

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 27 February 2019

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public

There was 1 question from members of the public.

1. From Mr Jones to Councillor Watkins

In September 2017 as ward Councillor for Stanford East and Corringham Town Centre I handed in a petition and spoke on behalf of residents regards the poor condition of the road surface in Gordon Road Corringham between Springhouse Road and the Sorrels. Could the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways please supply an update on this issue?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins, please respond.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Mr Jones for your question.

Speaking on people who are coming to the end of their tenure this year, it's good to see you back in the Chamber this evening as well. And I think it's also right to say that I do remember you delivering that petition and I think actually that some things do go a bit unnoticed sometimes if it weren't for some former Councillors will do after tenure is up because they still have a vested interest in the area and I think Corringham residents are lucky to know that you're still standing up for them today.

I can confirm that as part of the additional money that Thurrock Council got from the Government which is part of the budget 2018, a series of work are being done across the Borough. Just to name a couple of those roads, you've seen Brentwood Road which has already been done, in Chadwell, Romford Road, Ship Lane to name a few across the entire Borough are getting some work done. I can confirm that Gordon Road, in that particular section, will be done this year as well.

Mayor

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

Mr Jones

Yes please Madam Mayor. Thanks very much Councillor Watkins for your reply.

I know for a fact that the residents on Gordon Road will be greatly relieved because this is a major bus route; it's a major HGV delivery route to the town

centre so they'll be very welcome of this. Could you tell us when these works may start and if there are other works to be done in and around Corringham?

Mayor

Councillor Watkins.

Councillor Watkins

Thank you very much Madam Mayor, thank you Mr Jones for your supplementary.

I can confirm that works will be taking place around the third week of March of this year on Gordon Road. And I can confirm that yes, there is further work to be done in and around the Corringham, Stanford area from the Government funding for this year. To name a couple there, you've got High Road in Fobbing, sections all across Southend Road will also be done and the Manorway. And also, where we're going into 2019/2020 years part of Capital Plan moving forward, there'll be further work taking place, not just in Corringham and Stanford but across the Borough as well.

Mayor

Thank you Mr Jones.

Unfortunately, Mr Perrin is unwell this evening and cannot attend and would like to pass his apologies onto to Councillor Hebb. And indeed, we send our good wishes from the Chamber to Mr Perrin. And the Chief Executive has already sent out best wishes to him, thank you for that.

Item 15 – Questions from Members

QUESTION TIME

Questions from Members to the Leader, Cabinet Members, Chairs of Committees or Members appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee in accordance with Chapter 2, Part 2 (Rule 14) of the Council's Constitution.

There was 5 question to the Leader and 8 questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee.

1. From Councillor Maney to Councillor Gledhill

Last year we saw some disturbing headlines that highlighted how street drinkers were dishonouring our war dead by drinking around Grays war memorial and generally behaving in an unacceptable manner. Can the Leader outline what action has/will be taken in order to help prevent this from happening again?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Maney for your question. I, like the vast majority of residents, were sickened to see those in Thurrock who fell, dishonoured by a mindless few who clearly have no respect for those who fought and died to give them the freedom to do what they were doing. As you know, for the 100 year anniversary First World War, this administration set aside £150,000 to clean up and enhance the memorials across the Borough and I maintain that part of Grays has been cleaned from top to bottom to become something befitting the fallen.

So to have people use it as a toilet; as a place to pass out from too much drinking; or even to use it as an improper seating area to consume can after can; and to abuse town centre users have to stop. So we took a two pronged approach to tackle this. We erected fencing around the war memorial flower beds to deter anyone using it as an impromptu seating or sleeping area. The fencing not only aids as a physical deterrence but also improves the overall look of the war memorial.

As you know, the designated public place order that it was that former Councillor Charlie Key fought so hard for in Grays was put in place by this Council but from the day it was introduced, it was pretty much ignored. To be honest, it was viewed as a pointless exercise by residents and the police had to focus on more serious crimes. We, as a Council, did nothing. This led to

many residents saying they wouldn't go into Grays after 10am for fear of being abused or harassed by those clearly drunk in the High Street.

