

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 27 September 2017

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

6 questions were submitted from members of the public.

1. From Mr Atkins to Councillor Gledhill

Can the Leader of the Council tell me if Council residents are liable for the upkeep and maintenance of the water tanks that are in their property?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Atkins for your question. No, as the landlord, the Council is responsible for maintaining these types of installations. Inspections of water tanks are included where appropriate and the gas safety inspections which are carried out at all properties, at the mandatory year point. Full contemporaneous records of these inspections are kept, including an inspection record which is signed by the tenant to confirm that the inspection took place,

In the event of any failure to a tank or its component parts the Council is responsible for responding through its responsive repairs contractor. Tenants are not charged for these repairs, which fall with our obligations as a landlord. That also extends to the inspections.

Should a fault occur with the system, the Council would only be at fault as a landlord if it had notice of a defect and failed to undertake repairs where necessary, i.e. knew that there was a necessary problem and neglected to fix it. This is covered under case law which is O' Brien vs Robinson which states 'when a latent defect i.e. one that is not evident when it occurs and arises in a demised premise, tenant's home, the Council will not be held liable as they have not received notice'. This relates to where a ceiling fell in and the landlord could not be held responsible. This is why we strongly suggest residents have contents insurance in the event of such a problem.

Mayor

Thank you. Mr Atkins, do you have a supplementary question?

Mr Atkins

In a fashion I did but since my problem was rectified, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Councillor Gledhill, Councillor Baldwin and David Lawson for their time.

2. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill, in a letter signed by you, dated 25 August 2017, you notify me, and other Council Tenants, that Thurrock Council has made the decision that from 2 October 2017 service charges will be introduced for those tenants receiving each service. One of the four services you will be charging me for is an item titled "Grounds Maintenance" at £5.00 per week. Councillor Gledhill can you please tell me what weekly "grounds maintenance" the Council will be carrying out on my premises which justifies such a charge?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Perrin. As I already stated Mr Perrin, obviously there is a temporary suspension to this charge whilst it's being re-reviewed. However, I have been provided with your address and the location of your property. There are grassed areas in the area immediately opposite your property which are on housing land, and are maintained as part of the grounds maintenance service. This has been confirmed with visits to the property in question and confirmation of ownership of the land through the Council's GSI mapping system.

As I've stated in previous press releases and at Cabinet, this charge does encompass a number of different things, it's not just grass cutting. It also covers for tree maintenance, repairs to footpaths, hardened areas and indeed, play areas. On this basis, you have been chosen among the tenants liable to pay the charge as outlined.

Mayor

Thank you. Mr Perrin, do you have a supplementary question?

Mr Perrin

Councillor Gledhill, for 36 years, I have been the tenant of my council home which is a ground floor maisonette with an approximate 30sq yard front garden. During that time, the council has never cut the grass or maintained my front or back gardens. On the contrary, the council has specifically held me, not the upstairs tenant, solely responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of both gardens as part of my tenancy agreement. Does the council intend to impose a charge of £5 per week on both the ground floor and upstairs tenant, amounting to a charge of £260 per tenant, per year, totalling £520 per year for cutting the grass on a small patch of garden?

There are 12 such front gardens in a row of maisonettes in my street, for which you intend to charge the 24 tenants £5 per week for ground maintenance, a total of £6240 per year, as Delboy would say to Rodney,

“We’re on a nice little earner here”. I call it extortion. Can you assure me and all the other council tenants in Thurrock that they will only be charged for services actually received and if they cut and maintain the garden themselves, they will not be charged for the privilege?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and Mr Perrin. I think it’s been made clear time and time again, this is not about cutting what your tenancy requires you to cut. This is about the communal gardens outside your front/back garden. There is a total of 50 hectares of green space, there are 14 play parks, there are 30 hectares of hard standing and 20 hectares of path, 2000 trees. Plus various other areas that we go through in the year. This is what you, in your own words, tenants will be paying for. It’s not for cutting grass in your front garden, that’s your responsibility. So thank you for reiterating what we are saying, this is about tenants paying for services that they will receive. Thank you.

3. From Mr Akhigbe to Councillor Gledhill

Which areas in my ward, Little Thurrock, have an PSPO in force, if any, and which such zones have CCTV for enforcement and are there any pending PSPOs for the area?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) were introduced by the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, 2014, giving local authorities powers to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) related activities in specific areas. They last for up to three years, but can be extended, if justified. Enforcement is by police officers and authorised persons, including some Council Officers.

There are currently two PSPOs in Thurrock covering Grays town centre and the area near the Lakeside shopping centre. There are two Designated Public Place Orders (DPPOs) in the Little Thurrock Rectory, which is also the ward I represent, covering Delafield Park and the Little Thurrock Village Green. These are in the process of being made into PSPOs in the sense that signage is audited to make them very clear.

With regard to CCTV coverage, I will not divulge the areas covered by CCTV as that gives those either looking to breach the PSPOs or commit other crimes with the advantage of knowing where and where not to go to avoid detection. But beyond this, I’ve taken up the issue of street drinkers, for instance, using the bench on the Village Green and quite frankly, somewhat objectionable in their language when challenged by myself and the other residents. I’ve taken this up to the police recently and in the past. You may be aware that we are currently procuring new enforcement officers and looking at

how and what we can enforce as a council to help make Thurrock a borough that works for everyone and not just limited to the town centres. I would also reiterate that at 10 Downing Street, I took this up with the Police & Crime Commissioner, not just for Little Thurrock. There are other DDPOs that are now PSPOs across the borough which also need policing as well as the ones in the town centre.

Mayor

Thank you. Mr Akhigbe, do you have a supplementary question?

Mr Akhigbe

Thank you very much for your answer. I guess the next question will be if you had the number of notices that have been served on the existing PSPOs in Little Thurrock Rectory?

Councillor Gledhill

To the best of my knowledge, it is zero. I'm not particularly impressed with this amount, indeed residents regularly contact me to say we got the same people back on the benches. I've gone to the benches myself and have asked them to move along. I've asked the police to come along and enforce it. They're a little bit unsure as to whether the DDPO has changed to a PSPO and I made clear that it was, the signage is a little bit ambiguous at the moment which needs to be changed. The very second it is changed, I will again be asking the police to be paying special attention, not only to the Village Green but to the PSPO on Delafield Park. I do apologise, also forgot to mention, you asked where there are other PSPOs planned for Little Thurrock. We do need to have evidence of where ASB is happening, it needs to be documented, needs to be regular. Once we have that, then we can apply for the PSPO. If that's happening and not reported to me, which shall be very, very rare, then please come and see me and we can discuss this.

4. From Mr Kankiya to Councillor Gledhill

As a resident in South Chafford, one of the biggest issues facing residents in the area is the constant sound of the cruisers in the lakeside area which has a detrimental effect to residents living nearby. My question is what has happened to the PSPO that was meant to be in the area and would the council consider implementing speed restrictions to deter these cruisers from continuing to behave this way?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Mr Kankiya. The issue of car cruisers and disruption to local residents has been the subject of extensive consultation with Highways England, who have responsibility for the A126 Dumbbell Roundabouts, which is where a lot of this activity is taking place. Police have been negotiating with their representatives and recent discussions have suggested that these roundabouts will be blocked off by Highways England in the foreseeable future, to prevent the car cruisers using them for doughnuts and all the other ASBs they commit there.

That said the PSPO is indeed still in force there, latest figures confirm that there were 56 complaints of ASB incidents in 2016, that was a reduction from the 105 incidents recorded in 2015. 99 Fixed Penalty Notices were issued in 2016, as well as 8 arrests made and 11 PSPO tickets issued. Even so the noise disruption to residents is a very serious matter, as is the very serious threat of major injury to the participants and spectators and indeed, anyone travelling there. It is therefore to be hoped that Highways England do make the necessary changes to the road layout to block this as soon as possible. I know officers are in discussions with them regularly about this.

However, your suggestion on speed restriction is noted but it must be remembered that things like speed bumps are in place 24/7 and affect the millions of legitimate road users that use and visit lakeside each year. Whilst there are times that speed humps would make little difference to the speed of vehicles travelling to and from Lakeside, especially at Christmas, they are unlikely to be the best solution. But of course there are other solutions. The Council is considering the use of average speed cameras in the area which will form part of a bid to Government for road safety funding for the A126, a road that has already been identified by Government as a road with a high risk of collision.

Mayor

Thank you. Mr Kankiya, do you have a supplementary question?

Mr Kankiya

Thank you. So in relation to the average speed cameras that you're talking about, Councillor, when are these likely to be implemented? Because as I said, as a resident in the area, this is something of great concern and I've only lived in South Chafford for about 3 years now but I understand that this is an issue that has been going on for well over a decade and anything that could be welcomed would be really helpful. Thank you.

Councillor Gledhill

You're quite right. This has been going on for far too long. Obviously the PSPO has made a bit of a difference but as with any enforcement action, unless it is enforced and in this case, it would be the police enforcing it because it's a moving traffic offence, then it does go a little by the wayside. The noise is quite annoying, I have friends who live in Chafford, I've been with

them and you can hear the noise, it's terrible. As I said, the bid will go in and by the time the bid comes back, we will look to put them in as soon as we possibly can. However, more importantly, the Highways England, our officers and the police are in regular discussions to very quickly, hopefully in the next couple of weeks, put in the barriers of the Dumbbell roundabout to help stop the issues there. It's not to say it won't push it to somewhere else but it's certainly a start. I have spoken to the local police commander on this, this week, he's fully aware of it and will hopefully be allocating time for his officers to enforce on that. Thank you.

