it , although the police are probably not going to come on that first occasion, but we have to do is make sure that when there computers get overwhelmed with calls on one particular issue in one hotspot that their computer systems are going to flash up the data because that is how the police is now trying to justify not turning up to stuff.

Mayor

Councillor Rice do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Rice

Thank you Madam Mayor it's such a serious subject I do have a supplementary. Could the portfolio holder assure me that when I and Councillor Barbara Rice pass on information from residents private and confidential information of where these idiots are and I'll be a little bit more specific that almost run down one of my grandchildren that's why I'm so incensed, that these complaints will be taken seriously and this intelligence will be acted upon because I really am annoyed with Essex Police.

Councillor Potheary

I am obviously firstly gosh what a horrible situation for your grandchild, what I would say is that all I can do is guarantee what my officers will do, I can't speak for Essex Police I'm not here to defend them it's not my job I'm here to hold them accountable and that is what I have been trying to do and what my officers try to do, so in terms of actual report of this type of behaviour if it is reported to officers it is fed back through to Essex Police at the correct level it will also be taken to as I said earlier the Thurrock Community Safety Partnership where I think there will be as there has been a number of reports that are probably now creating a cumulative affect that will be something that will be discussed at that forum and if it's not on the agenda I will certainly make ensure that it is put on.

5. From Councillor Hebb to Councillor Potheary

Please Councillor Potheary, would the Portfolio Holder ask the Environmental Health Services to contact the owner or occupiers of the Sand Pits Car Park in Stanford-Le-Hope to tidy the area and maintain the standard weekly; failing this they investigate an enforcement option?

Councillor Pothecary

Thank you for your question Councillor Hebb, I am fairly easy going soul but littering definitely is one of the things that makes my blood boil, so I appreciate where you are coming from on this with regards to the sandpit car park the only Member of the site has been contacted previously only a while ago and told on to take litter clearance that he did comply with that but obviously the litter has built up again the owner will therefore be contacted again to request more regular clean ups, I'm not sure I can guarantee weekly but we can ask for it. If that doesn't work then legal options will have to be considered we have the power to serve a notice under section 43 of the antisocial behaviour crime and policing act 2014 known as a community protection notice on the owner of the car park requiring the litter, the clearance of litter from their land failure to comply and I would just like to stress this failure to comply with the notice carries a maximum penalty of £20,000 for business or £2,500 for individual so we are not messing around here so if we have to go down that route we will do.

Mayor

Councillor Hebb do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Hebb

Yes that is very welcome news Councillor Pothecary, residents in Stanford Le Hope and not only residents if I am honest with you small business owners are at absolute wits end with the vermin and I use that word deliberately and infestation which are growing around the sandpits car park since the asset disposal some years ago. I would ask if the owner does not get in touch and does not do what he needs to do that we look to move to enforcement action post haste. This man has had so many opportunities to get this area sorted for once and for all and what I would say is you may not personally councillor Pothecary but officers may have contacted the owner but I will be clear it was residents and volunteers who cleaned it up then each one of them then got a car parking fine from the said officer for cleaning officer for cleaning up his mess I am sick of it , we are all sick of it in Stanford thank you for the backup and I expect if nothing does happen we get that enforcement action going straight away thank you.

Councillor Pothecary

Yes just quickly to come back on that what I will do to be helpful is get you a timescale as well from officers so that you know when we are expecting them to comply by. You mentioned vermin so that's something I will make sure goes specifically to the environmental health team that will deal with something like that and that may lend some extra weight.

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