

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 13 October 2022

Item 6 – Questions from Public

The Mayor informed the Chamber that no questions had been received.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

1. Councillor J Kent

We are told that the new council chamber “has been meticulously designed to stand for generations.” Why then, was this “meticulously designed” chamber unable to be used for annual council, on the 25th of May or for the June and July council meetings?

Mayor

Leader of the Council.

Councillor M Coxshall

The new council chamber has been designed to be modern, public-facing, and a venue to contain democratic matters in a total transparent manner. The construction projects and nature of these projects are specific during these recent times when many challenges were faced during this long journey, not least the impact of COVID, the construction sector supply chains, and construction worker shortages. Unfortunately, as we neared the building completion it became clear that the chamber – aesthetics of the chamber – were not up to the standard and fit that we could see we could use, unlike the rest of the building. Steps were taken to improve this part to hosting meetings and this work took much longer than expected, due to complexity changes. We now have, as you see, a chamber that’s designed for more people in the public gallery than the old chamber, improvements in technology as still doing live-streaming for more democratic and wider external audiences, and allowing more visibility for presentations at planning committees. We are almost there, just a few more tweaks.

Mayor

Thank you Leader. Leader of the Opposition?

Councillor J Kent

So back in March, February budget setting meeting, the then Leader of the Council said that he was disappointed not to be in the new chamber as had been hoped. He said that the works had gone on longer than expected as the finishing touches inside were not up to the standard we would expect. Mr Mayor, that was eight months ago. Would the Leader of the Council tell us just what finishing touches have been changed and detail the changes that have

been made since now and February?

Mayor

Leader of the Council.

Councillor M Coxshall

In February, as you saw, in February the finishing touches are major. We completely came into here as Members and walked around, it was not acceptable. This chamber was not acceptable or fit and that's the major change that we're talking about. It's a whole new chamber, if we see this it's completely different to what it is and there was finishing touches, Members saw it, it was unacceptable and that was not to our standard, so we've got a new chamber and building that we're in now today. What I will say is that I don't want to get into tit for tat, I can't change what the last administration did, it's a different administration.

Mayor

Leader of the Opposition - thank you.

2. From Councillor J Kent to the Leader

Councillor J Kent

Does the Leader of the Council agree with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, when he says that Thurrock Council has a "culture of poor financial management"?

Mayor

Leader of the Council.

Councillor M Coxshall

Yes.

Mayor

Leader of the Opposition.

Councillor J Kent

Will the Leader of the Council detail what he's going to do to change that poor culture of financial management. What's he going to do to improve that culture?

Mayor

Leader of the Council.

Councillor M Coxshall

I think we see tonight there's some differences in this chamber, we won't go into them. But we can see what we tried immediately when I took over. I think the decisions what I want to make in the Improvement Board are going to come out in that time. I think we're going to make major financial changes and there's a culture that's got to change from the top. I've been invited continuously to the Leaders groups with the officers, I can think of one with the CEO and myself we're going to work together. We cannot change the culture without changing attitudes in this chamber to the 49 of us. I'm not talking about tit for tat and going back over old ground. I can't change the old ground, I can change today and be judged on what I say and do every day, here, now. How I was – I can't change how I behaved in this chamber when I first got here, I'm a different person, learnt my lessons and carry on trying to change. So, I hope that will happen to everyone. I've got to have the honesty and the belief in that change, and that changes from us which goes to the officers. The officers have quite rightly agreed there's a culture change and I think the new Interim CEO will try to make that culture change. Part of the peer review which we'll go onto later is a cultural change and listening to the views of that peer review and saying that the Leader and Chief Executive working together as one, that's a culture change. And once we get a culture change embedded, we believe that's transparent, openness and honesty, we will see that culture change.

Mayor

Leader of the Opposition?

Councillor J Kent

I'm really not sure we got an answer there Mr Mayor. I'd really like some tangible steps that are going to be taken to improve the financial management of this authority. And I have to say that Councillor Coxshall has sat on Cabinet for every day of the last six years, to somehow claim that this is a new administration, and he's been nothing to do with the past six years is just fanciful. So, give me some concrete steps that you're going to take to improve the financial management of this authority.

Mayor

Leader.

Councillor M Coxshall

The offer when you came to me this week is the financial improvement board, that's the biggest thing that we're going to go through. Everything will go through that Improvement Board, that's new. That's part of the recovery plan and part of the commissioner's work. That meets two weekly and that will

change and improve the financials, but that's cultural change we need, that changes from every part of that. That's not finance but, we've got to have a cultural change between Members and officers and how we treat each other in this chamber and outside this chamber and working together that will change that.