5. From Mr Towson to Councillor B. Little

In light of a question on Low Emission Zones submitted to Full Council in September 2016, Can the Portfolio Holder for Transport make a full statement as what actions are being undertaken to reduce all forms of Pollution, including Pollution from Traffic?

Mayor

Councillor B. Little

Councillor B. Little

Thank you Mr Mayor and Mr Towson for your question. The Air Quality and Health Strategy were approved at Cabinet in December 2016, which contained an action plan of initiatives which will help improve air quality in the Borough. The strategy can be found on the Council's website for further information.

Since then, the actions set out in Section 4.2 of the report have been progressed. A programme of weight restrictions and advisory HGV routing has been progressed across the borough. Following various bilateral initiatives with private sector and police partners, the Council is re-launching the Freight Quality Partnership in October, with particular emphasis on encouraging more responsible behaviours from HGV drivers in avoiding, where possible, residential areas. Variable message signs to advise traffic of network problems and advise on alternative routes have been installed. On the 15th June, the Council ran a pilot programme to tackle idling outside of schools which was attended by myself, together with the Public Health, Strategic Transport and Road Safety Teams. The scheme engaged with two schools, Purfleet Primary and Woodside Academy. The purpose of this project is to engage with parents who leave their cars running outside the school gates at pick up and drop off and make them aware of the impact on the health and children and the environment.

As part of Thurrock's preparation for engagement with Highways England on Lower Thames Crossing, the Council is currently developing a position statement on all environmental pollution in Thurrock. A more detailed update on air quality management will be presented to CGS O&S at their October meeting.

Mayor

Thank you. Mr Towlson, do you have a supplementary question?

Mr Towlson

Thank you Mr Little. My supplementary question is, I feel most of Thurrock's residents want Thurrock to be seen as a forward thinking and progressive council. What are the future plans and actions to reduce and, possibly eliminate traffic pollution as large areas of green belt land may be lost to roads, homes and businesses etc?

Councillor B. Little

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Mr Towlson for your supplementary question. Thurrock has been in dialogue with Transport for London (TFL) for the last year regarding the operation of the existing low emission zone and their plans to roll out ultra-low emission zones by 2020. We are keen to learn from London's experience but we're very mindful that Thurrock has a very different pattern of trip making and vehicle usage. Rolling out a London style low emission zone in Thurrock is not a viable option at present time. Additionally, Thurrock's transport strategy sets the Council's commitment to encouraging low emission transport, including working with partners to deliver charging points for electric vehicles. Currently in Thurrock, we have charging points in motor services, Ikea and Lakeside along with council owned facilities, civic offices, Ground Road, Argent Street and Canterbury Parade. A recent bid to central government for national productivity investment funding includes and asks for funding for future sites.

6. From Mrs Imamzade to Councillor Gledhill

In a street with 1 council owned, 1 private rented and 1 privately owned property how is it fair that a grass verge that is open to public use and spans the full length of all properties should suddenly become the responsibility of one tenant to pay for its up keep. How is that a fair and just charge?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Mrs Imamzade for your question. As you are aware, obviously I have suspended the implementation of this charge pending further review.

However, I must make clear, not only for this question but indeed, for shouts from the audience, there are two types of land in Thurrock that the council is responsible for. That's the General Fund land, which is covered by the council

tax that you pay and there is Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land. The upkeep of this is only paid for by council tenants, it's not paid for by everybody else. Every elected Member in this chamber is aware of this and every elected Member should be making clear to residents the difference. However, as mentioned, the cost of the grounds maintenance service is currently being met by using part of the rent paid by all tenants, including those who do not live near any HRA maintained areas. The service charge was set to enable the cost of the service to be met from those tenants who were deemed as receiving the service freeing up money to be spent on repairs and improvements to our housing stock.

We must remember that the charge is not just for cutting the verge outside of a particular property, irrespective of who lives there and around, but it's also as mentioned, the cost of cutting the 50 hectares of grass, fixing 30 hectares of hard standing, 20 hectares of paths and 14 play parks that the HRA has to cover the cost of.

As I made clear yesterday there were far too many anomalies after a review, not only from different properties but from different areas. Information I received yesterday and from visiting some of the sites across the borough, talking to residents and other councillors I felt there were too many questions unanswered so have as mentioned suspended the charge pending further scrutiny.

Mayor

Thank you. Mrs Imamzade, do you have a supplementary question?

Mrs Imamzade

Mr Gledhill, I'll put it to you, that teams around you knew exactly what you were doing when you put this tax forward. I put it to you that you couldn't be trusted to get this right the last two times that this went to scrutiny so how and why should we believe you now? Councillor Gledhill, the public request that this is scrapped and as you stated in the previous meeting, these meetings are about what the public want.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. First of all, when something goes to scrutiny, it's for the scrutiny committee to scrutinise the information in front of them, to form an opinion, to bring that opinion to Cabinet and for Cabinet to take consideration of that and other matters. Regrettably, on the two occasions, it did go through scrutiny, the main responses were about the sheltered housing accommodation charges. Very little was said with the exception of one Member, thank you Councillor Potheary and I will praise you again later for this, in relation to other service charges. Indeed, the Chair of that committee mentioned 30 times the £15 charge to sheltered housing but only mentioned 27 words in two meetings in relation to this charge. That is not scrutiny, that

does not help us make the decision. We now have a much better Chair for scrutiny in my opinion. I spoke with him at length yesterday and the day before, we're both of the same opinion. It will eventually go to scrutiny through the proper democratic process. It will then come back to us after the Chair has decided what to do. When it comes back to us, Cabinet will then make a decision based on the good scrutiny done this time I would hope and any further information that becomes available between now and then.

Item 13 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 14 questions had been received to the Leader of the Council and 8 questions had been received to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee had been received.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

1. From Councillor Jones to Councillor Gledhill

Would the Leader explain to Members and the residents of Thurrock what measures are this Conservative administration putting into place to combat the rising crime rates and ASB in the Borough.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and Councillor Jones. My first part of this statement will be no doubt shocking to you as it was to me when I found this out.

Apparently, the number of reported cases of ASB to the Police fell during the first quarter, by 5.8%. I too laughed but remember this is reported cases. The Council has an ASB Team within the Housing service that deals with cases involving tenants. These and all other cases are reviewed in fortnightly geographically based Locality Action Groups, attended by Council officers, police, private housing associations and other interested parties.

Currently, two of the major issues in which the Council is engaged with Essex Police include the actions with Highways England to address the car cruiser issues at Lakeside as I previously outlined in questions from members of the public. Regular operations as I outlined in my statement earlier in relation to the PSPO in Grays which should result in a number of street drinkers not being able to return for 48 hours. I'm talking to the local commander who believes that there has been a slight increase in the number of ASB reports in the past couple of weeks. It's down to the number of people reporting the street drinkers. We are carrying on with these operations, I won't say when they are happening or where they will be happening but trust me, they will continue.

35 fixed penalty notices issued to persons who littered, totalling £2,800 of fines, as well as the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices. Work is also in hand to use robustly other legal measures to reduce various nuisances. Use of communications, via social media to demonstrate successful legal action is also sending a clear message that we have a zero tolerance policy on things such as littering.

The service is currently dealing with some complaints from Stanford and Corringham residents about youth nuisance in the Town Centre and Hardy Park. The ASB Team and Essex Police are co-ordinating one response aimed at reducing disorder within a small identified cohort of young people. This includes but is not limited to joint out-of-hours patrols, referrals to the Youth Offending Team and/or Children's Services where appropriate, warning letters to parents and guardians, and multi-agency meetings at local secondary schools. The police are also leading on intelligence-gathering for the consideration of disruption and enforcement action if necessary. Only 9 formal reports of ASB in this area were recorded between April and August 2017. This doesn't bear any resemblance to what I'm seeing on Facebook social media and indeed, I'm sure what you're seeing through your workload. We are aware of residents' concerns however, and we are trying to resolve this through working with the police.

Across the borough as a whole there have been 112 ASB incidents reported to the Council from April to August this year – this compares to 135 over the same period in 2016. Again, please, if you feel free to laugh, this is a reduction of 17% on reported incidents.

In the same period our CCTV service has provided a total of 286 packages to the Police and the Council's Tenancy Services teams, either in response to a request for footage relating to a known incident or pro-actively when new incidents are picked up when footage is being reviewed. In 58 cases to date formal enforcement action has been taken by the Police following the provision of such footage.

For Council accommodation the Housing service takes its own enforcement action where it appears clear that serious breaches of tenancy have occurred – formal action has been taken in 21 such cases in the first five months of this year. As the Courts are reluctant to evict social housing tenants that are found guilty of this, we have to place a strong focus on informally resolving low-level ASB through the use of warning letters, mediation and intensive housing management. Since April a total of 147 reported cases have been successfully resolved through this approach. I think that shows the housing service and the police working with the Council, we are doing something. I leave open to interpretation, the number of reported ASBs.

