

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 29 March 2017

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

There were no questions from members of the public.

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Item 14 – 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.

Those questions not heard would receive a written response or have the option to resubmit at a later Council meeting.

1. FROM COUNCILLOR JONES TO COUNCILLOR HEBB

Does the Deputy Leader agree that this Council would not have been able to set a balanced budget without the recent 4.98% rise in council tax?

MAYOR

Thank you. Councillor Hebb.

COUNCILLOR HEBB

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you, Councillor Jones. Blunt answer is no, I don't. There is a legal requirement, that's why I don't believe in it. We have no choice, we have no choice. We have to set a balanced budget or all 49 of us, are legally accountable so no, whether it would be 2%, 1%, 5% it would have been balanced.

Now, just to get a few points of clarity, the 3% is an increase directly into our adult social care service. That was not part of any book balancing exercise, that's part of our invest to prevent plan which is being funded, not to mention by the extra £2.8million which the Council has been afforded by the national Government in the Spring Budget by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Moving onto the increase of the General Fund Budget of 1.98%, it was not needed to fund a gap. We inherited the same budget that was set this time last year, we brought it into balance and we don't need to raise taxes to do that; but what we did need to do is listen to what our residents were asking. Our residents were sick to the back teeth of a dirty, dirty Thurrock. That's why we've ploughed £1million directly into 'Clean it, Cut it, Fill it', price of a pint of milk, that is getting 'Clean it, Cut it, Fill it' 365 days a year. So, that is where we are, Councillor Jones, so no is the answer.

MAYOR

Councillor Jones, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

COUNCILLOR JONES

Yes thank you, Madam Mayor. We all want a clean borough, so I've got no problem about the £1million that you mentioned for the 'Clean it, Cut it'. It's just that the Leader stated in the local press that the increase in Council Tax will be for delivering improvements to Thurrock when clearly, we all know that because of this Conservative Government's continued cuts to Councils, the monies raised by the Council Tax rise is to help fund the basic services. All I'm asking for is that the residents know the truth; I mean, you mentioned the

extra monies obviously for the 'Clean it, Cut it', we know that was identified in the General Fund Budget, you mentioned the lorries that are going to be needed for the refuse collection, well that's in the Capital Programme, I just say just tell the truth. If you feel that your Government's cuts are right in what they're doing then tell the residents. Thank you.

MAYOR

Councillor Hebb.

COUNCILLOR HEBB

I shall tell the public the truth, this Administration will not preside over another 6 years of neglect of our borough. You will never see this Conservative Administration, and for all the rhetoric we hear tonight about Committee Systems and Lord knows what else, have it be known in public this Conservative Administration have, and will continue to, fund 'Clean it, Cut it, Fill it' through a modest price of a pint of milk a week. We believe that that's achievable, we believe that that's something people can afford and most importantly we believe it's what people want.

MAYOR

Councillor Jones, do you wish to ask a second supplementary question?

COUNCILLOR JONES

Yes I do, Madam Mayor. I don't think you understand what I'm trying to say. I've got nothing against the million pounds for the 'Cut it and Clean it' you keep on going on about the Cut it and Clean it, I agree, we do need to keep the borough clean. All I'm saying is where you're raising the funds in Council Tax to pay for this stuff, or is this supposed to be extra? Deputy Leader, would you agree that, because of the continued cuts to the Council from central Government, it will be expected that Thurrock residents will have to pick up the shortfall of monies via Council Tax rises and charges? Thank you.

COUNCILLOR HEBB

Councillor Jones, I think it's not me that doesn't understand. Pennies don't fall from Heaven, as one wonderful woman once said, they're made here on Earth. You may stand and laud and praise 'Clean it, Cut it, Fill it' but how are we going to pay for it? There are years of neglect of the public finances by a Labour Government of 13 years, we are having to deal with that to make sure my daughter's generation doesn't suffer any more. So going back to your point around supporting 'Clean it, Cut it, Fill it', that's great but no pun intended you need to put your money where your mouth is and support what we're doing.

MAYOR

Thank you.

2. FROM COUNCILLOR SPILLMAN TO COUNCILLOR HEBB

I am of the understanding that families with dependent children who Thurrock Council does not have a duty to house under homelessness legislation are referred to children's social services. Can the Deputy Leader explain what

action is then taken to house these families and prevent children being taken into care?

MAYOR

Councillor Hebb.

