

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 27 January 2017

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

One question was submitted from members of the public.

1. From Mr Groves to Councillor Coxshall

In light of the recent introduction of parking charges for the Sandpits Car Park in Stanford-le-Hope, which contravenes the clear intent of the sale conditions, will the Council consider launching a review into the appropriateness and robustness of the Portfolio Holder's report and decision by the Council / Cabinet in April 2013, to sell the freehold of Sandpits Car Park land. This decision was against the known opinions of local Councillors and the introduction of charges is a huge detriment to the local community and the trade of local businesses. Would the Council also consider investigating a full range of possible legal and practical actions to urgently address this detriment to the local and business communities?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

Thank you very much, Mr Groves. The decision to sell the Sandpits Car Park was made by the last administration in 2013. It was strongly opposed by the local community; it was opposed by the local Councillors, Councillor Shane Hebb vigorously one of them, one of the others supported it or didn't say anything from Norfolk, and the Thurrock Conservative Party...

Mayor

Councillor, please, we don't need references like that. The other Councillor is no longer a Councillor; he's not here to defend himself so please can you...

Councillor Coxshall

It's his decision that we've got to deal with.

Mayor

No, you don't have to. Excuse me; this is my meeting, please.

Councillor Coxshall

It's my question.

Mayor

Yeah, but it's my meeting so I trump you. So, I don't want reference to Councillors that aren't here, it's unfair, now please answer the question.

Councillor Coxshall

Can we have a ruling on that that I can't answer the question how I want?

Mayor

The ruling, according to the Monitoring Officer is that it's my meeting.

Councillor Coxshall

Well, there you are I've said it anyway, so now everyone knows anyway.

There is a strength wealth of feeling of the parking charges there and it's completely outrageous and so I've asked, before your question, I've asked for a review of this decision to be carried out. Indeed, a review is already happening. Given the impact and loss of the free parking, in the business and the communities around Stanford, I will ensure that all possible options, and I mean all possible options, are looked at to rectify this situation and make sure we put right what was wrong by the last administration.

Mayor

Mr Groves, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Mr Groves

No, thank you. That answers my question.

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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.

1. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

The NHS currently faces a severe crisis. Given the associated issues span a number of portfolios, including Health and Adult Social Care, will the Leader update the council on what action has been taken so far to play our part in alleviating the impact of the crisis for Thurrock residents?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and I will try to keep it short; however there are at least ten points which this Council is undertaking. First of all, I'm no denier of reality but I'm also someone that can look through the headlines and through the terms used to grab those headlines. The NHS is actually facing the challenges for what they've not planned for and those have been outlined earlier. And these are the ones where people are not using the NHS properly and they've just not planned for the future number of people using it. That's despite the amount of money that every successive Government has given them, extra each year. We've just had the Public Health report which outlined some of the challenges that they are facing and that way we can start working with them to try to mitigate those but, and I will do this from the top, and unfortunately I'm going to have to cut out many of it.

The social work team is working extended hours and over the weekend to minimize any delays at the hospital;

We have a very effective Rapid Response and Assessment Team, jointly with the NHS, that will see people in the community within two hours to prevent hospital admissions;

We are active members of the A and E Delivery Board which brings all NHS and local authority partners together to identify hot spots in the system and co-ordinate our action plans;

Full participation in the daily conference calls seven days a week; irrespective of when.

We have increased the number of step down beds at Collins House, and that now covers 40% of the provision there, again supporting people being discharged from hospital quicker so we're not bed-blocking.

Increased the resources within our Joint Reablement Team to help manage the current pressures and of course the administration is looking to take over

the surgery building in East Tilbury to ensure sufficient GP provision in that isolated area.

There are also longer term vision, we're looking at a new model of service for domiciliary care that's based around geographical areas and encourage the development of community based services as an alternative to the hospital crisis.

Expansion of early intervention approaches to care and support to prevent admissions to hospital and one thing I really do need to say is a big thank you to the Hospital Social Work Team who worked tirelessly over Christmas and the New Year to make sure that outpatients came out of hospital, they weren't bed-blocked, and were back in their homes or place that they should be at a time when they really do need to be with their family.