Mayor

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

Councillor Jones

Thanks very much Leader. It seems to be a lot of things going on but the one thing I think that's not going on is police on the streets. The way you about how crimes are down, that's probably because the 101 number as we said before, we stated many, many times, is not fit for purpose. So people just give up, they don't bother. Now, in April this year, a petition was run in my area, Stanford and Corringham, and in a two week period, there were 2300 signatures for that petition. That was followed by a public meeting in which the PCC attended a packed hall and basically, the theme that night was that the residents do not feel safe on our streets. Now, I went to a memorial on Sunday before, with the Mayor, where the IRF laid wreaths. It was a fantastic event but you know what let it down? Lack of police, there was anti-social behaviour, there were drunks all around. This was in front of a police station, there's no police there, not even to come out to lay a wreath or stop the traffic. When are the residents of Thurrock going to get what they pay for in their council tax? And that's a police force capable of tackling these crime rates.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mayor and thank you Councillor Jones for your supplementary question. I couldn't agree more. The reason I mentioned the reported crimes time and time again, I was hoping you would mention the appalling 101 service that is currently being supplied by Essex Police. This is quite clear, I know the Chief Executive, I know I have, I know Councillor Cherry, who is not here this evening and a number of other elected Members have sat on the phone for 20, 30, 40 minutes to get through. By which time, if the ASB is not over, it's probably developed into something else. It is absolutely dreadful. I did speak to the PCC as said, last week, and he again reassured me this service is being reviewed. There's a new police officer in charge of this particular service. Of course, I can't respond on behalf of Roger Hirst, that's his role. It's his role to be held accountable for the police service. It is atrocious that a service where we are remembering our fallen and those that fought for this country so that people could have a good, honest democratic life is being abused by people who really don't know a simple right and wrong. If you want a drink, stay at home, drink reasonably, don't ruin it for everyone else. Yes, more needs to be done, I'm really surprised and shocked more hasn't been done in Stanford and Corringham in relation to the issues there. Again, when I speak to the PCC, as I do regularly, I will make it clear to him, our disgust at how things are not changing. ASB is number two on his crime directive, it doesn't appear that is happening. Thank you.

Mayor

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

Councillor Jones

Thank you Mayor. Thank you Leader for your in-depth reply. You know, I think as I said before, it boils down to cuts. The Tory government cut 50 out of 80 police stations in Essex, they cut 850 police and now we're seeing what this causes. The ASB and all what's going on. Now, what I urge you to do, and this is as a Conservative administration, is to talk to your two Conservative MPs, to go to your government and say, 'Do you know what, we need something on the streets, so our residents feel safe'. That's what I'm asking, thank you.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mayor and thank you Councillor Jones for your second supplementary. It needs to be clear, the government last year, did not cut the amount of money going to the police service. This does not mean in real terms or any other term that anyone wants to play politics with, doesn't mean that there is less money being spent on those on the streets. You've just said yourself, couldn't believe the terrible, appalling actions outside the police station. Police stations do not cut crime, police officers on the street cut crime. I agree with you 100% and as a former special constable, you can never have enough police officers on the street. So for someone from the City of London, where there are 1000 police officers per square mile, effectively, we could have (*interruption in middle of sentence*). As I was saying, we could have one person on the end of every corner of every street. Guess what, we still had the highest number of assaults against the person out of one police station, not just in London, but the whole of the country. So it's not just about police out on the streets, it's about people behaving themselves. Yes, I will speak to the Police & Crime Commissioner, yes I will speak to both our MPs to see what can be done, to see if anymore money can come in. but I am also and I shall make this very clear right now, I am also supporting Councillor Barbara Rice's motion later on, that the police service for Thurrock and the amount of police officers here need to be reviewed as a matter of urgency. Thank you.

2. From Councillor G Rice to Councillor Gledhill

Please will the Leader of the Council confirm that every Council resident living outside a grass verge will be charged £5 per week for grass cutting, does this mean a weekly cut will take place?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Rice for your question. I am surprised that, you, of all councillors are asking any questions in relation to the charges that, as I have already announced, am suspending. You were the chair of the overview and scrutiny committee that looked at these proposals twice and at those meeting you didn't ask one question in relation to the maintenance charge. Had it not been for Councillor Potheary, don't worry

Councillor Pothecary, I shall mention you again later, this pretty much would not have been mentioned. That is a failure of you as a Chair of overview and scrutiny. That is terrible, something you should be ashamed of (*brief disruption*).

Furthermore, your question asks “every council resident living outside a grass verge will be charged £5 per week for grass cutting and will a weekly cut take place?” I made very clear earlier and a Councillor, someone who regularly pontificates about being a Councillor way back in 1847 or whatever it was, knows the difference between Housing Revenue Account and General Fund. We are not charging every council resident, we are, sorry, we were to charge some council tenants. I’m sorry, if you do not know the difference between council tenant and council resident, perhaps you should not stand for election again. So with your question being so inaccurate, I’m afraid the answer is a clear no.

Mayor

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

Councillor Rice

I am surprised with your answer Councillor Gledhill, but perhaps you can tell me and the public tonight, now let’s have some facts on the table. There are 10,000 tenants in this borough, you have proposed, you can call it a grass tax, you can call it a maintenance charge, call it what you like; but if you’re going to lever this on the bulk of these tenants, can you tell me tonight, £5 per week, how many of those 10,000 tenants you’re going to charge and what will you raise in collection of that? How many millions of pounds? You tell me and forget about the party politics nonsense. Just tell the people and tell us.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and Councillor Rice. It’s quite often I’m shocked at what you’re saying so I won’t carry that to heart. However, this is not about party politics, these questions you are asking, are too little, too late. You had the opportunity in December and February. Had it not been for Councillor Pothecary, guess what, this wouldn’t have been raised. As I mentioned earlier, you mentioned £15 weekly charge for sheltered housing 30 times. 27 words out of two meetings about the other charges. You should be ashamed of yourself. However, to your question, 6320 odd properties would be liable as it were, for the maintenance charge. This would equate to somewhere in region of £1,000,604. This is the cost that the HRA currently uses to maintain, as I said, the 50 hectares of grassland, the 14 play parks, the 2000 trees, flowers and hedgerows, 30 hectares of hard surfaces, 13 hectares of footpaths as I’ve already laid out.

Mayor

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

Councillor Rice

Now, you talk about Essex, Councillor, do you think it's appropriate for you to telephone the lead petitioner last night and talk about this? Do you think it's ethical to do that? And to get, before you answer, a member of staff to dig her telephone number out so you can contact her. Do you think that's ethical?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. It's not normal I get a dull roar before I stand up, but thank you very much. Yes, yes I do and the reason is, Councillor Rice, rather than sit in the meeting and pontificating, rather than sitting in an ivory tower somewhere and saying, 'We're going to do this, we're not going to do that, look at how popular we are. Oh guess what, it's all the government's fault all this terrible Tory cut etc.', I'll get on and do the job. Yes it was right, I did not have Mrs Imamzade's number at all. I asked Officers, Officers did the right thing. They contacted Mrs Imamzade and asked her if she was ok with this. She could have refused, she didn't. I spent 30 minutes speaking to Mrs Imamzade, it was very informative. Not only about what is happening tonight but about her past and what has happened there. I'm not going to discuss it but it was very interesting and I cannot wait to speak to her again because unlike you and the people at this side, who only talk to people if there's a vote involved, I want to talk to people when there are problems to be resolved. Thank you Mr Mayor.

3. **From Councillor Spillman to Councillor Gledhill**

To date how much has the 1% cut in social rents cost Thurrock Council and how much is it estimated to cost in total by 2020?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and Councillor Spillman for your question. The loss in projected income year-on-year to the Housing Revenue Account as a result of the reduction is estimated as follows;

2016-17 £460,000
2017-18 £450,000
2018-19 £441,000
2019-20 £431,000

An estimated total over four years - £1,780,000.

Mayor

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

Councillor Spillman

Can you agree that this Conservative government policy has been disastrous for the Council's finances? And it has placed the delivery of basic housing functions in jeopardy?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and Councillor Spillman for your question. If we look at the previous administration and what they've put, they've put a plan in place that was relied year on year for above inflation, rent increases. The government had to look, not only at the purse within Thurrock, but at the purse across the whole nation. I would only assume that reducing the council rents by 1%, means that the government can calculate exactly how much less housing benefit will be paid over those four years. Thereby, reducing the amount of money this council has to borrow to make ends meet. Don't forget, as mentioned by Councillor Hebb earlier, £1 for every four borrowed. Absolutely appalling situation to be in, the government had to make difficult decisions. Has it had an impact on Thurrock? Yes, it has. Are we trying to address that? Yes, we are.

Mayor

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

Councillor Spillman

When your Party Leader became Prime Minister, she stood on the steps of Downing Street and promised to lead a government that would look after the 'just about managing'. Are you not slightly embarrassed at having to resort to stealth grass tax, specifically targeted at the 'just about managing' in order to fill the black hole created by your government's disastrous policies?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and Councillor Spillman. Obviously, it's down to local authorities to set the amounts of which people can earn before they're entitled to some form of social housing. That is, as you're fully aware, currently under review. Building more council house, yes, will make more available. Have we been targeting a stealth tax? Now, let me think, a stealth tax, let's look at the word stealth. Something that is stealthy, something that flies under the radar, something that nobody sees. If nobody sees it, we got a whole public area, full of people who have seen it. We've got elected Members here that have seen it. Ok, we got a former Chair of Overview and Scrutiny who kind of missed it.

But we do have everybody fully aware. Now what were they aware of before? Were they aware of the £1.6 million pounds being taken out of their rent to ensure that the grounds were maintained or pay for the four million kilowatt hours of electricity that were being used communally? Or indeed, any of the other services which we are paying? Would that have been fair? Would people have known? No, that was the stealth tax. That's what we're getting rid of and that's what, hopefully as we go through this review, a fairer outcome as you and I discussed yesterday.

1hr 56mins

4. **From Councillor Spillman to Councillor Gledhill**

A year ago I questioned the portfolio holder on whether he believed enough new dwellings were likely to be built to meet the needs of Thurrock's growing population. After 15 months of this Conservative administration what action has been taken to try to improve the situation and has this action been successful?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Obviously, I've still kept one bricklayer out of doing his job by keeping him here. The overwhelming majority of new homes that are built in Thurrock are built by private house builders. In the year to April 2017, 603 net additional dwellings have been built in the borough, enabled by decisions at Planning Committee. Looking ahead the local plan will set the framework for future growth and we will receive the local plan issues and options report at our next meeting in October.