Councillor Hebb

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you, Councillor Spillman. I agree to respond to this question because of the nature of the question, something I think Councillor Gerrish probably understands.

First of all, your question isn't particularly specific, but that's rightly so. It wouldn't be appropriate to bring a case you might have at hand to this public forum. That's something Councillor Barbara Rice said earlier, we shouldn't be lauding things in public that don't have a place in public. The stance of this Council is very clear; as much as prudently possible we want to keep everyone who's local, local. There are sensitive cases where sometimes it is necessitated for people to move further away, domestic violence is one of those circumstances. I have no idea whether that's what you're talking about this evening, I don't really want to know what you're talking about this evening, but that's the general thrust of why we would possibly move someone outside of the borough, very, very rarely. It's a delicate balance to ensure that we do what's right. But, our policy is clear; when and wherever we can we will house local people local.

MAYOR

Thank you. Councillor Spillman, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

COUNCILLOR SPILLMAN

Yeah I do. Thank you very much for that, Shane. I have some reassuring news, actually this evening, I requested some stats and it said that there hadn't been over the last year anyone housed a significant distance, and this is for people that are intentionally homeless or there's no housing duty but there's no risk of harm so they have to be housed, these are people that *could* be housed in Thurrock but that hasn't happened, they've only been housed a short distance away. So, it would appear I've caught this right at the start and I saw a case where someone had been told that they needed to move to a privately-rented home in Durham, I think most Members would agree that that's not acceptable and I'd just like reassurances that this Administration will look at that as a matter of urgency and make sure that this was an Officer-led decision and not a policy of this Council.

COUNCILLOR HEBB

Thanks Councillor Spillman, and thanks for as much clarity as I think you're probably able to give in the circumstances. The policy is as I've already outlined. You know, the gentleman raises an excellent point. We will obviously look at said case and I think if we go back to some of the problems in the way they manifest the truth of the matter is we probably need more houses here in Thurrock to house vulnerable people and people that are

aspirational, want to move out of Mum and Dad's house, get their own place and all that good stuff, we've all been there. And that's part of the plan. We need to get a decent Local Plan in place, which is something that Councillor Coxshall alluded to earlier and make sure that people in Thurrock have a home in Thurrock should they decide to stay here. Hopefully that's of some reassurance to you.

MAYOR

Councillor Spillman, do you have a second supplementary question?

COUNCILLOR SPILLMAN

Yes, very briefly, in a very hypothetical situation, can we have assurances that this Administration condemns a practice where a resident in temporary housing is told that she is going to be evicted very shortly unless she takes a privately-rented property off of a list of about 9 or 10 homes in the North East of England?

COUNCILLOR HEBB

It really, honestly and you must empathise with this, it does depend on the circumstances. Well, I am not arrogant enough to make claim that I have any idea what that, the person that you refer to, what her circumstances are. I'm not arrogant enough to do that. But what I am dogmatic enough to do is make sure that perhaps you, I, my Leader, get together, look at this particular case and I can give you a very blunt answer, how's that?

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

1. FROM COUNCILLOR J KENT TO COUNCILLOR COXSHALL

Is the Portfolio Holder satisfied with the progress being made in delivering our plans for the regeneration of Purfleet?

MAYOR

Councillor Coxshall.

COUNCILLOR COXSHALL

Thank you, thank you. That's a very helpful question actually because I'm sorry to say that no, I'm not satisfied. We, I believe for all united across this chamber, the regeneration of Purfleet is a key priority and over the last 10 years we've been talking about the regeneration, and over the last 3 years since PCRL (Purfleet Centre Regeneration Ltd.) won the bid, since they won the bid. Into January 2016 my predecessor, Councillor Speight, said, and we can all agree with him the development is now signed off by all parties, over 2016 we will see planning applications coming through. Clearly, that hasn't happened. We all signed up to that and it is disappointing to see no planning application still today, let alone a planning approval.

When I became the Portfolio Holder I asked PCRL how they're progressing and whether they're on track considering the Conservative-led Government in

January 2015 gave £5million to speed this up. I am then surprised also by the lack of engagement of external stakeholders from the last few years considering how important the train station is, and the crossing. I'm advised that PCRL have only had cursory meetings with Network Rail until August last year. I understand they did not meet the Port of London until late last year and as for businesses in Purfleet they still have never met Esso, which are abutting them and Ensign bus company which are in Purfleet, their depot but they have, in fact, had numerous meetings with the Environment Agency but still haven't taken on their plans for what they wish to do in Purfleet in their considerations. Considering PCRL, an urban catalyst, have been development partners since February 2014 it's very disappointing.