However, after two years of putting resources in to tackle this and litter issues through a much tougher approach, the new Public Protection Order Zone seems to be working much better. Environment Enforcement Officers have been working in partnership with Essex Police to enforce the PSPO in the Grays town centre, this has resulted in a number of street drinkers who are identified to take appropriate action to remove them and offers of help given to improve their lives. Ad-hoc street drinkers can still be seen from time to time and I'm sure as the weather improves, we may see a slow return of some of them but both the police, enforcement officers have the powers to move them on quickly, to issue fines and eventually for banning orders to put in place as of last year.

We cannot forget, Grays is our Borough capital, we have massive investment programme, public and private money going into Grays and we wish to attract more and more developers, retailers to improve the High Street as Councillor Spillman pointed out earlier and unless we make sure Grays is as safe and as clean as possible, this will not happen.

Mayor

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

Councillor Maney

Thank you Madam Mayor, I do. I am, like most members, I am sure hearted by that response. Street drinking has been a problem in Grays for a very long time and more recently there has been some focus on those who sell alcohol directly to street drinkers many of them are intoxicated when they buy the alcohol. I wonder if the Leader could give an update on what the council is doing to tackle this.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Yes thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor Maney for your second question. Last year there was an idea that alcohol was being sold to street drinkers was being sold by irresponsible retailers in or around the High Street. On investigation this appeared may not have actually been the case it appears that the individual was buying this as a third party and selling it to them direct. Obviously number one this is clear breach of licensing rules but also just making the whole of that area much more susceptible to street drinkers no doubt making profit for themselves at the expense of every other tax payer. But what we have also introduced obviously as a Council is this it is the responsible retailer's pack that will be given out to all new retailers that will

be selling either alcohol or any other restricted items and contains various posters like Think 25, don't buy sell cigarettes or alcohol to under 18s. This gives the retailers the ability to instantly set up shop and be responsible retailers. I understand that the person who had been identified has now moved away so hopefully that this will not be a problem going into this municipal year.

Mayor

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

Councillor Maney

Thank you Madam Mayor, I will briefly if I might. The Leader touched on regeneration in Grays and really in posing this question a wider issue of Grays and the decline of the town featured in my mind having been re-elected last year and having been a councillor for Grays seat many times again it comes up on the door step that local people regard the town hasn't seen its best days. The Leader as I have said mentioned regeneration and I welcome that but reality is that although the Council is formulated a regeneration plan and with the Governments supporting millions of pounds will likely be spent in the town unless we do get outside investments that will really count for little in the long terms but I wonder if the Leader could just expand on a bit more on what his administration is doing to bring in outside investment.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill. Can I remind you that I did ask for questions to be brief and answers to be brief so that as many people that have taken the time to put questions forward can have their questions answered. Thank you very much.

Councillor Gledhill

It will be brief Madam Mayor as I have mentioned in my opening speech we have got the owners of the shopping mall looking to invest in Thurrock, we ourselves and Government £40m for the new underpass, walk through whichever way you wish to call it, new council offices to join the place from the college all the way through to the renewed court house. We need to bring in investments by showing and leading by example and that is something that we are doing with the regeneration of Grays. We have heard it time and time again even since before I was a councillor that Grays is good, Grays is bad. Grays needs to be better change and that is what we are aiming for. Thank you Madam Mayor.