The HRA funded housing schemes will be on site this financial year at Calcutta Road Tilbury, Claudian Way Chadwell and Topps clubs in Grays delivering 112 new affordable homes within the housing system.

Further HRA developments require the HRA debt cap to be lifted and I will this week be writing to Government to make that case. The Council's regeneration company has now completed its first scheme of 128 homes at St Chads, and looking at second and third sites forward in the next 6 - 12 months at Belmont Road Grays and the Culver Centre in South Ockendon.

A recent analysis based on information from over 70 boroughs indicates that the average number of new Council homes being delivered nationally is around only 20 per year per authority. We want to continue exceeding this figure, but the current financial envelope of the HRA makes this very difficult. The overall cost of the 117 new homes at Calcutta Road, Claudian Way and Topps Club is £26.5 million.

As part of our bid for additional infrastructure funding to support sustainable housing development in the borough we are making the case straight to government that now is the time to consider some relaxation of the HRA borrowing limit in Thurrock to enable us to deliver the affordable homes we need. I will be pointing out in my letter that in Thurrock we have already used £7.3 million from Right to Buy receipts to re-invest in the current new build programme. Had we not, we would have been fined heavily by government and it's shame on the previous administration for holding that money back that would have cost a tenant here and everywhere in Thurrock significant amounts of money.

I will also refer in my letter to the fact that Thurrock is one of only a small number of boroughs who have made full use of our current borrowing limit – and yes, I will refer to the fact that we have extended service charges as part of further demonstrating that we are a prudent Council and landlord in the context of asking for more financial flexibility. I am asking for an increase in our borrowing limit to enable us to deliver around 500 more affordable homes. I will not say how much that is but it is a lot less than the £131m plus land costs the previous administration would have been happy spending to try and deliver the same outcome. An appalling amount of money.

We also recognise that to contain the cost of these new homes and to speed up their delivery we need to be looking at non-traditional methods of construction. We are actively looking for partners to deliver modular housing in Thurrock, which can minimise the disruption of development and provide energy-efficient homes and well-maintained for the future. Indeed, last week, I attended one of these modular homes companies and was very, very impressed. They can put these homes together at a rate of nearly four a day, something that we desperately need in this borough.

Mayor

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

Councillor Spillman

Thank you for that answer. As you know, I'm an advocate of the borrowing, we've got to do it, it's the only way forward. But can I ask, how many new council developments are being put forward by this leader's administration?

Councillor Gledhill

Again, I'm one of these people that does not go with this aim, fire and hopefully it works. I'm one of these who make sure we've got the money, that we put all the plans together and they are delivered where they need to be delivered. Not delivered after getting plan permission in 2030 costing nearly £425,000 to build each property, delivered three to four years later. Once the money is there with the plans we have, we will be happy to announce where these extra homes will be going.

Mayor

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

Councillor Spillman

We've got a meeting on Monday about the local plan and we've got an Officer coming into to our meeting to talk about all these wonderful plans and I know that Gary is beavering away trying to get it through. The thing is, the local plan that you're going to put to us, on current building rates, is total fantasy. Anything in that document is not even worth reading, the building plans in that document. Because there's no indication in the market, no indication of government funding that you're going to be able to get anywhere near to the figures that you're putting forward so are you not concerned that this borough is going to become only middle class people who can afford to live?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, Councillor Spillman. I'm not going to steal the thunder of Officers when they come to see you on Monday or indeed if Councillor Coxshall is there as well. The plan is actually a very good one, I support it as does the rest of my group and hopefully the rest of the Chamber will do. Is there flexibility within the market? Unfortunately, you can't ask me, you got to build, you got to build, if you then say, well there's no flexibility in the market in which to do so. If we get the master plan approved and it gets through, there is money that comes with that which then enables infrastructure. That infrastructure then makes it more affordable for developers to come to Thurrock to be able to build. When they build, because there isn't infrastructure money they're going to need to add to the cost of each house, they can then build cheaper which then means, they can start delivering as they should do, in my personal opinion, the full 30% at least, affordable housing that should happen with every application. We can't do that, as you rightly said without money, the money will be there if the plan is approved. Thank you.

5. From Councillor Jones to Councillor Gledhill

Does the Portfolio Holder for Housing believe that tenants in general needs Council properties, who will soon be liable to pay a service charge were adequately consulted?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Jones. I will focus on your consultation question rather than reiterate temporarily halting of the ground maintenance charge.

The extension of service charges was first proposed in a report to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December, and was the subject of a long discussion at that meeting, The Committee asked for the sheltered housing charges to be re-considered, and another report was taken to the Committee in February. At that second meeting officers outlined in detail the consultation for all tenants which was carried out. These were public meetings with the documents readily available online. The Council's website was updated to include details of the proposed changes and a link to a dedicated consultation portal which tenants could use to respond to the proposals.

However, as I have raised a number of times before tonight, not every resident is glued to the council website or a lot of them cannot access the internet. So In addition to this, every tenant who was potentially liable for the charges was written to individually, with a letter explaining the changes and a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document explaining in clear and simple terms what the extension of the charges would mean. For example part of the document runs as follows:

Who is affected? As a question.

All tenants living in flats or houses who receive one or more of the above services.

Question: If I live in a house, will I still be paying service charges?

You will not be charged for lift maintenance, heating and lighting of communal areas or secure door entry if you do not receive these services. You may have to pay a grounds maintenance service charge if the Council is providing this service close to your property'.

A full consultation feedback report capturing all the responses was submitted to Cabinet in July and taken into account in making the final decision.

Mayor

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

Councillor Jones

Thank you Mr Mayor. Maybe, Leader, I suggest we have the Council officials, I mean the Housing Officers and that, because a lot of the residents say they were confused with some of this stuff as they are with a lot of council stuff. So this is how the residents see it, they see they had a 1% reduction which amounted into pennies per week for them so now that causes a shortfall in the HRA as we all know. So to counteract these measures, this Conservative administration concocts something else up that costs them £5 per week. How is that fair on these residents?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Jones for your question. Obviously, you are quite right, some residents are confused when they receive stuff from the Council and there are quite clear numbers on there for them to contact to discuss this. They can also contact their elected Members. I know there are some that did and that came out in some of the consultation through overview and scrutiny, through the one Member that mentioned it, Councillor Potheary. When it comes to the pennies as you mentioned, by the end of the 1% reduction it's continually contributed to, the amount of rent reduction would be £11.60 a week on average. The maximum you would be charged, assuming, that the same charge was applied for grounds maintenance would be somewhere in the region of £7.65 I believe. So it would still be a difference. So whilst you say there are pennies now, over the lifetime of this, the residents would end up paying less in rent than they would in the increase of service charges.

Mayor

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

Councillor Jones

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Leader. The residents don't see it like this, whatever way you put it, they just see it as a stealth rent rise. It's as simple as that, that's what they say to us. Now, who would you say is responsible for this fiasco? Because there's a lot of rumours going around that, who do we actually blame at the door? (*Disruption from the Members*). Gerard (Councillor Rice), will you answer?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Jones and thank you the entire Labour group for taking the words right out of my mouth. However, I was not going to blame Councillor Rice for this at all. Or shall I? I'm not, I'm a man of principles, I can't blame him for everything as much as I'd like to. However, there is no one to blame for this. This is unpicking a number of years where every other local authority went down the route with a sight to charge, service charges from various services that residents get and that came out from part of the consultation and indeed, a number of the reports. I'm not going to name all of those that we found but it was a significant number. Pretty much all of those along the Thames corridor and into London. So who is to blame? Well, when people come out with the words 'stealth tax', 'grass tax', 'tenants tax', etc, when they know full well, it is not. When they know full well, one account pays for this and that is the only account tenants pay into, I would say it is them to blame. Thank you Mr Mayor.

6. From Councillor Allen to Councillor Gledhill

Can Council explain why so many residents in general needs housing that are without any communal areas are receiving letters telling them they need to pay a service charge?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

The letters sent to each tenant reflect the individual services they are receiving. In blocks with communal hallways a charge is being applied for heating and lighting these areas.

Where tenants in all types of general needs properties – including flats, houses and bungalows – are receiving a grounds maintenance services for the amenities near their properties, the standard grounds maintenance charge was also being applied. I use the term ‘was’ because as you know, as I repeatedly said this evening, we are suspending that pending proper overview and scrutiny. All this was derived from officers in a detailed exercise using maps showing all of the areas maintained under the service specification and information from the housing database. Clearly this wasn’t enough and as I have said the grounds maintenance charge has been suspended pending further scrutiny.

Up until yesterday, where a tenant makes clear they do not believe they should be subject to a particular charge, the service was re-visiting the decision to include them in the ongoing decision by going out to the property concerned and re-assessing the situation. Basically, an appeal. In a small number of cases this has led to an exemption – in most cases tenants have received a response confirming the charge and giving more details of how and why they were made liable to the grounds maintenance service charges.

Mayor

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

Councillor Allen

Thank you Mr Mayor and Councillor Gledhill. Like many colleagues, I have looked through the committee reports and minutes but can see no reference to general needs housing tenants receiving such charges. How can such a controversial policy have ever seen the light of day before going through basic scrutiny?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Allen. Everyone gets to the point of being fed up of blaming Councillor Rice, including myself. Whilst I’m not responsible for the minutes of the overview and scrutiny committee on both

times it went to them, I have got transcripts of those which I'm quite happy to share with you and indeed, any other elected Member, where it was made clear, repeatedly what this was for. Those questions were not asked with the exception of Councillor Potheary. So again, well done Councillor Potheary for raising that. It is not up to me again, to say how a scrutiny Chair conducts the scrutiny of any decisions put forward in advance. However, you would have thought the basic questions would be asked. You would have thought there would have been, when it comes to the minutes, that Chair or indeed any of the other Members, questioning it saying, 'I said this, I said that'. Unfortunately, that's not the case. Thank you.

