

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 30 November 2022

Item 6 – Questions from Public

The Mayor informed one question had been received from members of the public.

1. Due to Mr Perrin being unwell a written response will be provided.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

1. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor M Coxshall

Thurrock Council has now agreed to abide by the ruling of the Information Tribunal and answer the Freedom of Information requests it has been fighting to keep secret. How much Council Taxpayer money has been spent fighting legal action to try and keep this information secret?

Mayor

Leader of the council, please respond to the question.

Councillor M Coxshall

Thurrock Council instructed Anthony Collins to act on their behalf and the total costs of works is around £70,000.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Does the leader of the council believe that was £70,000 well spent?

Mayor

Leader of the council.

Councillor M Coxshall

No.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor I welcome that response, that the leader of the council has sat in the conservative cabinet for the last six years these FOIs were submitted three years ago in 2019. Since then, he has been complicit in trying to keep this information secret and in fighting legal action to prevent the publication. What's changed his mind Mister Mayor.

Mayor

Leader of the council.

Councillor M Coxshall

I don't think I have ever changed my mind but I'm sorry.

2. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor M Coxshall

The scale of the financial catastrophe facing Thurrock Council is now becoming clear. What are the next steps the Leader will take in trying to save the Council?

Mayor

Leader of the council, please respond to the question.

Councillor M Coxshall

As we continue to work closely with Commissioners. The initial phase of work as you know is to fully understand the financial consequences arising from the issues identified in the investment strategy that was published yesterday. With Cabinet on the 7 December 2022 and I have now asked for cabinet to be moved and no decision on the 7th to the 14th to give time for corporate overview and scrutiny to give views to cabinet. So, cabinet on the 14th will trigger a request for exceptional financial support to central government for 2022/23 and 2023/24. The next phase of the work for a longer-term financial view which enables consideration of the financial sustainability of this Council and its future. Further discussions with government to consider the ability to pay back the financial support granted and to develop a sustainable council and will continue this chamber on progress and updates.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor what we learnt yesterday was truly shocking that the in-year losses for the council £470 million, I believe the largest ever posted by a council in this country. Reserves down from £66 million to £12 million, a funding gap next year of £184 million, having to go cap in hand to the government for a bailout. Mister Mayor the leader of the council has sat in

cabinet for the last six years for every day of the last six years what does he believe he could or should have done differently to prevent us reaching this past.

Mayor

Leader of the council.

Councillor Coxshall

That's an interest question, I think about that daily what I could or what I should have done in hindsight and once I come to a settled position I think I should be doing that and I'm hoping the BVI would help that settled position and yes I think every day what I should have done.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor, I think it is disappointing that the leader of the council needs to wait for the outcome of the best value inspection to make up his mind as to what it is that he could or should have done differently. Mister Mayor we heard the leader speak earlier about doing the right thing, taking tough decisions, taking really tough decisions. Can you give us an example of what those tough decisions are, what does that actually mean taking tough decisions?

Mayor

Leader of the council.

Councillor M Coxshall

As we go through the next stage, we have to look at levers to pay this back, there's no free money and the levers are the tough decisions, and the levers are multiple levers which we will go through and bring forward here. We all know there are assets, council tax, loans, extended loans, agreements but we could there is loads of different levers and as soon as we have got all the levers and what the options are the tough decisions be made with consultation with everyone here. Then we go back to the first question about secrecy, that won't happen with me and as soon as those tough decisions are made in consultation with everyone and I won't move forward without having conversations and, but my decisions would be made as leader, just like if you were sitting here Councillor Kent, in the end the decision falls heavy on me.

3. From Councillor Worrall to Councillor M Coxshall

At the July Cabinet meeting it was agreed to release a significant number of council owned assets for sale. Can the Leader give an update on the sale of these assets and how much has been raised since July?

Mayor

Leader of the council, please respond to the question.