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

1. From Councillor Byrne to Councillor Snell

Councillor Byrne

Thank you, Mr Mayor. What due diligence was carried out by the Administration on Toucan Energy and Rockfire before we trusted it with our family silver?

Mayor

Thank you Councillor. Councillor Snell would you please respond?

Councillor Snell

Thank you Councillor Byrne for your question. As the Leader mentioned in his opening statement today, a lot of this kind of information is subject to the ongoing investigation. Now as you know the intervention has only just started, really got underway this week and there are a lot of details that are coming out or yet to emerge, and I can't really comment right now on what happened, but suffice to say – can I finish my answer?

Mayor

Councillor Byrne, Councillor Byrne – Councillor Snell is trying to answer the question.

Councillor Snell

If you'd like to let me finish the answer at least before we get onto the next bit. The next bit I was going to say is that as far as due diligence was concerned, we do – that was given out to several outside agencies, respectable agencies. But it would be wrong of me at this moment to name those and to comment on their findings right now because that information is part of the intervention that's currently ongoing. So, we will come to the answers, they will come to this chamber at some time in future when the best value inspection is finished and then all this information will be revealed, and we can go from there. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you have a supplementary question?

Councillor Byrne

Yes but the question was what due diligence did the administration do and if we believe it was only last August you knew about it, the answer has been absolutely none. So, what we're saying is you didn't do any, or you knew before August. Same question, what due diligence was carried out on Liam Kavanagh by the administration before we trusted him with our money.

Mayor

Councillor Snell.

Councillor Snell

That's actually the same question again and I'm afraid the answer is exactly the same. Those details are – I know everybody wants this information, I know we all want this detail to come out and it will, it's just not there yet. So, all the things you've just asked about the due diligence going into Toucan to start off with, information on Liam Kavanagh himself – that will all come out, it's just not there yet. The intervention has just started now, we've had our first meetings this week and you know it's going to be ongoing. As the Leader said it will be fortnightly and as this information comes to light, we will bring it to Council, and you will get the answers you're looking for. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you have a final supplementary?

Councillor Byrne

Yes please. You're the third Cabinet – you're the number three Cabinet Member in the last few months, that's ironically the same number of different colour rosettes you've worn. I think we deserve to know that you're not bringing the same level of schoolboy naivety to the table we've witnessed over the last two years. So, my question is what are you bringing to the table in terms of audit and accountancy skills, and for example can you read numbers?

Mayor

Councillor Snell would you like to respond?

Councillor Snell

I'm not sure I should deign that one with a response really – do I know numbers. But let's put it this way I got nine O-levels at school – when I went to school they were O-levels – and I got two A-levels, so I'm pretty good with

numbers and words and things generally I think. But again, all I can say is look, the report's going to be published by the BVI in January and the answer's that you're looking you'll get then. In terms of my competence, the Leader's placed his faith in me to do a job and I will do that to the best of my ability. Thank you.

2. From Councillor Muldowney to Councillor M Coxshall

Councillor Muldowney

Thank you. Can the Portfolio Holder tell the Chamber what this administration intends to do with the land known as Flat Irons Field opposite Cole Avenue?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall.

Councillor M Coxshall

This question has been a long time coming hasn't it. I've seen it for months. Flat Irons Field is owned by the council and is held on a charitable trust basis. The council is in discussion with the Charities Commission what it can do and how it could use the revenue. Any revenue raised from the land to the betterment of the children of Thurrock, and it won't be sold.

Mayor

Councillor Muldowney do you have a supplementary?

Councillor Muldowney

Yes please Mayor. Thank you. A Freedom of Information record shows the Council has received £1012 a year in rent and wayleave since 1970 on behalf of the children's charity that was set up to receive this money on behalf of the children of Chadwell, and the borough. But at the time of enquiry none of this was paid into the trust. It may this year after further enquiries by me, I was assured the payments had been ringfenced and they'd be paid into the trust the following week. However, to date only four payments totalling £168 have been deposited into the trust from the years from 2018-2021. What has happened to the other £3880 covering those four years and the additional thousands of pounds still missing from previous years.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall.

Councillor M Coxshall

I agree with you it should be paid into the trust and that's why the ongoing conversation with the Charities Commission to make sure we abide by the law

and should pay that into there and should expedite that as quick as possible.

Mayor

Councillor Muldowney, final supplementary?