Mayor

(Suspending orders agreed from Members). Thank you. Councillor Allen, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Allen

In yesterday's press release, Councillor Gledhill, you indicated that you wasn't even aware of the full scale and scope of these charges. Now, as Portfolio Holder for Housing and as Leader of the Council, are you not a little embarrassed that you voted such a controversial policy through two cabinets without understanding what you are voting for?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mayor and thank you Councillor Allen. At no point did I say that. What I said, there are a number of anomalies as we've gone through and I've found them after the decisions been made despite asking the questions beforehand. I have brought this to a shuddering halt as it should be. I've asked it to go back to scrutiny to ensure that the questions that were not asked previously have been asked. That includes, the information I only received on Monday, despite asking for it previously. Thank you.

7. From Councillor Fish to Councillor Gledhill

I have received many complaints from residents on Seabrooke Rise about youth nuisance. Can the Portfolio Holder tell me what steps the administration is taking to deal with this?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

The number of nuisance incidents reported to Essex Police between April and August for Grays Riverside ward was 66, an increase of 11 incidents from the same period last year. These figures include all tenures, and the ASB team is obtaining full details from the Police to focus on those relating to Council

accommodation i.e. Seabrooke Rise. As a landlord we do not currently have any open cases in the area and have received only 3 reports of ASB from our tenants over the same period.

We would encourage any residents who are encountering such issues to report them to the Anti-Social Behaviour team at the council in the first instance immediately. Or if it's urgent enough, to call 999 and to make sure the police are aware to tackle the problem appropriately.

I've also received a letter from residents on Seabrooke Rise that say that they themselves have not experienced anti-social behaviour and feel that the entire area is being demonised. I know that is not your intention, indeed, that was mentioned earlier by Councillor Kerin with the petition. I'm quite happy to discuss the issues and indeed, as Councillor Kerin pointed out earlier, the need for CCTV in a very small area. We'll look at that in association with the information we received already. Plus, any other witnesses that come forward now after this meeting. Thank you.

Mayor

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

Councillor Fish

Thank you Mr Mayor and for your answer Councillor Gledhill. Yes, I agree with you that we don't want to demonise the residents of Seabrooke Rise and that the complaints I'm referring to, do mainly relate to that area. I'm pleased to hear you're looking favourably at the CCTV. But also, the residents that have spoken to me about the anti-social behaviour amongst young people, have also noted the lack of youth facilities in the area. What steps are you taking to look at that and improve that?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, thank you Councillor Fish. Earlier in the summer, unfortunately, the name of the artist escapes me, is engaging with the youths on Seabrooke Rise to develop some street art furniture. I really do hope this continues. They are very, very passionate about coming to Thurrock because of what they've seen when they've come here and this is the kind of thing we got to do. Obviously, we got the new community house open and I would ask you and the other Members of the community to look to see what services these children wish to have. There's nothing worse than supplying services to young people in what we think they are and what they need. We need to engage with them. So please feel free to do so and our ten participation officers will help to facilitate where we can.

Mayor

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

Councillor Fish

No, Mr Mayor.

8. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

Does the Leader agree that Thurrock Council lacks the managerial leadership to deliver big or transformational projects?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, Councillor Gerrish. Tonight, as you may have remembered, I know it's been a long meeting, we have agreed the creation of a new director for Environment and Highways. Additionally the head of paid service has made clear that there will a change in two assistant director post to help to increase capacity in the place delivery part of the council due to the significant number of big capital schemes to be delivered in the coming years, including a number of National Strategic Infrastructure Projects which are running concurrently, you've got to remember, 64 of them nationally since 2008. The announcement of Lower Thames Crossing and the work that needs to go in them to show that we are against the Lower Thames Crossing, just for clarity, Councillor Duffin. Monies awarded for Grays Underpass received in January 2017, building more enterprise units for Thurrock businesses, building more homes as mentioned by Councillor Coxshall and Councillor Spillman, through the Council's housing company, widening the A13 the Council's largest capital project, a programme of community hubs, and the fact that this administration is bringing forward ambitious and exciting plans to deliver change in Purfleet and Tilbury. All this at no extra cost to the taxpayer. So I think our actions this evening in agreeing those positions, show that now, we have the managerial capacity to deliver.

Mayor

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

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. On the subject of leadership, does it believe that given the balanced political nature of the Council, his administration has given enough weight to the appeals of Members? Particularly on the grass tax where Members gave a very clear signal in February, in the budget setting meeting to halt those proposals.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Sorry, Councillor Rice, you know what I'm going to say. We listen, obviously, to Members, it goes to overview and scrutiny, we look at the reports that come from overview and scrutiny and we take on board the recommendations when only one Member, Councillor Potheary, mentioned these charges. When, it would appear that the whole committee wasn't even particularly bothered. In February, it was made very clear that we was discussing the HRA as it was, not with any planned service charges on them. Again, made very clear. It was made very clear on Forward Plan when we were making the decision. Were there any questions raised in relation to this? On service charges? No.

Mayor

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

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. Tonight, the Leader's blamed the implementation of the policy, presumably that's for Officers for the failure of this grass tax policy. He's blamed scrutiny for the decision. In his version of events, he seems as surprised as anyone that this seems to be actually happening. Is that what he calls leadership?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor, Councillor Gerrish. No. I'll tell you what leadership is, it's not about making the popular decisions, it's about making the decisions we need to make to turn this Council around and make sure there is enough money to pay for services. In this circumstance, the repairs. I have made very, very clear it should not be the administration who sit as the Chairs of overview and scrutiny as it was under your administration previously. That is also leadership. Unfortunately, when that fails, it has failed on this occasion, I'm glad we now have a new Chair of overview and scrutiny for Housing and indeed other scrutiny Chairs. Again, I will maintain, leadership is not about playing to the crowd, leadership is not about making the popular decision, it's about making the tough ones to make sure we can deliver.

9. From Councillor Gerrish to Councillor Gledhill

Does the Leader believe that the new tenant service charges makes Thurrock fairer or less fair?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Something being fairer is a subjective term Councillor Gerrish which I'm sure you're aware. Is making every council tenant pick up the bill for services they may not receive at the cost of them receiving better repairs and improvements to their home? No I don't think that was fair. Is making tenants pay for services they may benefit from to ensure that there is money freed up for those repairs and improvements? Yes, I think that is fair.

Mayor

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

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. Can we just try and nail this point about differences between homeowners and tenant charges, and can I give the Leader a scenario? So if a tenant, subject to the grass tax, buys their standard terraced house, so not in a block of flats, would they still be liable to pay once they've bought that house?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and Councillor Gerrish. Obviously, I cannot say with 100% certainty but it is normal for any house and we have a number of houses across the borough in private areas that pay service charges for private areas in which they live, that these service charges would remain. I cannot, legally unpick nearly 30 years of Right to Buy in Thurrock where previous tenants have bought their house, sold them on and then tried to apply a service charge to them. You know that, I know that, it is what it is.

Mayor

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

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Mr Mayor. It is what it is and what it is seems to be a pretty big mess at the moment. He's been forced to now suspend these charges and we can think many things about that but being surprised is probably not one. Does he think that he showed an error of judgement in introducing these charges despite very clear public and council opposition?

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and Councillor Gerrish. I'm going to refer to my earlier answer in relation to leadership. We're not here to make the popular decisions, we're here to make the decisions to make sure that everybody gets the services in which they need when it comes to repairs. The way that they will need to be done is by introducing service charges for things that residents

get individually. Now, I'm sorry if people are upset by these new charges. As I've said, I'm not particularly happy with the anomalies that were brought to my attention yesterday and indeed, for those I've been speaking with residents since this became out in public and indeed, from speaking with other elected Members, not just Councillor Spillman.

10. **From Councillor Smith to Councillor Gledhill**

Would the Portfolio Holder confirm that all communal residencies in the housing stock meet the full and latest fire safety requirements, in particular fire escapes and entry and exit fire doors?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

All Council blocks with communal areas have current fire risk assessments in place. The assessments are carried out every three years on a rolling programme. A planned programme of fire safety works is delivered every year, in order to implement any recommendations from these assessments as well as other enhancements identified from within the service.

In the case of older buildings it is not always possible to retro-fit systems which meet the latest building regulations in full – this is fully understood by the Fire service and recognised in their detailed inspections (*disruption from public gallery*) and recommendations tailored to the actual situation in each building.

The means of escape in each building are situated in areas maintained as 'sterile' environments, with staff promptly removing any abandoned items which are identified or reported. Communal fire doors are replaced whenever necessary based again on our own assessments and recommendations for the Essex Fire service and the specialist contractor (previously a senior firefighter) who carries out the risk assessments.

Fire safety remains a top priority in the Housing service – we will be sending regular bulletins to all residents in our stock to maintain awareness and update them on the actions being taken to ensure their safety and security. As an example, us going the extra length of ensuring that our cladding is not that of, what we saw as the tragedy of Grenfell Tower.