Councillor M Coxshall

Since July there has been eight properties that have been sold so far, totalling £2.6 million. A further 43 properties have been approved for disposal and 10 of these are currently in negotiations or undergoing marketing. The remainder would be sold and brought to the market in phases going forward.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Worrall

Yes, thank you Mister Mayor, in the financial briefing report that goes to cabinet next week, the commissioner's reports state an exercise has commenced to identify opportunities for further capital receipts to be generated through the disposal of assets. Can you assure councillors that in the spirit of your very public commitment to be open and transparency, councillors will have an input into the assets that are considered to be at risk or will we simply find out what assets will be sold in the next financial year briefing.

Mayor

Leader of the council.

Councillor Coxshall

No, I actually hope to bring that to more members, to the relevant overview and scrutiny committees. The decisions at this time, I say at this time depends on what the BVI reports comes back with, and the government decides to change the commissioner's position. At the moment those decisions lay locally, and I cannot see how one cabinet of ten, how ten people should be making those decisions, we all should, having views that's why cabinet was delayed so overview and scrutiny could be listened to and to take their views on board of that. I urge the cabinet members and overview and scrutiny members of your party and everyone else to make that in their overview and scrutiny recommendations to cabinet on the 14th and I'm certainly put that in words and change that and make sure that does come to us as wide as

possible and that list shouldn't just be kept to me or the cabinet or my group it should be everyone able to see that and comment on because no one's got the locus on what's good or bad to go.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Worrall

I do, thank you Mister Mayor and thank you for that because up until now you've just mentioned a whole load of assets that are being sold. I haven't got a clue what they are, I don't know if they are on my ward, I don't know whether they are where I live, I don't know if there are services that I use or a building that I use, I haven't got a clue what your selling, so the sooner we all get to see that the better. But Thurrock residents obviously during covid you know the reverend said tonight that we used all of our spaces you know as social interaction you know and we've got a whole host of open spaces in Thurrock and many residents are involved with using those open spaces for the housing development we've fought to keep our open spaces and for the mental wellbeing of our residents many got involved in allotments and you know to get over what was going on, so can you assure us that were not going lose parks, were not going to lose our green spaces and our allotments, please they can't be at risk.

Mayor

Leader of the Council

Councillor M Coxshall

My moto is work, live and play in the planning and I've been here six years getting excited about delivering our local plan and that means you've got to work for a good person, so a good employer here and earn a good wage for whatever job you do and then you got to live somewhere in a nice home and then got to play and play is part of them open spaces and enjoyment if you remove all places of enjoyment plots and anything else you end up with a pressure that comes back to this council and if you can't have that, so I completely understand that is going to be what our open spaces are what good quality open spaces look like and that's part of the local plan but then there may be some surplus spaces but we've got to make sure that what is available is good quality and making sure it is available for the communities and for people to take their kids to, when George was younger used to take him to parks. I've realised that and I think the officers here and the commissioners also realised that their first comment was we don't, were not here to remove things arbitrary were still local government officers and were still local government councillors who have got to deliver what comes out of this has got to be a council sustainable that includes good spaces, good venues, making sure we deliver for the community who elect us here, that live

here, we have to live in a ward I don't want to destroy that, where I live, why should I and I'll be stopping it just as much as you know are fighting it.

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

In the absence of Councillor Byrne, written responses to questions 1 and 2 will be provided to Councillor Byrne.

3. From Councillor Muldowney to Councillor M Coxshall

Further to my questions at the 13 October 2022 Council meeting about the money owing to the Elsie Florence Grover/Flat Irons Field Trust, please can the Portfolio Holder confirm that this money will be hypothecated for use in Chadwell for the benefit of Chadwell's children?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

I am so glad to answer this question now, any monies derived from the letting of this land will be used for the benefit of the young people in line with the original wishes of Elsie Florence Grover and as set out in the Charitable Objects of that Playing Field Trust.