2. From Councillor Cherry to Councillor Gledhill

Already we have had travellers arriving at the Haven in Chadwell St Mary, there are many other such historically used sites in Chadwell and across the Borough. I know what we can do after they arrive but what is being physically

done to prevent such land incursions this year 2019 and what preparations are being put in?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor. Since taking this administration we have been working hard through target hardening to reduce these incursions that includes putting in fencing, height restrictions, new padlock systems, raised kerbs or indeed bunding. We have improved securing the locks on the gates with steel covers as we all know they seem to miraculously get cut just hours before these incursions happen. We cannot obviously do that everywhere so we have as you can imagine looked at the most visited areas for one of a better term and we are putting in place a number of physical measures to stop this from happening. I do have a list of those but do not want to give those out in public for obvious reasons but quite gladly share these with you after the meeting or indeed next week. As an idea £128,600 across the borough last year with a further £77,000 being spent next 6 weeks on target hardening alone. On the flip side of that we are also still pursuing our high court injunction unfortunately the London Borough of Bromley had to adjourn their case following further submissions from others and that was supposed to be heard on the 28 February and that has been delayed again but once this has been heard and the outcome is known we will use our injunction which is I understand already to go just using the time now for further information to make that even stronger and the very second that we can we will put that through the high court.

Mayor

Councillor Cherry do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Cherry

Yes Madam Mayor. Thank you for that, that is quite satisfying really because I have been working with the council officers to improve Chadwell St Mary and a lot of work has been done there but in Chadwell Hill there is still rotten knee high rails that could easily be broken if you sat on them quite hard so if that could be looked at. The same with Thames Drive and I have noticed that there is still a broken tree line in Blackshots field where we had a massive incursion and I have seen tyre marks going through there recently. So that is still open and I suggest perhaps that could be looked at. But then I would also like to be able to approach every councillor on their wards and ask them directly about their wards and how their wards can be further improved in regards to this particular subject before we have any further more incursions. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor. As I have said I can't go into any specific detail in public but you may gather from me pointing that out that some of these are already being thought about and will be addressed. We did actually ask all members through the injunction process to give us the experiences they have had and I know a lot of members had taken part in that to which we are grateful and hopefully that will make an impact when comes to getting the injunction and yes if the time needs to ask all members again so I shall take that on board and make sure that happens. I would actually ask of course that it is not just members but see this as residents and the very second they see this is to call 101 and report it. That's elected members or residents. Call the police and give the information. It makes it much easier for them to use their powers to remove people within hours sometimes within 24 hours rather than the week to 10 days as it can take us under the section 77.

Mayor

Councillor Cherry do you wish to pose a secondary supplementary question.

Councillor Cherry

Yes a very brief one. I am glad you said you are going to consult my fellow councillors regards this and residents but being a resident of Little Thurrock ward, your own ward sir, I have got a site there that I would like to discuss with yourself or with officers about target hardening. So perhaps I will make some contact quite quickly. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor. Actually Little Thurrock is one of the few wards that have escaped incursions because there are not many places that they can park up and have a fairly good idea where you are talking about and I have already approached officers in relation to that one. Sure so if this is somewhere different we can have that discussion. The bigger problem that we have in Little Thurrock is people buying land building on it without permission and also being travellers which we are dealing with through planning. Thank you Madam Mayor.

3. From Councillor Liddiard to Councillor Gledhill

What can be done to remove the travellers in Fort Road next to Anglian waste treatment site? They have been there for over one year despite several complaints into Council.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor. Apologies for this I have a very very late amendment to this which I have had to type up. The issue is more complex and one normal land ownership issue. It appeared originally that the land in question the unauthorised encampment had taken place on had been looked after by a man paid by the Tilbury Commoners. Tilbury Commoners describe themselves as a statutory body with a jurisdiction of containing 148 acres of land in question. This has been presented to council with an unusual position as Tilbury Commoners did give us permission to move the travellers off that land after discussions. However it would appear when we have gone to serve the section 77 notice to ask them to move on that there may a land ownership issue that needs to be resolved. Once that has been resolved there is the intention of serving the section 77 notice by the Essex County Traveller Unit. It does appear as we fear as it passes onto somebody else's land then we will be advising the owner that they need to step forward and move these on.

Mayor

Councillor Liddiard do you have a supplementary question.

Councillor Liddiard

No thank you.

4. From Councillor Maney to Councillor Gledhill

Would the Leader explain by what means the Council monitors members' attendance so as to ensure compliance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 (vacation of office by failure to attend meetings)? Further, has the Council recently initiated any investigations or proceedings in accordance with this provision?