Mayor

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

Councillor Smith

Thank you Mr Mayor. In particular Councillor, I bring to your attention, the communal blocks in Romford Road, Aveley, where elderly residents, vulnerable residents, are concerned that some of the entrance/exit doors are not closing properly. The closing function where it should shut is failing and also the door and lock mechanisms are failing as well. This needs to be addressed and looked into if that's ok.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Smith for bringing this to my attention. This is the first I was made aware of this and I can assure you, first thing in the morning, I shall bring this up with Officers and I will write to you and the other elected Members of Aveley with the outcome including the residents who are affected. Thank you Councillor.

Mayor

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

Councillor Smith

No.

11. **From Councillor Potheary to Councillor Gledhill**

At Full Council in March I submitted a petition on behalf of the residents of Seabrooke Rise and the six Grays high rises against introducing new tenant service charges. What consideration was given to this petition by the Portfolio Holder in making the decision to push ahead with plans for new tenant service charges?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Potheary. Firstly I would like to apologise to you due to an administrative and oversight you did not receive a written response which you should have done in relation to a your petition and this should have now been corrected. Has this now been received.

Councillor Potheary

No

Councillor Gledhill

It will be received by 9am by tomorrow morning. The content of the petition was considered in the normal way and taken into account along with the responses to the consultation. The decision to proceed with the charges was taken after two scrutiny meetings, I'm not going to go over that again, however it was in which you, you alone, made your concerns for the general need of residents which were obviously listened to. Cabinet also took into account the fact that tenants on Housing Benefit will have the charges included in their rent, and any tenants in financial difficulties will receive full support from the service not necessarily financial.

Mayor

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

Councillor Potheary

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you for your response Councillor Gledhill. I wish my warnings had been heeded as we would have had this pantomime tonight. However I am going to quote back to you Councillor Gledhill that something you said towards the beginning of the meeting which was a very long time ago and I think you said in response to question by Councillor Barbara Rice. You said we take a consultation response based on the outcome sort so you ignored the consultation because it didn't suit you. You ignored the petition because it didn't suit you. You ignored what I said on Housing O&S because it didn't suit you. You did it anyway. You went ahead and why because you thought Council tenants were a soft touch. I think tonight it has shown they are not. I had hoped in the wake of the Glenfill Tower fire we had stopped with tenant bashing. This is specific to my high rises in the borough does Councillor Gledhill really believe it is fair to force residents placed by the Council in a 14 storey tower block to pay for having a lift, is a lift really a privilege. Will you reconsider that charge as well.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. I am not going to mention anything about pantomimes and I am sorry that I do not think our residents sorry our tenants are soft touches and indeed accusing me of tenant bashing is somewhat distasteful. Do I believe it's a luxury it's a lift I wouldn't want to live on the 12 floor and have to drag all my shopping up to those 12 or 14 floors or indeed children in prams it is part of the construction of a tower block. We have service level agreements to ensure they are repaired as soon as they break down. Should the tenants in those tower blocks be paying for them yes should the other approximately 9000 tenants across the borough should they be paying for the servicing and maintenance of the lifts through their rent no.

Mayor

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

Councillor Potheary

Thank you Mr Mister. Thank you Councillor Gledhill for your response. So far this conservative council has gone after toddlers, vulnerable pensioners in need of sheltered housing and has now decided to penalise those least able to afford the extra charges and making them pay for the most basic amenities, lift and grass verges. Please bear in mind that tenants of the high risers already pay for additional charges for their caretakers, this is on top of that as well. Does Council Gledhill agree that this is just another example of how conservatives are strong against the weak and weak against the strong.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you for Councillor Potheary for your question. When you say attacking toddlers I assume you mean Councillor Halden fantastic change to the family centres um children's centres, sorry, which has proved we are outreaching more people getting more services for less rather than sitting in a building somewhere in the borough waiting for someone to turn up. Again it gets back to something you said here, caretaking, the residents of those flats pay extra for caretaking reason being that this is an extra service that they get direct to themselves. They also get the lift service themselves and the communal lighting in there that needs to be paid for. It should not come out of the 10,000 tenants across the whole of the borough to pay for this service. So I will reiterate it is right for these service charges to remain and are no different to any other or a majority of other local authorities in the immediate area that make these kind of charges. Will I reconsider them, no.

12. From Councillor Collins to Councillor Gledhill

Is the Leader able to outline what the £2 million he expects to raise from the new service charges will be used for?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Collins. The revenue from these charges will be used to pay for these services and these services alone. However this frees up money in the HRA to put back into our housing stock to the responsive repairs budget. This was a budget that ran at a deficit of half of million pounds last year because of the amount of work that needed to be done. However due to finance prudence across the whole of the HRA a balanced budget was delivered at the end of the financial year. Detailed budget proposals shared throughout the process and with the scrutiny committee also show that the additional revenue from the extension of charges will be used from the following. As in the money freed up by these

charges were paying from the direct. To expand the Transforming Homes programme to include the provision and upgrade of loft insulation works in the most energy inefficient properties in the stock at a cost of around over the next 3 years of about £750,000. Council also has 138 non-traditional properties which require extensive refurbishment to ensure they remain fit for purpose for another thirty years. In deed we had to spend a significant amount of money on urgent repairs recently as the cladding fell off because of poor neglect over the years. The estimated cost of these works is £2.9 million and will be spread over four years from 2017/18 to 2020/21.

Mayor

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

Councillor Collins

I just want to query a figure of £11.60 savings a week was mentioned can you tell me what portion of those tenants were in work, can you tell me what proportion of the current housing tenants are currently working please.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. I will make clear the £11.60 would have been the amount of rent that would have been charged had the previous administration rent increases over the years being applied. So residents will paying £11.60 more at the end of the 1% reduction. In relation to how many residents are, sorry how many tenants, are working I don't have that exact figure however I am pleased to announce 48% only 48% of the rent received in relation to the HRA is paid for by the housing benefits scheme. So more than 50% of the rent is paid by tenants direct and doesn't come in that state of the form of housing benefit.

Mayor

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

Councillor Collins

That's good hear. Can you outline what percentage of those residents could afford to rent privately to free up much needed social housing for those that cannot afford to rent in the private sector please.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Collins for your question. There were proposals as we know for what was dubbed pay to stay for those residents that were deemed that they could afford to pay the local rentable value as we all know those in private rented accommodation know that renting

in Thurrock is exceptionally high there is now a very large section of the community that under the old scheme that have got earning a little bit too much money that need to qualify for the housing property but have absolutely nowhere near enough to be able to afford to pay for private renting. We are currently looking at that with a proposal going to the overview and scrutiny to increase the amount of money that residents can earn before they qualify for housing properties. Unfortunately there is no methodology for us to find out how much residents are earning and even if we did we actually in no position to ask them to move out of their property at the moment into private rented accommodation or to purchase the property. That part of the legislation was stopped with the change of prime minister.

13. **From Councillor Redsell to Councillor Gledhill**

Could the Leader outline the actual cost of building council homes agreed under Labour?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Redsell. Seabrooke Rise (The Echoes, 53 units): the final account was settled at £12,873,634. Or cost of around £243 on average per unit. Sorry £243,000 per unit. Of this just over £1 million was community housing fund related and the Council received a HCA grant of £1,325,000. Derry Avenue (Bruyns Court, 25 units): the final account was settled at £5,872,500. An approximate cost of £235,000 per unit. The Council also received HCA grant of £1,225,000. Bracelet Close (12 units): final account was £5,098,365. A cost of a whopping average £425,000 per unit. A total spend of £23,844,499 for nine properties. I need to make it very clear that it does not include a land value. But had this been a private company building we also have had to purchase the land in which these buildings stand. So add to that the Council land plot costs that is over and above what you would normally pay for a brand new property in Thurrock at any level.

Mayor

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

Councillor Redsell

Thank your Mr Mayor. These building costs are astronomical compared to the building in the private sector can you let me know what you will be doing to reduce these costs in the future.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Redsell. Councillor Rice I will not be taking your advice and I will also not be taking your advice when it comes to spending money on building council houses. I'm sorry but the price is quoted £425,000 for a property in Stanford whilst I am sure there are lovely properties in Stanford, whilst I am sure there are lovely properties in Stanford. 2013 planning permission all delivered on my watch couldn't do anything about the costs. What am I doing to reduce this. We have engaged with the builders who are using modular homes which not only does it reduce the actual costs of the building materials which reduces the costs of labour. Something that we obviously need to do both in the physical sense and indeed the political sense and we will be setting a price for these properties when we go to the HCA but I will not be announcing how much we intend to pay per unit as I want the market to come to us and say this is the best we can do not try and match how much we are saying we have got per unit.

Mayor

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

Councillor Redsell

Thank you Mr Mayor. It's a shame to see so much money spent on buildings these houses when more could have been built if the contract to build them was much more lower. Could you possibly give us an outline on how many more could have been built if the build costs were similar to those of the private housing market.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Redsell. I am no building expert but have spoken to one of our members who has an awful lot of experience in this. I have been told that you would normally pay out one third for the land, one third for build costs and one third for profit. That said we are not here to make profit we should be paying for land and we should be paying for the build as you don't pay for land its more cost to the build. Quite clearly a third more minimum if we go along with what I intend to put forward to the HCA and we will be able to build a significant number of more social housing to get our residents off the housing list into new properties that we can afford from the housing revenue account and indeed maintain over the years.

14. From Councillor Redsell to Councillor Gledhill

Can the Leader outline what the housing rent levels are now and what they would have been had Labours 2015 plan been adhered?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mister. Thank you Councillor Redsell. I have already outlined this earlier that there would be a £11.60 difference at the end of this at the moment is it just around the £5 mark from just over £86 at the moment to around £90 had the original plan been kept in place.