Mayor

Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you, Madam Mayor and thank you, Councillor Gledhill, for that response. I will echo some of that words in welcoming a lot of the work that takes place in Thurrock Council and I think there's a lot of good work that has taken place and we've seen, I think, with a report this evening a framework for a lot of the good work that will take place into the future.

I'll pick up, if I can Madam Mayor, on something that the Leader said in his response around not denying reality. Can we take it, therefore, that the Leader does agree that the NHS is in crisis?

Councillor Gledhill

Okay, I shall just repeat what I said again, for the tape. I am no denier of reality but what we see through the headlines and terms such as crisis is what the realities are. The NHS is facing challenges. If we're going to start looking at crises let's start looking at bigger things. Are you comparing the crisis in the NHS perhaps to the big crisis that we see across the globe, in places like Syria? I certainly don't put it on the same level. There are problems and guess what, this Government is dealing with it; £10 billion extra over this Government to the NHS and this Council has stepped up to the plate, cross-party agreement and we are continuing to do so, as will other Authorities across Essex.

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you, Madam Mayor. Well I was very interested because the Red Cross call this a humanitarian issue. I'll ask again, and I'm really only after a very simple response, does the Leader agree that the NHS is in crisis, yes or no?

Councillor Gledhill

Madam Mayor, I will not be bullied into a specific type of answer. I have been doing this way too long to fall into that. First, I am no denier of the reality of what is happening and I can see through the headlines, and the terms used, the NHS are facing challenges that they have not planned for, this includes the level and the type of way that people are using it. How many more times do I have to say the same thing? Even I'm bored with saying it. Thank you Madam Mayor.

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

1. From Councillor Smith to Councillor Brian Little

Given recent studies such as The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence report that, "smooth driving would cut air pollution and the development of more modern and intelligent methods for traffic calming" would the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport agree with me that no more speed bumps will be built without full investigation into alternative methods.

Councillor B Little

Thank you, Madam Mayor and I'd like to thank the Councillor for his question. Regarding road traffic speed and reduction improvements, full assessment is undertaken prior to any improvement scheme. These look at location, use and current issues, and alternative methods of control. Where speed bumps are considered the best solution, measures are put in place to control acceleration and deceleration, thus not having the effect on air quality as described in the NIHCE report.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Smith, do you wish to pose a supplementary question? Okay, thank you.

2. From Councillor Aker to Councillor Tolson

Can the Portfolio Holder for Environment confirm that residents who lose a wheelie bin due to theft or vandalism will get a replacement free of charge?

Councillor Aker sent his apologies for this Full Council so therefore his question was not heard.

3. From Councillor Watkins to Councillor Halden

Can the Portfolio Holder for Education and Health please inform the chamber the possible impact of the National Funding Formula?

Councillor Halden

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor Watkins for your question. Well, it's tremendously good news. Thanks to the Government finally taking action on the disparity of some schools being better funded than other schools, because of a quirk of how the formula has evolved over decades, Thurrock has the potential to be £1.5million better off each year, every year, forever. An extra £1.5 million that is a tremendous boost to the borough. Obviously some schools gain and some schools lose. The benefit of what we have encouraged here is that our schools do not stand alone as academies we help foster strong multi-academy trust relationships, so you work together in a MAT and therefore you can share burdens, you can share opportunities, you can share staff. Last month a question was put forward to me claiming that teachers would be disappearing, so on and so forth. The MAT that Thameside is in, which I think was the subject of Councillor Pothecary's question, the Multi-Academy Trust will be a net gainer, will gain! The Gateway Group, serving some of our most deprived communities, will be a tremendous gainer. This is great news. Obviously there are some issues that we want to work out how we can best tackle, for example no school's funding can go up or down by more than 1.5% in a year. We want to look at how we can manage that transition with our MATs as best as possible, so I've called a summit with all the head teachers on 1 February where myself and the Director of Service will lead a conversation in regards to how to best manage this situation. But based on the current projections, we really are in a very good position.

Mayor

Thank you. Councillor Watkins, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Watkins

No, thank you Madam Mayor.

4. From Councillor Spillman to Councillor Tolson

Under the current approach the council are refusing to clear fly tips in un-adopted roads and alleyways. This includes fly tips containing hazards which present a genuine risk to health and safety. The risks are particularly high to children who often treat them as a playground. It is possible that an injury may occur in the future as the result of a hazardous fly tip which the council are aware of, but choose not to clear. In such circumstances does the Portfolio Holder agree with me that it would be reasonable for residents to regard the council as partly responsible?