In view of the slow rate of progress last year, Councillor Halden and myself pushed, and succeeded in getting a new Harris secondary school to be delivered outside and built outside their control, of PCRL I mean, and back into a private contraction between Thurrock Council and the department. We are now confident by the end of the year, by the end of 2019 that school will be built, and open for children, by the end of 2019. Clearly, the big part of this Purfleet Regeneration is the proposals for the film and TV studios, one of the reasons why I think they won the bid, but now looking at the Mayor of London, is supporting a new development of a film studio in the Dagenham site, in Dagenham. I've asked for a business plan to be produced as speedily as possible, which has now given a guarantee that it'll be here, from PCRL, by May 2017 so we can see if the studios are viable, on this viable Green Belt, Brown Field, site. I don't want to see the loss of green spaces, or Green Belt, across Thurrock developed before this Brown Field site is used, and it can't be left there for many years because Purfleet is a major Brown Field site and I want it started as soon as possible to deliver the 2,400 homes and I want to, let me understand you, I'm determined to do this, do whatever I can to make sure this happens.

MAYOR

Thank you. Councillor Kent, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

COUNCILLOR KENT

I'm grateful for that response; I was kind of hoping that the Portfolio Holder would be able to give me some kind of reassurance that all was really well but clearly not. So, I have to ask the question which is: what does he believe the core reason is for a lack of a planning application? He alluded to discussions with the Environment Agency, and I take it that he's referring there to Thames Estuary 2100 which are the plans for a new Thames barrier. My understanding is they're looking to locate the new Thames barrier at Purfleet and wish to take land out of the Purfleet Regeneration Plan. Is that right, and does the Portfolio Holder think that that is having a major bearing on the lack of a planning application?

COUNCILLOR COXSHALL

There is a bearing on that but sadly that's not the most important thing; it's the stakeholder engagement and how they're building the sites and it's delays before that happened and it was a surprise so I think they're working quite

well with that item it's just two or three times there's been suggestions. I think, I believe they suggested to, they had a conversation in August last year about the position of where the Thames Barrier is in 2070 and it just shows poor stakeholder engagement that we've got to that stage. I don't think that's the delay that we're seeing at the moment, I just think it's a long, laborious process of where we need to get urban catalysts here, and I do need all Members' support to make sure that there's engagement here and good questioning to make sure that development partner works with us to deliver that, because that's our only alternative.

MAYOR

Councillor Kent, do you wish to ask a second supplementary?

COUNCILLOR KENT

Yeah, again I'm grateful for that and I think this is one of those issues that we are absolutely united, all parties in the Chamber, I think that the Portfolio Holder said that this has been a desire in Purfleet for 10 years, I mean I go back further than that, I go back probably 20 years or more when we first did what was known in those days as 'Planning for real' down in Purfleet people there told us that this is the kind of thing they wanted to see so it's been a long time in the making. Given that we all want to see this happen, what can we usefully do, working together, to put some pressure on the prospective developers to get this across the line? Should we be asking in the new municipal year for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be calling Urban Catalyst to the Committee? What can we usefully do to make sure that this is delivered?

COUNCILLOR COXSHALL

I'm hoping to, obviously as I said the business plan for the film studios is really important in May this year, so hopefully we get to see that and make sure, and I really do want, when it comes...It was disappointing because we did go to Overview and Scrutiny before December last year and we saw it, and we saw some lines, drawings, but we've just got to get some better force to make sure that partner, delivery partner, gets that planning application in this year and gets building so that we don't, as I say, that we don't want any more developers across our wards using the excuse of not delivering Purfleet's 2,400 and that 70 acres of business land there and we end up losing more Green Belt across our areas because we can't get this through over the hurdles. So yes, if it does go to it, I'll be more than welcoming if it goes to Overview and Scrutiny and if the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny brings that back when it comes there. Hopefully there'll be a Cabinet paper for a planning application coming to us as soon as possible with a pre-application and I can see that and hopefully I can share that with everyone else. But I think everyone in this area wants to make it, get this over the road to make sure we get a good Local Plan and 2,400 homes built as quick as possible now, because the people of Purfleet want it and deserve it. I moved there in 20-- , 10 years ago or so, and it was the reason why we moved there, because it was such an exciting development and I think it's been too long in Purfleet for this development.