Mayor

Councillor Muldowney do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Muldowney

Thank you, Mister Mayor and thank you I welcome that response and we have a lot of need for it in Chadwell, so I am really happy about that. Just as I was looking, obviously the last meeting I asked when the money that was supposed to be paid in was going to be paid in, actually this was the September meeting that was rearranged for the 13 October, and you did kindly say you would expedite that, but I did notice tonight that there is still no further money has been paid into the account. So, by my calculations were still missing £3,880 for the last four years, where there had been small amounts have been paid in and then there are thousands missing from quite a few years before that so can I ask personally to expedite that please.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

Sorry Mister Mayor. I certainly will because there is a legal obligation to the charities commission that we must be doing that and I take that up tomorrow to make sure that money is there and we are abiding by the charity commission rules.

Mayor

Councillor Muldowney do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Muldowney

No thank you.

4. From Councillor Worrall to Councillor Spillman

The council housing waiting list continues to increase and now sits at about 8000 applicants. What direct action are you taking to provide more homes for those on the housing waiting list?

Mayor

Councillor Spillman

Councillor Spillman

Thank you for that Councillor Worrall. I have reliably informed that it is 6669 on the waiting list of that there is 5121 applicants and then there 1548 applicants who are on the transfer list who are already tenants of Thurrock Council, or other social provider, who are looking to move to another property of the same size. So, a lot of them are transfers. Within in that 5121, there is also a lot that are inactive as well. Now that's just to clarify I am not going to say that for me 3000 4000 2000 8000 is all thousands too many. So, you know I accept that I am not trying to downplay the level of demand. In terms of what we've been doing we've got about 800 units that are in progression and there's also a section that have gone through the scheme that we worked on together that are in consultation with members but aren't actually publicly publicised at the moment, so that's where we are at the moment.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Worrall

Yes, certainly Mister Mayor. When you took over the housing portfolio in your first report to this chamber you clearly stated that you had an ambitious plan to build new homes for Thurrock families. I absolutely welcomed this and believed that you would get to work to deliver on your promises to build hundreds of new homes. Just last year you came to scrutiny and announced

that CO1 was coming down and new flats would be built and then nothing, you know of all the announcements of the hundreds of homes what's gone wrong and where are all the new homes that promised?

Mayor

Councillor Spillman

Councillor Spillman

I think it would be a struggle for anyone to start in May last year and have hundreds of homes built by this council. It's a long process, goes through planning and all sorts of bits and pieces but can actually give you an update on where we are on each individual scheme so Aveley Library Hall that 16 units is preparing for planning submission, Broxbourne Drive 33 units is being prepared for planning submission, Civic Offices CO1 77 units is at technical design, Culver Centre 173 units is at planning approval stage, Darnley/Crown Road Car Park is preparing for planning submission that's another 53 units, Loewen Road that's four units on site, Lyndhurst Road is eight units at technical design stage, Teviot Avenue is 59 units at technical design, Vigerons Way is planning submitted 8 units, Blackshots is at feasibility 240 units and there are various other schemes that are in feasibility at 49 units as well as a group of properties that are not in the public domain as well so I hope you can tell from that list I have not just been sitting on my backside.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Worrall

Of course, Mister Mayor. So, I'm not surprised you have got the list because we have also seen the list, security have been sites and they are all on the housing development list. We had big announcements to build big numbers of new homes, we've had consultations, but they don't go anywhere. Sites that were identified for council homes are either standing vacant, they've got overgrown patches, hoarding around them or they are now up to sale to private developers, we've not had a spade in the ground for any significant development. What is your message to those families that are waiting to be housed, stuck in high rise flats, week after week there is nothing for them to be bidding on. Luke you should, you know, on top of this, you come here and said I'm going to build build build just like you've won the pools and you know you've not. We have got one big announcement after another, and nothing comes forward and people deserve to have good homes to be living in and its all come to a big standstill.