Mayor:

Can I just please make a note on this question that names and people cannot be identified through the question. Thank you very much. Councillor Maney.

Councillor Maney:

Would the Leader explain by what means the Council monitors members' attendance so as to ensure compliance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 (vacation of office by failure to attend meetings)? Further, has the Council recently initiated any investigations or proceedings in accordance with this provision?

Mayor:

Councillor Gledhill. Please heed my warning.

Councillor Gledhill:

Thank you very much Madam Mayor and Councillor Maney. I shall heed your warning but I need to say that this Section 85 Section 85 (1) and (2) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) provides the legislation for a vacation of office if an elected Member fails to attend a meeting of the Council, or represents the Council in a wider range of meetings, through a continuous period of 6 months, without prior approval. I am not going to list what it also includes but basically it is just meetings of the Authority; sub-committee of the said Authority; Joint body; Joint board; attendance as representative of the authority at a meeting of anybody of persons. Those wider group meetings that may qualify as attendance outside the Council do not appear in the municipal diary. They cannot be readily monitored by our Mod.Gov system so if any member appears to have missed six consecutive meetings on the Mod.Gov system the Council would be required on request to submit the details of their attendance at such meetings to the proper officer. If the elected member cannot supply the evidence that they have attended a qualifying meeting after a fair procedure the proper officer would on the necessary evidence and declare the vacancy in pursuant to Section 85. Ultimately it is for members to monitor their own attendance on Mod.Gov with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972 which had been explained to all members on induction and it is up to them, as I say, to monitor their own attendance. The second part of your question at the last council meeting I brought to the attention of officers that it appeared an elected member who I shall not name had not attended for six consecutive months. I repeated this to the chief executive on Thursday and as you have already made clear Madam Mayor, and indeed we have made clear in the past, the Council's corporate body does not comment on any action it may or may not be taken against an individual or an elected member. Indeed, I have been informed this would be breach of general data protection regulations however I have every confidence in the chief executive and the monitoring officer in this matter and positive that actions were taken as outlined in part 1 of my answer is that should any member appeared to have missed six consecutive meetings of the council the council would be required on request to submit details of their attendance of such meetings to the proper officer and that was carried out.

Mayor:

Thank you very much. Councillor Maney do you have a supplementary question.

Councillor Maney:

Thank you Madam Mayor, yes I do. Without naming members we do now know why there is an Aveley by-election and quite frankly I would like to share your confidence in officers. But I have to say I am astounded that it took a member to report another member's absence and in your answer you said something along the lines that if members appeared to have missed six meetings on the Mod.Gov system the council would be required on request to submit details of their attendance. That is all very well and good if it is being monitored at officer level. My question therefore is as it is wholly acceptable that members should have to monitor other member's attendance what is being done to ensure that investigations are initiated at officer level by officers and not due to the intervention of members. Because had you not intervened and had you not reported the absent councillor who won't be named lack of attendance he would still be representing the people of Aveley tonight if though he was unfit for public office and in my view that is a failure at the very highest of officer level. Thank you Madam Mayor.

Mayor:

I would like to intervene here and I am not going to allow you or Councillor Gledhill to continue with this line of questioning. I think it is totally wrong that we bring these debates into this chamber. This is a question time where we have members of the public present that won't know about this council. If there is anything that you want to take up with officers or anything else this should be done in the privacy outside of this chamber. I am now going to continue with the questions.

5. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Will the Leader of the Council set out the benefits to the local community of the Conservative Administration's plans to spend £10 million on building new Council offices?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor Kent for your question. Obviously I will try my best to answer the question as it is quite clearly in the public interest. It is in two parts Madam Mayor. The Grays South Regeneration Programme is an ambitious £40m plan to enhance the space around Grays rail station and create transform gateway into the borough and

the civic quarter along to the South Essex College (Grays Campus). This is something that the Conservatives were fully in support of whilst Labour ran the council and had made the original proposals for the change to the whole of Grays. As well as replacing the level crossing with a pedestrian walk through as I have been told it is called and enhances the public realm the extension to the civic offices will benefit the community by directly transforming a key site in the wider regeneration of Grays town centre which would be additional jobs including apprenticeships, training and investment to the local area. It will be providing a modern public facing community focused and fit for purpose building for the residents and visitors that come to Thurrock. Provisional for a new multiple functional space for local use and for hire by the community which includes a new café, a registry office and a ceremonial gardens for those people that wish to get married at the registry office have a much nicer vista when it comes to their photographs and enjoying one of the happiest days of their lives. There will also be an area set aside for those that come homeless waiting for temporary accommodation, to wait with dignity and to store their belongings whilst they wait. Other rooms set aside for residents to engage with services in private where needed again to maintain a level of discretion and privacy. Implementation of the civic offices extension will enable us to support the economy of the town centre and provide an inspirational and leadership of the regeneration projects in Grays. Our commitments to the investments in Grays will bring confidence and certain, certainly for the private investors and developers will bring forward their own investment projects aligned with ours. We certainly could not expect the new town owners, the Weatherspoon or indeed any other partners that investors in Grays or indeed Thurrock if we cannot set the scene ourselves. The second part of this is that I do need to make clear where the £10m comes from. This is £4.15m from the capital programme agreed in your budget in February 2015 this was on top of the £5.2m you spent refurbishing the non-public parts of this building. £400,000 allocated as a new budget by this Administration in 2018/19. £2.8m of estimated income from the sale of the post completion of the now soon to be the defunct civic offices one building which is basically that part, which will end up being cost neutral. £2.2m from other existing feasibility and business case budgets along with the money set aside for the maintenance improvements for the future of CO1 which as I say will be defunct. So in short nearly half of this had been set aside by your administration, a quarter was funding from the what will be the defunct empty building eventually. One twelfth from the additional funding from the Conservative administration and three twelfths from the existing budget which has been set aside to improve that this Council does business and maintains of the building that will no longer exist.

Mayor

Councillor John Kent to do wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Madam Mayor I am grateful for the confirmation that it is around £10m. I couldn't really from the answer the Leader gave get to the core of what he

thinks will improve life for residents. He spoke about transforming the site. What that actually means is compulsory purchasing every shop south of the railway line in Grays and demolishing them to make way for a new council offices. He spoke about a ceremonial garden we have to remember that these new offices will be built on the Mulberry Gardens, gardens dedicated in memory of the D-Day landings. He talked about, what sounded like, better management of homelessness as homeless people come into the building. I don't think we should be better managing homelessness I think we should be eradicating it Madam Mayor. And then finally he spoke about how a new registry office for things like weddings. You know, frankly Madam Mayor I think that is backwards thinking. We have plenty of places in Thurrock that are licensed or could be licensed for weddings. The authority should be looking at sign posting people to those venues rather than spending £10m in creating one of our own. So the question is Madam Mayor what is the key core clinching argument for this £10m from the Leader of the council.