MAYOR

Thank you. Councillor Sammons, would you please read out your question as set out on the agenda, please?

2. FROM COUNCILLOR SAMMONS TO COUNCILLOR HALDEN

Could the Portfolio Holder clarify what are the proposals to replacing the Children's Services that have been withdrawn in East Tilbury, Linford and West Tilbury?

MAYOR

Councillor Halden, could you please respond.

COUNCILLOR HALDEN

Thank you, Madam Mayor. As I outlined when I was questioned comprehensively on the subject last year, services are not being withdrawn from East Tilbury, what you are losing in East Tilbury is the rent of a very expensive space in a private children's centre, which I believe is the one you'll see next to East Tilbury Primary School. That is what is being withdrawn. What is being put in its place, as opposed to the current 0-5 model for children is a 0-19 model, integrated with health services to ensure that there's a single point of access that serves not just the child but the wider elements around that child. So that is still in place for all of your constituents. What is going to happen is, for the existing, for the sites that we have preserved as Children's Centres themselves, outreach will be run from those sites. As I explained when we had this debate after I approved this through Cabinet last year, we cannot just keep serving the current 75% of children who interact with these services. We need to reach past the 75% and we need to get to the other children. If people aren't going to come to the centres then the services need to go to them, that is why we are moving to outreach it will be done from existing services, from existing centres and from other educational establishments but things have not been withdrawn in your ward. We are saving money on extremely expensive and rather small space in a private nursery.

MAYOR

Thank you. Councillor Sammons, do you wish to ask a supplementary?

COUNCILLOR SAMMONS

So you're suggesting that the services are going to their homes, now? If they want something for their children they can call somebody who will come out, because obviously the people in East Tilbury, Linford and West Tilbury they can't actually walk to Stanford, Chadwell, they are very much reliant on public transport which we have a bus service every 1hr30, and 3 hourly of a weekend.

MAYOR

Councillor Halden.

COUNCILLOR HALDEN

Thank you, Madam Mayor. Well, what I said to Councillor Sammons is it entirely depends on who the child is and what the service is that they require. If they require support with good educational early years development, well that would probably be done in a better setting like a school. If they require health visiting, for example, that may well be done in the home, so it's difficult to answer her question. What I will say is, if she has got a particular constituent that she's concerned about contact myself and my Director and we can get a comprehensive answer for that individual. What I would say is that these services do need to be run more from existing educational establishments, and as I announced at the last Full Council, this Administration is going to make at a minimum £1.4million available immediately for the expansion of East Tilbury Primary which will help increase the educational capacity in her ward, for her constituents.

MAYOR

Thank you. Councillor Sammons, do you wish to you ask a second supplementary? Okay, thank you.

3. FROM COUNCILLOR POTHECARY TO COUNCILLOR MACPHERSON

In recent months I have been contacted by a number of residents expressing their concerns about safety in Church Path, Grays. On behalf of my residents, I made a request for CCTV to be installed. This was turned down. Will the Portfolio Holder please explain the reasoning for her department's decision and whether there is any option to review the previous position?

MAYOR

Councillor MacPherson.

COUNCILLOR MACPHERSON

Thank you, Madam Mayor, and thank you for your question. No, actually I don't mean that, because when it comes to residents' safety I don't think a question should be brought to Full Council, I think I should be able to deal with it before then. My Officers, if they've made a decision with regards to not installing CCTV come to me before Full Council; I want our residents to be safe.

I am aware that this pathway did have trouble with CCTV, overhanging trees, but that's not an excuse. I will get my Officers to re-look at this and see how we can make your residents feel safe. Thank you.

MAYOR

Thank you. Councillor Pothecar, do you have a supplementary?

COUNCILLOR POTHECARY

Yes, I do. It's sort of changed a little now but yes. I'd like to thank the Portfolio Holder for engaging with me on this and I'd like to thank her for committing to review that decision. I am slightly disturbed by the idea that we're not allowed to ask questions anymore at Full Council, this is kind of what Full Council is for. So, just to note that I'm slightly disturbed on the kind

of clamping down on Democracy that seems to be going on, but you know, we'll leave that to one side. So, could I just get a sort of timeframe for when we can have a kind of answer for that, please?