Councillor Tolson

Thank you very much for your question. I'm going to read it out because I want you to have it all and I probably couldn't articulate it any better than it's written here.

Roads and alleyways that are un-adopted, which is common with many alleyways within the area, are not maintainable at Public Expense. Public Health concerns are evaluated by Public Health Officers in each circumstance and take appropriate action, where they have the powers to do so.

In the case of un-adopted alleyways, the responsibility for maintenance and condition as well as the liability for any issues lies with the properties that have rights of access to the alleyway; this is often adjacent property owners. Specific responsibilities will be found in property owner's deeds. In order to undertake clearance of the rubbish, residents can make use of local authorised waste disposal companies.

An option could be considered by residents of properties that adjoin un-adopted alleyways is Alley gating. Each property owner living adjacent to the alleyway will have specific rights of access as specified within their deeds. This is a civil matter and the residents of the alleyway would need to communicate in order to determine the problem and decide to what extent they are willing to restrict access to their properties. They would also need to decide how to fund the cost of the gate as well as the cost of any clearance.

The Council is currently in the process of reviewing its approach to un-adopted alleyways and is considering options including enforced clearance by those parties responsible for upkeep of the land or alternatively exploring compulsory alley gating orders. These matters are scheduled to be considered as part of a revision of the Council's Environmental Enforcement Strategy which we will be taken through CGS ahead of Cabinet in the summer.

Mayor

Councillor Spillman, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Spillman

Yes, the last bit is what I'm interested in really. Since, I've had about four or five of these cases in the last week – it's a horrendous problem, I'm not going to pretend that it's easy to deal with, it's really expensive, it's a pain. You know, we all hate it, but the things you're talking about have already started to happen because, and there's a little bit of inconsistency. All the houses between Dell Road and Orsett Road there is a fly tip behind there in an alleyway. Now, they've received a letter from the Council saying that within two weeks they have to get that cleared otherwise the Council are going to go in and they're going to charge a sum of about £2,300 and about 20 houses have been sent a bill for, you know, that broken down. Now, I don't like to treat residents like that. I think we should be working with them a bit better

than that, not just sending them a letter that says 'sort this out in two weeks, this is how much it costs, if you don't do that we're going to take civil action'. I just hope that we get a bit more of a, you know, a warmer and more reasonable dialogue with our residents because you know this is a problem that they've not been charged with before and the idea of getting 20 people together, a lot of them are HMOs in that area as well, they don't know who the owners are. Can we just make sure that the approach is a little bit softer in the future?

Councillor Tolson

It's a difficult situation. You know it may be, unfortunately, that those people that reside in those properties, they're not even responsible for that fly-tip. It may be somebody else has gone in there, but we don't know that, and as regards a softer approach, I don't agree because we want a strong approach really. *Indistinct murmurs*

I haven't seen a copy of the letter... Now we want a strong approach because we don't want it in Thurrock. If people want to drive through Thurrock and fly-tip in Basildon, that's not in Thurrock so I'm not interested in that, but you know, time and time again you report these fly tips and I've been somebody that has said, you know, scavenger tactics – why aren't we using that? Because for all the residents in our borough that do the right things; that put the right thing in the green bin, the right thing in the blue bin, they recycle and do the food waste, they go to the Civic Amenity Site, they book the bulky waste collections, and then you've got, every time there's a new tenant in a property the mattress is flung out, sometimes it's on the public highway, on the path, and we have to fund that so I'll have a look at the letter, I'll see how it's worded, but I don't want a softly-softly approach. If it's in that back alleyway and they're responsible, the Council will not be paying to clear it.

Mayor

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

Councillor Spillman

Yeah, again it's not in terms of how tough the enforcement, it's just like working with communities to, you know, get them working together to build those links so they can, so they've got the resources to act as a unit rather than just getting a letter. The other query is the charge. Now, I went to see the fly tip, I actually reported it, it also appeared in the Thurrock Gazette. Now, you sent a bill to them on, the department sent a bill to them, for £2,300. Now, a colleague of mine got that job priced up privately and was quoted between £250-£400. Can we just make sure that, these were registered carriers you know, can we just make sure that residents are not getting overcharged, because it seems... I've seen the tip; it's not pleasant but to charge over £2000 for the goods that were there it just seems ludicrous to be honest. It's no wonder that residents get annoyed when they're getting bills like that. Just look into that for me, I'd be really pleased if you did.

