

## Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 22 February 2017

### **Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.**

Three questions were submitted from members of the public.

#### **1. From Peter Perrin to Councillor Gledhill**

During a debate at last month's Council meeting Councillor Gledhill indicated that he did not accept that the NHS, nationally or locally, was in "crisis" but rather that there were "problems". In view of reports since then that 137 out of 152 hospital trusts have been at "unsafe" levels so far this winter, Basildon University Hospital being one of the 137, would Councillor Gledhill now consider changing his assessment from "problematic" to "crisis"?

#### **Mayor**

Councillor Gledhill

#### **Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. Obviously after answering the same kind of question three times with the same answer last month...The short answer is no, but I think it would do you a bit of a disjustice just to say no. It is clear that the NHS are experiencing problems, and as I said last month, this is a lot to do with the lack of proper planning and the way that the services are being used by some. Councillor Halden later in the same meeting outlined things like, in 14-15, 24,424 patients attended A&E from Thurrock who received advice only i.e. no significant investigation or clinical treatment; that was 41% of all attendances. A further 25,652 patients attended from Thurrock who received the most minor level of investigations or treatment, for example blood test or a wound dressing change; that was 42%. Of all of these cohorts, sorry these cohorts made up 83% of all A&E attendances. 27% of those who turned up in these two cohorts turned up in an ambulance and I'm sure the well-trained and somewhat hard-pushed paramedics were very pleased to see them being used as a taxi service. The total cost to the NHS for treating these patients in A&E was somewhere in the region of £4.4million. Now, if you can imagine, if we put up with that misuse of public funds elsewhere there'd be an outcry. This needs to change. Public perception of what A&E is there for needs to change, and needs to change quickly. Imagine what that £4.4million could do just for Thurrock residents at Basildon Hospital. It could mean that there'd be more staff, it could mean more buildings so there could be more patients there for the longer, Winter period. So again, no, I will not change my statement from last month.

#### **Mayor**

Thank you. Mr Perrin, would you like to ask a supplementary question?

#### **Mr Perrin**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. In an attempt to please the Monitoring Officer I will try to comply with the rules of the Council's Constitution, CPR 14 which

I'm informed requires that a question name the individual to whom it is addressed. Would you, Councillor Gledhill, tell me, Mr Perrin – don't get alarmed I'm not about to plight my troth – what criteria you, Councillor Gledhill, would require to be met before you, Councillor Gledhill, would be prepared to admit that the NHS was, is, in crisis?

**Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. In the same vein I, Councillor Gledhill, I'm not an NHS expert, clearly. If I was standing outside A&E with a 4 ½, 8hour, 10hour wait in an ambulance or in a corridor I would say this is a terrible crisis, this is something that affects me directly, now. However, most people do that, a lot of people wouldn't look at the fact that 83% of the people that have gone in front of me probably didn't need to be there. So I will admit that it is in crisis when the waste, the misuse, the poor use and all the missed opportunities within the NHS are addressed, and then if it is still not performing up to a level that everybody finds acceptable then, and only then, will I say it's a crisis.

**Mayor**

Thank you, Mr Perrin. Mr Taylor, would you please like to make your way forward to ask your question.

**2. From Barry Taylor to Councillor Gledhill**

Can you tell us why you think it is acceptable to propose a £15 a week charge on the elderly residents living in sheltered housing in Thurrock?

**Mayor**

Councillor Gledhill

**Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you for your question, Mr Taylor. The reason I think it's fair to propose these, and I must stress again and I will be stressing throughout the evening these are propositions, this is not something set in stone, to introduce these proposals is that I don't think it's fair that residents, 100% of tenants in social housing, in Council social housing in Thurrock, are paying for services that less than 15% receive. I am a strong believer in pay for what you get, but more importantly get what you pay for. So not only will these proposals, if accepted, go forward and there will be a graduated charge over a period of time, a graduated charge that will not apply to somewhere in the region, in full, of 70% of residents in there. It will mean that they will get a service that is much better than it is now [*heckling from members of the public*] Madam Mayor?

**Mayor**

Please, please. Members of the public can we please listen to the answers given? Thank you.

**Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. I shall continue with my [*heckling from members of the public*].

**Mayor**

Please. I know this is an issue you feel very strongly about but we need to have rules in the meeting, otherwise you can't hear what the Councillors are saying. [*Heckling from members of the public*]. We need to listen to the Councillor to let him answer the question. Okay? I understand that you're feeling very passionate about this, believe me, but we do need to have the meeting run to a certain order. Councillor Gledhill?

**Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. I will continue and of course I will not rise to the bait of being called a liar. [*Heckling from members of the public*].