COUNCILLOR MACPHERSON

Of course you can. Perhaps I ought to make myself a bit clearer, if it's something to do with residents' safety I would rather know about it quicker rather than it being left until Full Council, that's all I was saying. I was certainly not putting a quash on democracy or anything like that, I'd rather we had an open dialogue if you had blockages. I haven't got a timescale, but what I will do I will speak to my Officers tomorrow and I will email you to let you know what that timescale will be, but please let me give you my assurances it will be sooner rather than later.

MAYOR

Councillor, do you have a second supplementary?

COUNCILLOR POTHECARY

I'm okay, thanks.

MAYOR

Okay, thank you. Councillor Duffin, could you please read your question out?

4. FROM COUNCILLOR DUFFIN TO COUNCILLOR HEBB

So far how many people have responded to the £3,000 consultation on how often we hold local elections in Thurrock?

MAYOR

Councillor Hebb.

COUNCILLOR HEBB

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you, Councillor Duffin, for your question. The Conservative Administration proposed and have led a democratic exercise, putting the question of how 49 Councillors who represent the constituents of Thurrock are elected, by the constituents of Thurrock. This was to be achieved in a budget of £3000 or under and when I checked last week we had 357 responses. My team are on track to deliver the consultation exercise within the budget window and I look forward to having a level and comprehensive review when the consultation closes in 2 days' time.

MAYOR

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

COUNCILLOR DUFFIN

Thank you. When I checked today the recorded amount of responses on the Council website listed that 409 people had responded. This is less than a quarter of 1%. Considering Members in here no doubt filled it in multiple times it is likely a much smaller sample than that. I'm not mentioning any names! In terms of direct democracy the 5% threshold is widely regarded as the figure you should be aiming to reach. Does the Portfolio Holder agree

with me that anything below that figure is incredibly disappointing and unrepresentative of the Thurrock population, ruling this a completely flawed consultation?

COUNCILLOR HEBB

Councillor Duffin, you raise a very good point and I've got to be honest, the principle effect this exercise is all underpinned on democratic responses by our constituents. The mandate for change will be assessed but I am very hung up, and I think you'll agree – sympathise with what I'm about to say, I am exceptionally, personally hung up on making sure that there is enough of a proportionate response to warrant said change before proposing it. I think it's far too premature to say what the output of the consultation is, Madam Mayor, but I don't want him going away thinking you know that there's any appetite to disregard democracy. You know, this Council has held a consultation, it has listened; it will continue to listen 'til Friday. It will pause, it will consider, it will propose depending on what the public will is, but it will cost the project. Now, we've heard a number of things tonight across this Chamber, Madam Mayor, about other constitutional changes, now we only have to look East towards Basildon to know about the constitutional changes that have been brought forward there, uncosted, unbudgeted, unsupported, no democratic input from residents of the community. Madam Mayor, I can give a cast iron assurance that this Administration will never invoke a constitutional change on residents of Thurrock without the residents of Thurrock putting a very big rubber stamp on it first.

MAYOR

Thank you. Councillor Duffin do you have a second supplementary?

COUNCILLOR DUFFIN

Why has the Council pushed for a figure of £3,000? We keep hearing that you have lots of residents' email; a free email to all these residents should have easily reached the 5% threshold if residents actually wanted to change the voting system. This exercise has proved that consultation is a completely flawed way to gather data and no doubt the Thames Crossing one we saw will see residents ignored in favour of what the Government, or Leadership want. Does the Portfolio Holder agree with me that we should shelve all voluntary consultations and replace them with a postal ballot to all residents when a local issue achieves a 5% calling for a referendum? That way we stop needless consultations on things residents don't want and we actually get their true opinions, rather than 409 people?

COUNCILLOR HEBB

Thank you, Councillor Duffin. I do not believe that we should do democracy on the cheap and £3000 in the grand scheme of things equates to, my fag-packet maths, 0.0019% of the General Fund. If I whack on the HRA budget with that it goes down to 0.0008% of the Council's spending. Do I think £3000 is too high a figure? No, I don't think we should do democracy on the cheap. The question around referendums, very good question, referenda as someone keeps correcting me, it's a very good question; and it is one I deliberated on for a considerable amount of time. It would cost £200,000 to

facilitate a referendum on a local issue. You've got to do a referendum, you can't do a postal...you can't have this hybridized system, you either do a referendum or a consultation, it's very binary, very binary, the legal advice is very clear. I do not believe in doing democracy on the cheap and while I have ideologically, and personally, believed in a change of the electoral system here in Thurrock I would not spend £200,000, a fifth of our "Clean it, Cut it, Fill it" budget, on driving an ideological agenda. I simply will not, and will not ever, do it. I think that's all, Madam Mayor.