Councillor Tolson

I think in terms of where we are now, where people used to settle in Thurrock, they knew their neighbours, things have changed. They may be renting, they may be tenants, where somebody would say to their neighbour 'for God's sake don't leave all that rubbish there, you know it's unsightly' people don't maybe know their neighbours now. Bad behaviour isn't checked, residents don't know their neighbours, they're not saying 'come on let's do the right thing'. I've said about the housing booklet, let's make sure people know about the recycling and the bin collections and make sure they know about the bulky waste collections - £30 for 3 items, but you know for all the people that do the right things in this borough, which is what we want, we're not going to take that fly tipping away for nothing and you'll say it's an overvalued price, we'll have a look at it but clearly someone has to clear it up and there's going to be a charge.

5. From Councillor Collins to Councillor Halden

Infrastructure is of great concern to residents, given new house building. What is the cabinet member doing about new school places to cater for the increase in demand please?

Councillor Halden

Thank you, Councillor Collins, for your question. As we've always said, the administration's policy is to build big, the more school places you create the more competition you create in the market and that competition is healthy for schools. The lobby unit that I set up last May to work with schools to help them refine their free schools bids is going extremely well. I am confident enough now to say that the current round of free school bids I believe Thurrock is going to do extremely well out of it and also consider the legacy we are working with Thurrock has been granted three free schools by the current government brand new institution buildings that is a tremendous level of investment in the borough that is on top of the £7 million that the Cabinet approved at the tail end of last year to help schools expand to currently cater for demand. £7 million in brand new pounds that we injected into the system and finally as I know Councillor Collins has spoken to me in the past about grammar schools and as I have previously announced at Cabinet a partner has been identified, plans to have an admission criteria slanted towards disadvantaged pupils has been written and approved. Recently myself and my director of service met with colleagues and representatives from within the department of education and we have potentially tested what our plans for a grammar school will be. Our plans are quite clearly incredibly robust and when we get further clarity of what the national push to reintroduce selection to education will be I am extremely confident to say that the Thurrock proposal for a grammar school will really be second to none.

Mayor

Councillor Collins, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Collins

No thank you Madam Mayor.

6. From Councillor Collins to Councillor MacPherson

What steps which are being taken to either reinstate or rebuild this very important library in East Tilbury and social resource for the local community?

Councillor MacPherson

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor Collins. We are carrying out an options appraisal in relation to the building, following a structural survey and insurance advice that was received last week. A number of suggestions have been put forward by the community to aid temporary solutions, which are being explored and officers are working up proposals at this time. Interim arrangements have been made with the Post Office in East Tilbury to whom I would like to pass on my personal thanks. On Tuesdays from 10am to 1pm, and Thursdays from 2pm to 5pm, library users can return books and take books from a very small collection. Library card holders can also use any library in Thurrock, Southend and Essex. But East Tilbury library was more than just a book provision and I saw several examples of this when I visited East Tilbury library on the morning of the fire. With one lady saying that her daughter had done her revision and homework in the library and a young chap whose mum ran the knitting and nattering club which I now believe someone is now hosting from their home. This was a community hub and we need to be clear following the options appraisal what we can do to support the community resources there. We also need to make sure we have excellent lines of communication through to our residents so they know exactly what is happening. And no one can forget the museum in East Tilbury library, storing and showing our Barter Heritage. We have been in very close contact with the chair and we have been able to remove some Barter items and store in 1 Big Storage, located across the road, who have kindly donated some space after hearing what had happened. Again my thanks go to them. My thanks also have to go to the community who always seem to pull together in the time of need. I will give you my assurances that I will keep this chamber updated as we move forward.

Mayor

Councillor Collins, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Collins

Thank you Madam Mayor. Just a quick one. I have to declare an interest in East Tilbury library because (1) I grew up on the Barter Estate at East Tilbury and also my cousin, one of my relatives, is the chair of Barter Resource and Reminisce Centre. Can we have some sort of reassurance that the Barter Resource and Reminisce facilities will be reinstated in some form in East Tilbury in some place please?