Mayor

Councillor Spillman

Councillor Spillman

I'm not sure what the question was there but it sounds like a sort of answer you had written before I had actually read out the second answer because I've just announced what we are doing with 800 units so perhaps you should not pre-judge your answers before you get the information. [Councillor Worrall – I asked what you would say to those families suck in those flats, that was my question]. So, what I wouldn't do is have a scheme already in place for the high risers in Grays, like the Labour administration did, and then bottle it because they think they were going to lose an election to UKIP. That's what I wouldn't do and that's on the record and a lot of you voted against it on that basis, didn't you, you thought you would lose a seat, so you pulled a scheme. So that is the sort of thing that I will not be doing. But in terms of the build if we can get back to sensible talk, there are challenges, our schemes built in inflation, but they did not build into their programmes the risk of a global energy war and that is a big challenge, interest rates are our big challenge and these are set to go higher, these are international interest rates. Every time the federal reserve raises interest rates in America, we have to follow that as well and that is a massive extra expense that we have to negotiate so a lot of these schemes will need to be looked at again, but I can assure you that these schemes will go with full consultation of opposition members. Thank you.

5. From Councillor Watson to Councillor Maney

Can the Portfolio Holder for Enforcement please tell me what support the Council is providing to the police in the continuing battle against car cruisers around Lakeside in West Thurrock?

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you, Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor Watson for your question. Indeed, sadly Mister Mayor it is the case that car cruising is an on-going problem at Lakeside. It has been for very many years now. The council is offering a range of support and advise to the police but before coming to that I do think I need to stress that this is essentially a law enforcement issue rather than a highways matter and is obviously only so much we can do in that regard [disturbance from the public gallery]. So, as I was saying it was essentially a law enforcement issue but there are things the council can do indeed the gentlemen's unhelpful contribution there, just highlighted the fact that the council was able to secure public spaces protection order not only if we managed to secure it our enforcement officers have actually been out on the ground with the police helping to enforce that two nights last month our enforcement officers were out there offering, boots on the ground and that resulted in 11 fixed penalty notices issues for contraventions to the PSPO, six section 59 warnings were issued by Essex police as a result of our

enforcement officers supporting them in that endeavour and we will continue. We will continue those enforcement operations, but I have to stress again it is a law enforcement issue, we are not the police. Our transport services team offers practical advice and support to the police and will continue to do that you know that there's an upcoming meeting with Essex police where we will, we will attend, I will attend, our highways officers will attend, and we will listen to the police and offer them any technical advice that we can. There's not much more I can really say on that I think we also have to bear in mind as well that when physical highways measures have been implemented in other parts of Lakeside it simply shifted the problem elsewhere. Previously the cruising took place near what was known as a dumbbell roundabout, the Highways Agency as it was then reconfigured the road and within no time at all it simply moved to another part of the network so we have to bear that in mind if the council was to fund highways measures it would of course be at the expense of the schemes and we've deemed as priorities. It is likely that the problem would just still shift somewhere else and its not really feasible or reasonable to expect the council to chase the problem as it progresses around the network and put in highway schemes when it is, it's the law that is essentially being broken. Thank you, Mister Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor Watson do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Watson

Yes please, Thank you, Councillor Maney, I think we need to have a little bit of a think about what's happening tight now down there in West Thurrock. I don't know what you have been told but I will tell you this much although we welcome the 73 police officers that we've been bragging about, which is a great thing they are not response police officers at all. West Thurrock is lawless. Night come the drones come down, they come out the road racers come out. They are actually so organised that they are on Instagram, they are bragging about it before they've even got into West Thurrock. They go from Maidstone, Dartford, Beckton into West Thurrock, Basildon, Pitsea, Southend – that is how they are playing with. About six weeks ago 150 cars showed up at West Thurrock for car racing they go and sit in TGI Friday's car park where they then take turns to race. We know last week there was a serious accident between a racer and an everyday normal person going about their business, they got hit at 100 miles an hour. We also know, I know my residents are scared to go out after nine o'clock at night and they are scared to even like come home after that, they are constantly checking Instagram because their mental health wellbeing is just not great. Actually, if they go out after that time they are raced against. The police turn up, one car, there is only about three cars that cover Harlow, Thurrock, Southend and Basildon and they chase them down and the police now have lasers in their eyes, they're being thrown things at, and it is absolutely law-less in West Thurrock nobody goes there after 9 o'clock at night, these races are not just weekends now, these races start from Wednesday to Sunday. Also, these people, those car cruisers then decide they want to go to the toilet, and they use the residents houses and