**Mayor**

Please, public can we please make sure we're quiet; listen to the meeting and let the Councillors answer the questions asked, please. [*Heckling from members of the public*]. Councillor Gledhill?

**Councillor Gledhill**

Again, I shall try to finish what I was saying. ...and you also get what you pay for, I have understood from [*Heckling from members of the public*]. Madam Mayor, am I going to be continually interrupted, because if I am I shall just sit down and I shall just wait for the supplementary.

**Mayor**

Can you answer the question, please?

**Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. ...and you get what you pay for and you pay for what you get. I've already heard that residents are saying that they're not getting the service that they pay for already, and if that's the case this consultation is the right place to highlight that and find out where the problems are and resolve them. Today I understand from officers they went to a sheltered housing complex where they said it's absolutely great, we get to see our warden every single day, we couldn't do without them. So clearly, clearly, it's from complex to complex and if there is a problem at any particular complex I need to know about it so my Officers will know about it and trust me, when my Officers know about it they will get it fixed.

**Mayor**

Mr Taylor, would you like to ask a supplementary question?

**Mr Taylor**

Yes, Madam Mayor. We've worked all our lives to ensure that we can pay our way when we retire and you want to take every shilling away from us. Do you think we are an easy touch? Well, we're not. We have fought many battles in our lives, than you can imagine. This is an unfair charge attacking some of the most vulnerable in our borough and my question is, why do you think the elderly are your cash cows, just to balance your books?

**Mayor**

Thank you, Councillor Gledhill?

**Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you, Madam Mayor, I'm sure the applause wasn't for me yet. You said in your response there that throughout your lives you've paid your way, we'll you're getting a service at the moment which you're not paying for. So, if you're going to continue to pay your way you would need to carry on paying your way. I do not see the elderly as cash cows, we are consulting on this. If we were going just to rush forward and do it we wouldn't have gone through consultation. If we were going to do that it wouldn't have happened, trust me. You're not cash cows, this is asking for people to pay for the services they receive. A significant number of people already pay for the services in here, £8 a week, this was introduced in 2014. This is pretty much trying to bring this in line and actually making sure that the service you get is covered by the charges you pay.

**Mayor**

Thank you, Mr Taylor. Ms Cunningham, would you please like to make your way forward to ask your question. Thank you.

**3. From Maureen Cunningham to Councillor Gledhill**

Why are you setting residents against residents by introducing a huge service charge for us elderly who you say can pay, and others who are on benefits and will get this tax paid for them?

**Mayor**

Councillor Gledhill

**Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you, Ms Cunningham. I'm not setting resident against resident. There is currently a system that effectively does that was introduced by the previous Administration in 2014. If you moved into sheltered accommodation in March of that year you pay nothing, irrespective of how much income you have outside of the State Benefit System. If you moved in on 1 April of that year you pay £8, irrespective of whether you're over the threshold for benefits. That is not fair. It's also not fair, as I've already said, that the current system which is a tax on 100% of housing residents to pay for the services that are received by 15% of the residents. That is a real tax, not what you're asking. As to the question of benefit, this is the same for rent; this is the same for all those on housing benefit, those who do not have sufficient get a State top-up. Those that have more than what the State say they should have, or can have; they have to pay the extra. That's the same for rents, the same for anybody in ordinary housing, same with social housing. This is not me setting it, this system has been in place for decades.

**Mayor**

Ms Cunningham, do you wish to ask a supplementary question?

**Ms Cunningham**

Mr Gledhill, most of us pensioners have managed our money, albeit a small amount, through all sorts of hardships in our lives. We've brought up our families through some very tough times. Some of us need help through benefits and some of us don't, but let me tell you we all agree on one thing; this is one step too far. Are you going to reconsider putting this unfair tax on us?

**Councillor Gledhill**

Again, I will reiterate, this is not a tax on the elderly, this is not a tax on those in sheltered housing, this is simply people paying for the services which they get. Will I reconsider it? No. We are at consultation stage and I strongly suggest that all residents

**Mayor**

Can we let the Councillor finish his answer please, ladies and gentlemen?  
Councillor Gledhill.

**Councillor Gledhill**

Thank you, Madam Mayor. As I say, this is not a tax; this is you paying for the charges, for the services you currently receive. Yes you have paid in through the system, yes you have made savings throughout your life and yes you've got to the later part of your life where you have over the benefit threshold. So whatever services that will be provided, that are over and above what you would get state benefit for, you will have to pay. Unfortunately it's no different for anybody else, anywhere in the Country. Remember, Thurrock is one of the very few places that doesn't have a universal service charge for these kind of services that you receive. There is a system where some of you pay £8, many of you pay nothing; this will bring everybody in line. Thank you.