MAYOR

Thank you.

5. FROM COUNCILLOR SPILLMAN TO COUNCILLOR HEBB

Over the last few weeks your administration has brought forward and supported a budget that has increased council tax, changed tax support schemes and could potentially increase other housing service charges. Would you agree that your administration is now the party of high taxation in Thurrock?

MAYOR

Councillor Hebb.

COUNCILLOR HEBB

Councillor Spillman, I actually pride myself on being part of a party which is so low tax. I believe in a party which believes in people climbing the ladder, keeping more of what they earn in their own pocket rather than giving it to Government to forcibly and socially distribute it in a way the Government sees fit. The tax threshold under the Conservative Government has gone up from circa £6,000 to £11,500. Now, I'm not going to comment on anyone's background but I can say from personal experience what a difference that would have made to life's circumstances for me many years ago, when I was in that situation. The other thing is it's a damn site more helpful than a 10p tax rate which was levied against low-income earners many years ago; one of the very reasons I will never vote Labour to this day. So no, I do take issue with being called a high-tax party.

Locally Thurrock Borough Council is a low-tax Council, the lowest in Essex, and it continues to be thanks to two gentlemen called David Cameron and Eric Pickles who froze rates for the hardest years that our generation have known and experienced; something that was embraced by the then-Labour Administration. I am personally governed, if you can pay for it yourself then you should pay for it yourself; other people shouldn't be doing it on your behalf. I don't believe in dependency on benefits, I believe that as the economy improves we should be in a position where we look at if who can pay can pay and we'll do the various consultations from there. So no, I utterly, utterly disagree with the statement that the Conservatives are a high-tax party in Thurrock.

MAYOR

Councillor Spillman, do you wish to ask a supplementary?

COUNCILLOR SPILLMAN

Yeah, I always imagined you to be a bit of a Boy George fan boy, to be honest. You know I always thought that George Osborne, Gideon Osborne was your spiritual hero, so it does surprise me when I see all these tax rises. You seem to have metamorphosized into some sort of tax and spend kazam. Is this a genuine epiphany or is it... 'cause last year you didn't want to raise taxes on those benches, I remember you abstaining, or even voting against certain raises in Council Tax. I just wanted to know is it an epiphany and if not what's changed over the last year?

COUNCILLOR HEBB

What's changed? A 5% Council Tax increase means 3%, another £1.2-million whatever it is-going straight into adult social care. That's what's changed. You can call it a tax, you can call it a levy, you call it what you like. We're calling it raising money, putting it into adult social services. So no, I utterly disagree. I'm not an overly Gideon fan, if you want to call it that. I do respect everything he achieved. That man and many others managed to navigate the economy from a very dire place, we're in a much better place for it now and as we head into Brexit I believe we'll be even better.

MAYOR

Thank you. Councillor Spillman, do you wish to ask a second supplementary?

COUNCILLOR SPILLMAN

You obviously appreciate what he achieved a bit more than the new Prime Minister. What I will say is that, do you foresee, I mean you're going to be setting a budget again next year, do you foresee another 5% Council Tax increase or are we going to get more than that?

COUNCILLOR HEBB

Joking aside, that's a very good question. So when I took the finance brief, as you'll know, one of the first things I did is I wanted to make sure that our rainy day fund was maintained at a correct level; that activity was done. We then needed to set the budget, that activity is done. This year, sorry, from May onwards, we will be instigating Service Reviews over 3 years. The reason why is because we need to understand that if what we're spending on services now is what is necessary to deliver what is statutorily required of us, and what we would believe as a Council, going back to our three party narrative from earlier, is required. Only when we know and have determined the base in spending against each service that we have to, and want to spend, only then will we know whether a Council Tax increase is possible. That piece of work starts from next year as part of the Council Spending Review; so hopefully that clarifies any uncertainty. I think this fencing duel will go on for some time, don't you?

MAYOR

Thank you. Right Councillors, we've run out of time. I'm going to ask the Councillors whose questions we haven't reached if they would like to resubmit

them or accept a written answer, but if you resubmit it won't be until the June 2017 Council Meeting.