gardens just to do that in. So, we are at the point where it's gone past anything we can ever have imagined happening so something now needs to happen so I am asking you there must be a way the council can help and support the police, I know you've got a meeting on the 19 December because that is how bad it has got. It has had to take a question to come to council, my question, that we now have a meeting with the police on the 19 December, forget the fact that I've been having meetings with the police before you even knew about all of this so what can you do right now Councillor Maney to try and influence and stop some of this before the 19 December when were supposed to be coming up with solutions, because my residents mental health and wellbeing is seriously a great concern right now and that estate is being bigger, not smaller. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you, Mister Mayor. There is a lot of respond to, so I'll try. In terms of what I can do right now, probably not a lot, because I'm here but there is not a great deal I can do personally anyway of my own accord. If I could it would involve an anti-air-craft gun but I'm afraid, you know as I said, there are constraints on what we can do. I know you have been very much involved in this, but I do have to challenge the idea that it's only receiving attention because you brought this question, this is a constant issue at the safer Thurrock community partnership and as I said we've been working with the police for some time, and this is not the first time this has been brought to the chambers. Its one of those perennial issues I'm afraid which successive members have brought to the chamber. I've had much dialogue with Councillor Abbas on it who's vociferous in his assertion that we need to do something. All of what you have said is true, but it doesn't make it the council's responsibility. I know those things are happening, they have been happening for a long time. Now there's been a lot of residential development in West Thurrock or that part of Lakeside, it puts a new dimension on it because if not an activity that has just taken place in the retail hub it's taking place in a residential area and I agree with everything you said but I noticed what you didn't do is suggest what you think the council can do and I think therein lies the issue. It's easy to when you get no relief from the police or another authority to just blame the council now, they are easy ones but every one of those things that you mention is a criminal offense it's not the highways issue there somebody's urinating in somebody's else's garden it isn't a highways issue that people are shining lasers in police officers eyes it is a criminal offense and we are not law enforcers. I've listed some of the action that we've taken we stand ready to work alongside the police but realistically what is it you're asking us to do? Dig up the road, what? I don't know. If you are asking for highway schemes to be put in place then it is going to be at the expense of all those other schemes that we've spent the year identifying as priority, many of them have been raised by members who what their roads resurfacing, who wants crossings outside schools they will fall by the wayside

if we expect it to then use what little revenue by the ITB to fund a scheme in the part of the borough where really there just needs to be law enforcements. I am happy to attend the meeting and listen to what they have to say but we all need to recognise there are limitations in what the council can do. If you have a suggestion, let's hear them. Thank you, Mister Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor Watson do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Watson

Thank you. I have got suggestions actually and I have been suggesting them for so long that I've given up suggesting. So first of all I think its down to the residents if they want like calming measures along West Thurrock Road because they've been told over and over again by the council they can't, because of the disyllables of a lorry going over is just too much for them but I think you give them that option when they doing night after night of racing from 9 o'clock to 3 o'clock in the morning that's one. Secondly, I can suggest that we have a conversation with TGI Friday to shut their car park, every single night to put a gate across in order to stop them parking in there because that's not happening. We do have an enforcement team that supports and helps the police and why can't we pay the extra overtime regardless of what our financial situation is right now to then could help and right with the police and doing all of that and the fourth thing is Councillor Abbas has done nothing on all of this, its down to us. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you, Mister Mayor. There's almost a whiff of local elections in the air isn't there. Well, the idea that Councillor Abbas hasn't done anything about this I'm afraid is untrue. What he hasn't done, is grandstand, he has had a lot of conversations with me, he's fed back lots of information, he's not using it for political gain, he's working to get results and that is what we were focused on. I mean we should be talking to some of the retailers and asking them to close their car park, you're a ward councillor, why can't you do it. Why does it need to come from the council? You say our enforcement officers should be out with the police, I have told you they are but again it's at the expense of other operations isn't it. We have councillors complaining about HGV parking in their wards, that's directly affecting residents. Are you suggesting that we just pull them out from every other ward and focus on the car cruising in West Thurrock and abandon our other obligations in other wards? The fact we cannot channel every available resource into West Thurrock for an issue, doesn't matter how much noise we hear from the public gallery, it's not going to change the fact we have fine line resources we have councillors and members of the public complaining about other anti-social activities in other