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor. I have said it once, I have said twice and I will say it again. We need to be bringing more investment into Grays, not just this council office. What we do here is a catalyst for more many others things will hopefully happen and in deed will encourage those investors to come into Grays and Thurrock and see that the Council are doing their bit we need to match it. And it is not about eradicating homeless, it would be lovely to eradicate homeless but the reality is that homeless cases will still happen. And I am sorry they desire as much dignity as anybody else. I hate to see those poor residents sitting outside in the current reception, the reception that you did not spend any money on at all, although half a million pound had been put away for. Sorry £5m away for. Actually sitting there on display with all their goods I think that is absolutely terrible and degrading. So that would be gone. So moving people to new licensed premises to have their weddings not everybody has got that kind of money John we hear time and time again there isn't enough money in the economy, people are poor, they can't afford this, they cannot afford that, but I am sorry when it comes to their wedding day they all try and do as much as they possible can and we are doing our little bit within this by supplying a registry office that is fit for purpose and not in somewhere which is just in a building that is long overdue for regeneration in its self. So its not just about what is going to happen here that's typical close minded of Labour it is just what can we see, what can we have a go at. They do not see the bigger picture. Madam Mayor this is about the bigger picture about Grays and Grays Regeneration and not just about finishing off the job that this Labour administration when they were in charge failed to do but by putting the rest of the offices first and not our residents and we are making sure it is fit for purpose as we go into not only 2020 into 2030 2040 and for the future as we go forward. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor John Kent to do wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Madam Mayor if the Leader of the council is so worried about the dignity of homeless people he doesn't have to wait for new offices to be built he could spend some of the money that has been put to one side dealing with that issue now. He talked about the bigger picture I have now asked twice I haven't had the bigger picture. I've had an awful lot of management speak but I have not had a single good reason for spending £10m of capital money on building new council offices. So I ask the Leader of the council that this will he reconsider Madam Mayor and scrap these plans.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor. Just shows you how far backwards Councillor Kent is in what we are actually doing in this office. We have already set aside a small area to improve the dignity of those that are homeless whilst they are waiting for accommodation but sometimes it is not just enough. That is outside of control of Thurrock council at the moment and hopefully as we go forward we do build new homes that will help that will improve. You asked, you have not received one reason. I have given you plenty of reasons John. Regeneration of Grays is something that you put forward under your administration that we are delivering. We are delivering that £5m that you put aside to do exactly the same kind of work but as usual let's fiddle with what we've got rather than look at the bigger picture. Well I'm sorry Madam Mayor this Conservative administration looks beyond the front doors that currently exist we look to the future and how that will improve the customer experience for those that are coming in, for those that are going to have weddings, for those that need that bit of dignity in one of the most toughest times of their lives, for those going through the happiest day of their lives equally and to ensure we are getting the regeneration that we need from outside Government and council spend that people want to spend their money, improve the high street and improve Grays for everyone.

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

1. From Councillor Redsell to Councillor Halden

Legal advice given on 13 June 2018 Cabinet report regarding the free school programme and land disposal stated that the local authority would be legally obliged to consult should it agree to dispose "open space" which includes land used for recreation. The land disposed of for the potential construction of Orsett Heath Academy in Blackshots fits this definition. Would the Portfolio Holder therefore detail what consultation the Council undertook prior to the disposal.

Mayor

Councillor Halden please respond.

Councillor Halden

Thank you Madam Mayor before disposal can be affected a 2 week consultation is required under the local Government act. The consultation on this site ran between the 12 and 25 July. A notice of consultation was placed in the 12 and 19 July of the editions of the Thurrock Gazette. Physical copies of the notices were placed at several points around and on the site on the 12 July. Letters were also written to local stake holders and the interest parties on the 14 July notifying them of the forthcoming consultation. If anyone who is concerned that they believe it may have been a quiet consultation that I would remind them that I had multiple public questions in this chamber, multiple questions from members in this chamber, 2 separate cabinet reports and a planning committee report. All in public, all in the chamber. The proof is really in the pudding that I have had multiple emails from local people, formal letters were lodged during the consultation and the press have dedicated multiple columns to this issue and as I have said in the past Madam Mayor I am extremely proud that we are delivering £70m investment to delivery 3500 new school places in this borough.

Mayor

Thank you very much. You may pose your supplementary but we might not have time to answer it.

Councillor Redsell

Thank you Madam Mayor. In light of the new Orsett Heath School being delayed for a few months can the portfolio holder verify that the children starting in September will have a place to go.

Mayor

Councillor Halden

Councillor Halden

Yes.

2. Councillor Redsell requested question to be resubmitted.
3. Councillor Cherry requested a written response.
4. Councillor Worrall requested a written response.
5. Councillor J Kent requested a written response.
6. Councillor Akinbohun requested a written response.
7. Councillor Smith requested a written response.
8. Councillor Allen requested question to be resubmitted.