Mayor

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

Councillor Redsell

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you for that Councillor Gledhill. When the properties that you spoke of were built what would be the rent.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Redsell. When the new properties were built at the Echoes the other place previously outlined the previous administration set 70% limit which is 70% of the indict rent which is obviously significantly more than the current housing stock. When these come on line there will be a business case and to how best these could be afforded and indeed the money coming in ploughed back in to the housing revenue account. To either build more houses or to improve our stock. I would not be able to give an exact figure but we would be looking at something in the region of 70 per cent mark of those that have already applied.

Mayor

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

Councillor Redsell

No thank you Mr Mayor.

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

1. From Councillor Duffin to Councillor Hebb

Will the Council be pushing ahead with the Communications Strategy as agreed at Cabinet?

Mayor

Councillor Hebb

Councillor Hebb

Thank you Councillor Duffin yes we will be pushing ahead with the communication strategy or be it not the one that was initially shaped out at Cabinet. We do want to push ahead with this very valuable document it's not just about a document on a shelf it's about how we engage with local representatives on the public participation piece that we talked about earlier. How we can encourage filming, commercial opportunities, the way we talk with residents in terms of twitter. I'll try not to say it how I said it earlier. Be more personel, be less corporate was the expression. But also supporting the residents who were not as IT savvy as others were. We want to be able to support them. There was a lot of maturity in that document and that was recognised with some of the local press. In the answer to your next question yes the Cabinet will look heavily at the proposal that was made by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny last Tuesday, um ya last week, to be specific there were 22 words Mr Mayor out of about 1500 that were disagreed with. I take that challenge as in deed I did on the 29 June when I attended the meeting to discuss that call in. It is now the 27 September I said back then that Cabinet would reflect and take on board the discussions at that meeting, three months later after some delay I am saying it again. But we are going to do, get on with it, we can now do. I think it is a good suggestion speaking frankly my whole Cabinet colleagues also think along those lines. The spirit of the strategy remains but ultimately the spirit of the call in should also be respected at the forth coming Cabinet.

Mayor

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

Councillor Duffin

Thank you very much for your response. While large parts of the comms strategy were good there were areas which needed serious work. A large of the part of the way the comms teams deal with the press. So the comms team said the strategy strongly very, very strongly worded with regards to making sure the accuracy of titles of press releases, press stories, so why on the 27 July why did the Council actively mislead the media with a titled press release which led to a local newspaper luckily one that is not being represented tonight miss report what happened at Council, while I understand you are not responsible for writing the press releases can you please look into it and make sure our Council's comms team is correctly reporting what actually happens in Council and not making it up to suit their narrative.

Councillor Hebb

I will have a look, look can we specify this is where the Council was united, and well frankly it didn't say it was wholly united but that it was united. I think

we need to stop having a nag at the Council's comms team as quite frankly they are the sort of people that are getting up at 5am in the morning on an August Saturday and Sunday morning when we had an horrendous issue down on the Manorway. I didn't see many others in this chamber or in this building here. The comms team were there throughout the whole thing. With respects they do a very good job and I am proud of the team I have got with me. To answer your question about the comms strategy I did make a point that any comms that we couldn't look at a standards and audit report at looks at some of the appropriateness of some of the comms, I don't think that was out of order. Jack, you have been known yourself to put a few nice PRs out made out of a couple of tweets, create a four paragraph document but god I am worse for that your equally as culpable . But we look at it, we will look at it and let's carry out working together. Yes we look at it certainly.

Mayor

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

Councillor Duffin

Well I would say if you call something Council united you are obviously united on something and not voting different ways. There are different interpretations of it. I just want to pick up on something that happened tonight with Councillor Gledhill confirming this evening that he was not aware of the first sentence of his press release last night, can I ask whose writing the press releases, why Councillor Gledhill doesn't know what's in them and can I recommend that potentially yourself or Councillor Halden give him some political advice.

Councillor Hebb

You have got more advice that you could give us than we could ever give you Rob so don't worry we have your back. With respect I shall defer outside of this meeting as I am sure Councillor Gledhill will give you a very direct blunt and conducive answer.

2. From Councillor Liddiard to Councillor Coxshall

Would the Portfolio Holder please update members and inform the residents of Tilbury what action will be taken to mitigate and compensate for disruption due to the upcoming 10 years of misery caused by three developments of national importance i.e. Lower Thames Crossing, Tilbury 2 and the replacement Electricity Generating Station

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

With all of those proposals are from a Nationally Infrastructure Projects. Thurrock Council is not the Planning Inspector but is working with the detailed plans to arrange to the pre-application stage. This includes mitigation packages that accompany any applications. About what I am surprised is that the word misery is used in your question because I don't look at these a misery but to look at them as an opportunity. I am trying to be polite, as an opportunity not as a problem. If you come into something thinking that these are a problem you are always going to get what we have had for many years, the Thurrock shrug, the thing that always gets done to us. If we work constructively with these three projects we could get some very good deals and some good advantageous things for the Tilbury Town. There is no doubt about it Tilbury Town does need some love. It needs the love and it needs that and this is an opportunity. One of things, let's talk about the individual cases. Let's look at Tilbury 2 first. Tilbury 2 was the idea of a green lung to actually get Tilbury to actually move and see that and see that fantastic fort there that the Queen Elizabeth was in and open that up and make that more accessible. We can't afford that as a council we have been talking about that if we live beyond our means but if Forth Ports are going to spend one billion pounds on Tilbury 2 we can see some great advantages there immediately I think the main link between the two and the railway line are good sight lines, with good access across these are my ideas but as we go through the planning communication process we can see some other ideas which I have also wanted, good indication to get these ideas in if we don't ask we don't get. You have got to ask, so that's what we want we want people to ask what people want for this Tilbury 2. If you look at the other one I am absolutely astonished that you mention the new power station. Look at the noise that when Ed Miliband so called the spad Polly Billington decided to bring in the carbon, what was the long laborious European name for it, the combustion palm directive that closed Tilbury and we all agree we all wanted a power station how dare they, you now say that Tilbury C is going to be misery. That's new jobs, a new power station and sustainability in our energy markets, that's ridiculous. And it was the [swear word deleted], oh sorry, Councillor so I can't believe it.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Coxshall I think your time is up. Councillor Liddiard, do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Liddiard

Thank you Mr Mayor. Only a fool could see that all three accumulative effects of three developments of national importance wouldn't cause misery for some of our residents. Can I count on you to support all future discussions so that we can minimise and mitigate circumstances please.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall do you want to start off with an apology, again.

Councillor Coxshall

Sorry, Yes yes it is so frustrating for me. What we have got is three projects that can deliver the transformation to Tilbury. It can, I say it can and I understand the concerns that you have got as previous national projects weren't done properly. That's the problem and we have had too many generations of Thurrock, you look at it and then the project has been failing and it's failed because we have never had that first conversation. I am hoping that this doesn't I can't give you a complete guarantee but I want it that good engagement we have a good set of demands from all members for all the residents living in Tilbury to actually deliver something around that next month is when I launch the Tilbury master plan. This a master plan across the whole Tilbury Town including what could come from these and what we need out of this. Because we can't have Tilbury staying as it is, I understand that there is nothing in but we need to deliver good quality, high quality buildings in Tilbury. High quality high street in Tilbury, high quality health provision which we are badly missing and high quality green space to make sure that Tilbury just doesn't look its jugged on the end of a dock. That is exactly what I won't for Tilbury and this is how we can get that is to making sure that we can get some money from these three national developments and with your help like questioning talking and asking and making sure that we can make sure that the developments going forward is international and we will get that. Now I understand that residents of Tilbury it is awkward we have had too many times if you look where I used to live in Purfleet I had to go in Purfleet there was a terrible problem where you had to go to a petrol station to get a sandwich or get a loaf of bread. It is nearly that stage in Tilbury as well like we can't have that we need communities and place. Place sounds very corporate like we were talking earlier. It's the place where people live and play and that's what we want to deliver from these three projects.

Mayor

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

Councillor Liddiard

No thank Mr Mayor.

3. From Councillor Stone to Councillor B Little

Could the Council liaise with Highways England as to why the 50 mph restriction between Grays and Wennington on the A13 are still in place even though the carriage works have finished?

Mayor

Councillor Little

Councillor Little

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Stone for your question. The Council has been in contact with Highways England, who confirm that the A13 Average Speed Cameras between the A1012 (Grays) and A1306 (Wennington) junctions are permanent, and although linked to the M25 Junction 30/A13 Corridor Relieving Congestion Scheme, they were constructed before the start of the major scheme and have been operational for almost three years. They were never temporary average speed cameras for the major scheme and were never publicised as such.

Mayor

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

Councillor Stone

No thank you Mr Mayor.