parts of the borough we can't neglect to that and pour all our resources into West Thurrock. I can only repeat this is something that is discussed regularly at the community safety partnership. It will be aware and that is the right channel to look at these kind of things and you know where there are practical solutions we will implement them but it is a bit fanciful to think that we can just bung in a highway scheme and that's job done as I said to you this was a problem in another stretch of the road network around Lakeside, a highway scheme was put in and its simply shifted and is something we have to bear in mind if we were to put traffic calming scheme in we have to assess the implications for traffic movement and traffic flow and that kind of thing the idea that they would all pack up and go away is a bit fanciful. They will simply move to another part of the network and will be asked to do this all over again, so we have to make sure when we were allocated money that is value for money but as I say I look forward to the meeting we look forward to what the police have to say and will continue to work with them as best we can. Thank you, Mister Mayor.

6. From Councillor Pearce to Councillor Maney

What measures does the Council employ to ensure that traders in Thurrock who sell age restricted items or services comply with the law?

Mayor

Councillor Maney please respond to the question.

Councillor Maney

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you Councillor Pearce for your question. Mister Mayor, Trading Standards are responsible for the enforcement of age restricted items and services on behalf of the local authority. The teams work with colleagues across the wider Council such as Public Health, the Community Safety Partnership and Licensing team as well as with other partners such as the police to ensure compliance with the law. The most common age restricted products include alcohol, tobacco, vapes and knives but the council also looks at the sale of fireworks, aerosols and other items on an intelligence led basis. The council uses various tools in their approach to tackling retailers selling age restricted goods, and that can include general advice for retailers including the provision of responsible retailer packs, challenge 25 checks and underage sales test purchases which should tell the use of underage volunteers who then attempt to buy age restricted goods. Mister Mayor, when contraventions are found be under no doubt the council will always take appropriate action, this could be anything from the issuing of a warning to prosecution or a licence review in the case of alcohol something which our licensing committee can be called upon to undertake. Conditions can also be attached to licensee in order to ensure safeguards against the sale of underage items. The activity taken by the council in respect of enforcing age restricted sales is naturally underpinned by the law and that this can be complex and means that we have basically, we need intelligence before we can carry out some of our operations, but I hope what I've said

gives Councillor Pearce a brief overview of some of the things we do. If you've got specific concerns, I'm happy to discuss them with you in more detail. That is only a few of the things that we can do to enforce the law but as I say I'm happy to discuss any particular concerns that you may have.

Mayor

Councillor Pearce do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Pearce

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you Councillor Maney for that answer. As parents and corporate parents, I am sure we were pleased to hear that the council takes enforcement of age restricted sales very seriously. Sadly, there is obviously those that break the law in making those underage sales and I understand that test purchase operations undertaken by the council reduced during covid 19 for obvious reasons. So can Councillor Maney give assurances that these are now recommenced and remain ongoing.

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you Councillor Pearce for your supplementary question. Yes, for obvious reasons during the pandemic test purchase operations did have to be scaled back or stopped altogether, they haven't stopped completely they have resumed with some success, and I have discussed with officers the need to escalate the use of test purchasing as somebody who is a long standing member of the licensing committee I've sat on many licensing reviews which have been triggered purely as a result of this council undertaking test purchase operations and I know what this is one of the most effective ways to ensure compliance with the law. As I said I've discussed with officers the need to step up test purchasing operations, they are of a same mind and providing we can get the volunteers we will very much be continuing with test purchase operations, thank you Mister Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor Pearce do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Pearce