Councillor MacPherson

As I say we are looking at an options paper at this time. The Barter factory, the history of Barter is a very important part of Thurrock's history. It is something that I will give you my assurances we will treasury, we will make sure we will always move forward with Barter in mind. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Collins, do you pose to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Collins

No further questions, thank you.

7. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Halden

Could the Portfolio Holder outline the reasons why the decision on Children's Centres has been delayed?

Councillor Halden

It hasn't been.

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Madam Mayor. Originally the decision was scheduled for January's cabinet meeting um but to move on parents in Stanford Le Hope gathered a petition against the closure which has 387 signatures does he believe it is fair that they have been told their petition and the comments attached to it will not be taken into account when making a decision of the children's centre and will he undertake to ensure that these responses are included in future cabinet consideration of the issue.

Councillor Halden

Thank you Madam Mayor. Firstly I am not going to comment on a petition that I have not seen I have no idea what the wording is so I can't comment on what's happened to it. What I would say to those parents seems as you have kindly given me the opportunity to repeat the last full council is that we will not be aiming the new service will not just seek to serve the 75% that engaged with the service we want to engage with 90%. Instead of just saying we have a building wonderful we are going to reach out to the families that are difficult to engage with. It is not going to a 0-5 service it will be a 0-19 service to serve even more families. We are going to merge public health, social care and education so we can ensure that children get access to services that they didn't even know about. I would say to parents in Stanford, Chafford, Tilbury and Grays that this is not a cut it is a reform and it is a meaningful reform. There was no additional decision planned to go to Cabinet in January, there wasn't, there was no additional decision. Cabinet have made the decision we then had to consult and inform people, let them know the structure, get feedback on the structure. The consultation is now going forward is for the new service. We don't want so many managers. We don't want so many

receptionists. We want resources for the front line. So for the posts that are duplicated fragmented services we know longer need we are consulting with those staff to see if they can be redeployed across the rest of the authority. No decision has been made to delay the progress. No decision will be made to delay the progress but it is clear what Councillor Gerrish wants, want he wants me to say. He wants me to say that I bound to his pressure and keep fragmented services and I'll keep expensive buildings, that's want he wants me to say. However, I am afraid that much that he is like to his colleagues I shall have to be disappointing.

Mayor

Councillor Gerrish, do wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Madam Mayor. I think what Councillor Halden needs to appreciate it is nature of the consultation that you don't wait to see what someone is saying before you decide whether or not that will form part of the consultation response. So I think that it is unfair of him to say what is said in that petition before he takes that on board. Councillor MacPherson happily decided to include consultation feedback from before their administration had started and it seems a little unfair that Councillor Halden won't take any feedback from the last month. Madam Mayor considering the detailed financial information implications for a particular centres, the total impact on staff numbers and details of specific sessions to be offered in the future are not given in the upcoming children's centre report to overview and scrutiny. Does he believe that the committee are being supplied with sufficient information to conduct an informed review of the plans?

Councillor Halden

Thank you Councillor Gerrish. Well first of all there was a consultation. I have weighted up the results of this consultation but I am afraid that my definition of leadership is you don't prevaricate you make a decision and you power through with that decision if you have got the outcomes of children at heart. If your intention is preserve fragmented services, preserve expensive buildings, to keep the status quo regardless of this then yes you can delay; you can obfuscate to make a decision. Six years of Labour rule, your very proud of the fact that you protected all these buildings. Did the service improve – No. Did the service help more children – No. Was the service reformed – No. It just stayed static frozen in time. My definition of leadership is to say that we focus on outcomes not building or empire building this is the direction we want to go in. That is what you do with leadership. You don't constantly kick the can down the road and with regards to the committee, um councillor, I remember when I presented myself at the committee, members on your benches didn't want to ask me questions and I remember when I was the chairman of that committee, my committee sat for more meetings, sat for considerably more hours and took considerably reports. If the committee, during the process that we were discussing the children centre reform you should have summoned me and I would have attended. You didn't want to do that. You had your time to ask me questions but instead you orchestrated foe public rage by taking Labour candidates for office who failed to be elected to ask me any questions.

It's very brave of you to bring this subject up again. As I recall the last time you tried this you took quite a whooping.