4. From Councillor Smith to Councillor Watkins

Earlier in the summer, Council notified residents of unusual vehicular breakdowns with the refuse vehicles. Over the past 6/8 weeks Aveley residents have continually had missed bin collections, suggesting the problem maybe wider than the "6 vehicles broken down". Would the Portfolio Holder be able to offer an explanation for those missed collections and consider offering an apology to Aveley residents for the inconvenience they have experienced together with an assurance going forward that they will receive a first class service?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mister, thank you Councillor for your question. Firstly I would like to assure residents that this council does offer a first class service but of course I would apologise to the residents of Aveley who have experienced any issues with bin collections over the last couple of weeks. I would like to add that we are one of the few councils across the country that have kept and maintained a weekly bin service which I think is a great service which is a greater achievement for this council but for also the residents and they should be proud of that. Yes as you have seen and it's been discussed tonight obviously we have now made the order for 27 new waste vehicles with over £4 million of investments but we have had many, many issues over the recent weeks with defects with the vehicles that could range from anything such as a light bulb going out to the crane not lifting the bins not working properly. Obviously for safety reasons for public if the vehicle has in any way got defects has to be serviced and maintained so that is what we are doing

making sure the service for residents and the protection of residents is first class. If there are any issues obviously have been expressed and no doubt reported when we do get reported to us the team is working very hard every single day to get these issues corrected will get them corrected. If you have any further issues please do email me

Mayor

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

Councillor Smith

I would like to put on record the guys that work the fleet are absolutely superb and they have been collecting my own bins for 15 years so top hats to them guys. Just a couple of things would you look into a repetitive failures in Stanford Gardens, Aveley Close and St Michaels Close in Aveley and could you also look into what we just discussed a moment ago about the transfer of waste from one residents wheelie bin to another residents wheelie bin which I found quite strange. But I am led to believe that that is actual policy but perhaps you could come back to me on that later please. Thank you.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor. Yes as it has previously been expressed please do inform me of all those issues and those areas and we will get those investigated immediately. I would ask all councillors in the chamber this evening as many have already done if you do have any issues with bin collections please do make me aware and I can action and look into it urgently. Thank you.

Mayor

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

Councillor Smith

No thank you Mr Mayor.

5. From Councillor V. Holloway to Councillor S. Little

Can the Portfolio Holder reassure Councillors and residents that adequate social care services are available at all times?

Mayor

Councillor Little

Councillor Little

There is also some pressure on social services as we all know but Thurrock's Adult Social Care has been very successful in providing services to meet demand through a combination of initiatives and approaches and a remarkable commitment by the team, they are absolute fabulous. Recently waiting lists for services have been cut significantly which I am pleased to say for example last spring there were about 50 on the waiting list, last week we only had 2 which was really good news and in addition to this 18 months ago we had people waiting for occupational therapy 16 weeks we have now cut that down to 4 to 6 weeks. Whilst it is impossible ever to say that adult social services will be available immediately for everyone I can reassure you that the Council has the situation well managed and those most at risk will always get the appropriate services when they need to have them.

Mayor

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

Councillor Holloway

Thank you for your reply and hope your back gets better. I am referring to a couple of weekends ago that were raised by my residents and other council colleagues where people felt they did not receive the care they expected over a couple of weekends. I understand this was due to staffing shortages but I know no one did this intentionally I agree and I echo that we have got a fantastic team but we definitely do have a problem with regards to attracting staff and would like to ask the portfolio holder what the plan is to make sure that these incidents where the people did not have the care expected at the weekend does not happen again and also is there anything that we can do as Councillors to help as I know you will agree that this is not an ok situation.

Councillor Little

Thank you Councillor Holloway. It would be lovely if you all came out to help, absolutely brilliant. But actually the two weekends that are always the worst or whenever they fall is the last weekend in August, the bank holiday, and usually Christmas. And that is because people either using the last of their summer holidays up or they like to be with families at Christmas. It doesn't matter what occupation whether you work for Amazon, Argos or anywhere all the staff levels seem to drop then. But I can assure you there was a little bit of a rumour mongering shall I say that we were lacking yes we were working flat out but everyone had their calls made. And if we don't have them made I get very few things through from other local councillors telling me a service has been missed. When I do get these calls through or emails through I am usually pretty quick picking up emails and the team will tell you I am straight on the telephone to make sure they are covered. So you know with all the extra money we had £2.5 million Conservative government money coming in we had the £1.7 million from the preset that is £4.2 of new money coming into Thurrock. You know this has been amazing for us and you know the government recognise yes we do have a problem but yes we are sorting it. So

if you please any of you councillors if you have a problem just come straight to me, email me and I will usually pick it up quite quickly. Thank you.

Mayor

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

Councillor Holloway

Just briefly. You identified the 2 specific weekends that caused problems do we have plans in place knowing those weekends have issues and this won't happen again on those weekends next year.

Councillor Little

Yes as we always notice that this is what always happens I am sure you know when Councillor Barbara Rice will tell you, yes it is something that everyone knows usually happens so yes that was why we were covered. So yes thank you for the question and as I say I can only iterate that if any of you have any problems with the elderly and the care packages and what we are providing in Thurrock please let me know. I try and look out and go around as many places as I can. I actually follow care workers around, I look like a stalker sometimes but heyho do I care? No. So thank you for your question.

6. **From Councillor V. Holloway to Councillor B. Little**

Parking in Angle Road, South Stifford is a major problem. Can the Portfolio Holder for Transport outline what could be done to assist residents?

Mayor

Councillor Little

Councillor Little

Thank Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Holloway for your question. This road was investigated as part of a residents request and road space is very limited there. There is no scope to provide any additional parking provision within the adopted highway, however, officers would be happy to meet with residents and ward councillors to explore some other possibilities.

Mayor

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

Councillor Holloway

Thank you and I really appreciate the offer of meeting and will definitely be taking that up. There are also other roads as well in the area. Mill Lane is another one that residents have again raised issues with parking and I am sure it is just not just me that has certain roads in the borough that have parking problems. Do we have long term plans in place to deal with roads like this or do is it meeting by meeting to have it sorted.

Councillor Little

Thank you Mr Mayor. Thank you Councillor Holloway for your supplementary question. We take each case on its individual merits because they are all different, different locations and different circumstances. Some near schools that you can appreciate are dependent on people going to school to other ones when you are down the dead end of a road like you do an angle road so they are all treated differently and different proposals are put forward. But there are some possible solutions but some of them are not very pleasing for some residents like some residents parking in places that they could park rather than parking outside their houses

Mayor

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

Councillor Holloway

No thank you Mr Mayor.

7. From Councillor Maney to Councillor Coxshall

Given the history of reported planning infringements associated with Buckles Lane in South Ockendon does the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration agree that it is high time the council took action to address the situation there?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

Thank you. After many years of turning a blind eye to this problem the Conservative Council here, today, recently served 45 planning contravention notices on individual plots. I can also confirm that there are plans for a budget resource to make the process move forward here in this area. There is already a large number of meetings have been held and internal meetings and external bodies to ensure a full and investigative matters across the area. This will also help us inform and actually decide amongst when projects are in the local plan to do what can be done in that area of Buckles Lane and not just leave it as a festering sore. We anticipate to have this work completed by

the end of this municipal year and will assist with other works alongside the local plan as well.

Mayor

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

Councillor Maney

Yes thank you Mr Mayor. I am pleased to hear that at long last the Council does appear to be taking some action instead of hiding behind whatever regeneration or planning documents is being drawn up at the time. My question to the portfolio holder is that. Does he agree essentially that the question of fairness. For far too long, for years in fact, there has been a complete lack of parity in the planning rules in Thurrock with residents and businesses elsewhere being held to one set of rules when some people in Buckles Lane seem to create their own and this is no longer acceptable. I know Members won't be able to see this but I was recently sent two aerial photographs of Buckles Lane. This one was from 2003; I know Members won't be able to see it. Another one I received was from 2015 and the scale of development is simply shocking. It is infringement of the green belt. It was gone on for far too long and there needs to be some action. I know the Portfolio Holder has given a commitment to look at that and my other question is that does he agree with me that from this point onwards any new unlawful incursions that are identified should be dealt with in the spirit of enforcement rather than regularisation. Thank you Mr Mayor.

Councillor Coxshall

Yup, I understand and moving forward here is a very critical point. We have a massive ingrowth of a large development that is growing and growing and what we need to do is make sure it is regularized, it is actually people there need to have some certainty of their life and moving forward there are sites there that I have visited that they need to have some regularisation on that site and they have been there many years and need to be fairly treated and that is what the Council needs to do. What we need to do going forward is to make sure that this does not keep expanding, expanding, expanding and that I can give that undertaking that we need to call it and look at it and I think this local plan as it goes through is an opportunity to look at Buckles Lane and that land around there what we can do and how we can make sure the Council make everyone abide by the law and as well as that make sure the residents there who have been there for many years are regularised and safe and feel that their homes are in Thurrock.

Mayor

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

Councillor Maney

No thank you Mr Mayor.

8. **From Councillor Maney to Councillor Watkins**

Would the Portfolio Holder confirm that it remains this council's policy to prohibit horse grazing during winter months on local authority owned land in the Mardyke Valley? Further, to ask that the Portfolio Holder takes steps to ensure the said policy is enforced now that summer has passed?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mayor and thank you Councillor Maney for your question. Yes the Council does have an agreement in place and works very closely with the grazer during the winter months of course the Council takes animal welfare as a top priority and thank you for sending me some of the press articles from a few years ago and have seen first-hand some of the shocking stuff that have gone on and should we are be made aware of any issues that have been breached the Council will act swiftly to resolve it.

Mayor

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

Councillor Maney

Thank you Mr Mister I do have a brief supplementary. [*Public Disruption and Council Adjourned*]. Thank you Councillor Watkins for answering the question, I can't remember what it was now as there has been a long passage of time, certainly last year and possibly other years the Council or Council Officers have given an undertaking to inspect the Mardyke Valley to make sure there are horses grazing beyond the period when they shouldn't be there and it was been publicly stated that there aren't any horses but for anyone who drives over the Mardyke Valley over the A13 can see them, it's not difficult, to see horses in the field. What I am asking of Councillor Watkins is that he instructs Officers to write to the owners of the horses now before the November when the winter grazing is due to end write to them now and remind them of their obligation to remove the horses before that time. Thank you Mr Mayor.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Mr Mister and thank you Councillor Maney for your supplementary question. Yes I will ensure that does happen as soon as possible and make sure that we remind the grazer of what is in place.

Mayor

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

Councillor Maney

No thank you Mr Mayor.