Yes, please Mister Mayor. I have a particular interest in the underage sales of alcohol, given the direct health risks that this causes with anti-social behaviour etc. Whilst most traders in my ward are responsible how can my residents in Aveley report any concerns about local underage sales to the council, thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you, Mister Mayor. As I said in my answer the council relies heavily on intelligence so the reports that we get from ward members or members of the public is actually vital. We use covert cameras when we carry out these operations and in order to get the permissions to do that there has to be a level of intelligence, so it is a pertinent question. In terms of how they can bring it to the council's attention, I know the most effective ways to do that is to do that through your ward councillor. Councillor Redsell and I have over the years have several residents come to use as they don't often what to make that approach and have asked us to pass on their concerns to the council, which we've done. In addition to that they can actually report underage sales online and I'm happy to provide you with the link after the meeting if that helps, in fact to all members if that is something they would like to have. They can anonymously report their concerns to the council, we always respond, we always respond to those concerns and if the evidence or the basic evidence is there to warrant further operations that will follow. Thank you, Mister Mayor.

7. From Councillor Fish to Councillor D Arnold

The first IMWC has now opened in Corringham, an area of the borough with the lowest health inequality. Can the Portfolio Holder tell me when the other IMWCs in areas such as Tilbury will be opening?

Mayor

Councillor Arnold would you like to respond.

Councillor Arnold

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you councillor for your question, what the short answer is and what you already know Councillor Fish is I can't actually tell you when the other IMCs will be opening but you do already know that. I was listening to live to the HOSC meeting you attended when Tiffany Hemmings from the NHS gave her update and I to completely share your frustrations, which is why the completion of the IMCs has always been and will continue to be a high priority. This administration had supported officers and NHS in this endeavour and will continue to make representation to the NHS and the secretary of state on behalf of Thurrock residents as members of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Fish, I would very much appreciate and welcome your continued help and challenge of health partners such as the NHS but let's be very honest here it means that you know like I know it's not in my gift, it's not in this administration's gift and nor is it in the councils gift to determine when and how the NHS and NHS England choose to focus and spend their budget, the gift of supplying you an opening date lies solely with the NHS.

Mayor

Councillor Fish do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Fish

Thank you, Mister Mayor. So, we've both accept that the IMWCs are under some threat at the moment, what alternative plans do you have to make sure the people of Thurrock receive the best possible healthcare.

Mayor

Councillor Arnold

Councillor Arnold

Thank you, Mister Mayor. I did not hear her say or councillor say they were under threat, what I heard her saying was that they were going to maintain focus on making sure services from Orsett hospital be maintained and are kept in Thurrock, but she wasn't able to determine when the buildings or where those buildings would be. Now I know the chair of HOSC shares your frustrations, and I think if I am right, she's coming back to do another presentation in January. I've asked for a meeting; I've written NHS leads. The acting Chief Executive has written to NHS leads, the MP has spoken to NHS leads and to the secretary of state and ministers. We are all focused on trying to get a meeting together now, to have everybody in that room and actually sort out and help each other with what issues is we both have to get Tilbury IMC moving.

Mayor

Councillor Fish do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Fish

So, thank you Mister Mayor. So, from your answer it seems that your just focusing on the IMWCs when we know there is a significant funding shortage in those which may not be able to made up. So, are you at the same time working on alternative plans to make sure that if those IMWCs do not happen there will be other provisions?

Mayor

Councillor Arnold

Councillor Arnold

Thank you, Mister Mayor. Yes, absolutely, and that is what Tiffany emanated as well. So the NHS are looking at this as well it's their funding issues, their funding gaps, but until they get those, the outline business cases, so until they

get that back from NHS England on whether they can or can't have funding or how that funding is going to be we don't know how we can help them but what she did say and what we are all focused on is making sure that those healthcare services stay in Thurrock they might not be in those buildings immediately but they will be somewhere in order to improve health inequalities across the borough.

8. From Councillor Shinnick to Councillor Abbas

This year Orchard Community forum paid for the road closure in Grays to facilitate the Remembrance Service can the Portfolio Holder for Communities consider that council fund this next year?

Mayor

Councillor Abbas please respond to the question.

Councillor Abbas

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you councillor for your question.

Orchard Community Forum are working in partnership with Grays Royal British Legion to plan and organise the Grays Remembrance Service. This year the forum applied and received a grant through the Community Fund to meet these costs. Remembrance Services are not organised by the Council, and those planning events are encouraged to give early consideration to the costs involved so that appropriate funds can be raised in advance.

Mayor

Councillor Shinnick do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Shinnick

I couldn't really understand a word that you were saying but I will go on. Remembrance day is all about standing side by side and remembering all those lost in battle in a war. I was concerned to see that a photograph taken by Thurrock Council, you tweeted and had my face erased and members of my party. This day is not a political day it is to remember the fallen who sacrificed their lives for us. Can the portfolio holder of communities please tell us why you felt the need to do this?

Mayor

Councillor Abbas

Councillor Abbas

I have official council account and I have not published that picture which the councillor is mentioning, and I will only answer questions which are related to the original question, thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Shinnick do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Shinnick

I would just like to say that in future you need to think before you do these things. I was so upset about this it was so untrue what he done. When my father fought in the war and fellow members of my families died, he does stuff like that.

Mayor

I fully appreciate the motion councillor, but it does need to relate to the actual question tabled.

9. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Snell

What level of Council Tax increase does the portfolio holder anticipate recommending for next year?

Mayor

Councillor Snell please respond to the question.

Councillor Snell

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. As you know the government have given us the flexibility to raise council tax up to 5% which is the 3% plus the 2% ASC precept without the need for a local referendum. We will be considering rises within that envelope when we have our budget setting conversations, we haven't had those conversations but that will be the envelope that we will be discussing it. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor, earlier this evening the leader of the council was talking of negotiations with the government and looking what the ask of government what would be in relation to the extraordinary financial support that this council needs. Does the portfolio holder intend that part of that negotiation will be asking for permission to raise council tax by more than 5% without the need for a referendum?

Mayor

Councillor Snell

Councillor Snell

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you John. Yup there is that possibility but there have been no decisions on that yet but should there be that decision will come to this chamber for us all to make that decision. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

So, for clarity Mister Mayor the portfolio holder for finance is saying that there is every chance that the council will be asking government for permission to raise council tax by more than 5% without going to referendum first. Can I ask the portfolio holder to rule out any increase in council tax of more than 5% without referendum?

Mayor

Councillor Snell

Councillor Snell

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you for your question, Councillor Kent. Unfortunately, I can't rule that out, no. That decision won't be ours; the commissioners will make that decision whether that will be raised or otherwise or whether the least the option to raise it will come to this chamber and if that decision is made, bearing in mind no decision has been made yet, we will discuss that here, but I have to stress there has been no decision on that yet at this stage. Thank you.

10. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Abbas

Does the Portfolio Holder support the continuation of the theatre, library, museum, and other cultural and heritage services from the Thameside Complex?

Mayor

Councillor Abbas please respond to the question.

Councillor Abbas

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you councillor for your question. I support the continuation of Thurrock libraries, museum and other cultural and heritage services in our borough, our libraries, museum and theatres are open, and residents are welcomed to visit these facilities.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

I take that answer as a no then Mister Mayor. I was very specific does the portfolio holder support the continuation of theatre library museum and other cultural heritage services from the Thameside Complex. The portfolio holder says he supports their continuation within the borough, so I ask the question again does he support the continuation of those services from the Thameside Complex.

Mayor

Councillor Abbas

Councillor Abbas

My priority is services and obviously I will support a running theatre, an open museum and libraries.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor, the portfolio holder has been the portfolio holder since May, the Thameside Complex has been opened for over 50 years does he really want his legacy to be that of the man who finally brought the curtain down on 50 years of the Thameside.

Mayor

Councillor Abbas

Councillor Abbas

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you councillor for your question, I think the councillor is struggling to understand the difference between services and assets. Assets is not under my portfolio, then if the councillor has any questions, then obviously, I am more than happy to sign post this to the relevant portfolio holder and he will be more than happy to help and assist you.