Councillor Muldowney

Thank you Councillor Coxshall for that undertaking. We've been waiting a long time for that money to actually end up where it is. I think we need to be clear about what's happened here. First, this administration has tried to sell land that didn't belong to it, and we managed to stop that. Secondly, it's failed in its trustee role to submit money received into the charitable trust set up for that purpose. It's become increasingly clear in recent weeks that this administration can't be trusted with taxpayers' money, now it can't be trusted with money meant for the children's charity. Does the Portfolio Holder agree that this administration has hit a new low by withholding money meant to benefit the children of this borough?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall.

Councillor M Coxshall

It would do if it did it maliciously. It didn't and you know that. If it was malicious – one thing, and if they deliberately withheld it that's one thing, but if they inadvertently, accidentally or forgetfulness, that's a different matter. What you're accusing is unlawful behaviour and that's highly serious. Not illegal but unlawful if you withheld money if you knew you was supposed to. If you didn't do it without that, it may be mismanagement, completely agree. But that's what we need to be doing. That small item there is just one of bigger items and noughts on it, and I think it shows the relationship has broken down and how the council works. And what we've got to do is actually solve these problems and that small item there is writ large across the council, some of these things, and how we've got to work together better to make sure it works.

3. From Councillor Pearce to Councillor M Coxshall

Councillor Pearce

Thank you, Mr Mayor. To ask that the Portfolio Holder for Growth comment on suggestions that's held discussions with landowners or developers who may have had an interest in developing large areas of greenbelt, often insensitively referred to as 'the smile', which is behind the Ship Lane, Hall Road, Love Lane and Purfleet Road in Aveley? Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Pearce. Councillor Coxshall would you like to respond?

Councillor M Coxshall

Landowners and developers as part of the call for sites exercise in preparation for a Local Plan always speak to Councillors and council. This is a legitimate activity, but I will make sure that it's always done in an open and transparent way because it hasn't – it's very difficult when you find out too late, and Members can find out too late. I think there's a new published directorate of all meetings now to get people used to the training and I encourage you to come up. I think it was a great meeting this week actually with members there that I enjoyed going to with members, to make sure they're aware of what's happening, who's doing what, what officers are speaking and when they're speaking in your wards. It's a legitimate activity, but as for this site in question, no decision's been made at this time about the allocated locations for any growth, and it would be up to a vote in this Council and then a public inquiry of the Local Plan, and even then, it'll have to go through a Planning Committee in the normal way. I want to encourage ward Members from across this Council to take part in Local Plan discussions and consultations and get as many residents engaged in this process over the next few months. Only then we can have a plan that residents want, not developers.

Mayor

Thank you, Councillor Coxshall. Councillor Pearce do you have a supplementary?

Councillor Pearce

Yes, I do. Earlier this year I was concerned to read in the public domain that the Council had held, and I quote 'secret meetings' with those interested in developing the land known as the smile. Would the Leader ensure that all such meetings have transparency and held in good faith?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall would you like to respond?

Councillor M Coxshall

Yes, I will look into how we minute the meetings and publish any meetings that officers have, because day in day out, especially the Local Plan team speaks to local developers, residents, on an hourly basis. None of them means that there's guarantees and it's an open process that everyone can go through this process. I talk about land across the borough – there's thousands, we're in a great experience. These people in here, I've said before, 49 of us can choose these sites, we're not like other local authority sites across the country where they haven't got a choice of where they build in the next twenty years. We have and that means loads of these land developers will be disappointed because they won't make the bar and then

that's – how we motivate the bar is how you give your representations of your residents to the Planning Committee, to the Local Plan team, but I will make sure that no meetings like that come out again, and it was like, it was a mistake secret meeting. It wasn't a secret meeting, there are plenty of meetings, we need to make sure how we work together to make sure when these meetings happen, I think the Labour group and the opposition groups have been invited to talk to these them, and the more you listen to everyone, including our officers, and the planning developers to make legitimate choices and take back to your residents. So, we will make assurances, it will be nothing will happen without being as open as possible to make sure these don't happen again.

Mayor

Thank you, Councillor Coxshall. Councillor Pearce do you have a final supplementary?

Councillor Pearce

Yes, I have. I'm grateful for that reassurance and know that the Aveley residents will be too. From what I know of the smile plans so far, having followed the public engagement events up to date, I'm for one wholly opposed to such large-scale housing estates on Aveley's greenbelt. Would the Leader make clear that should the plans come to fruition, and I hope indeed they don't, will the voices of local residents be heard? Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall?

Councillor M Coxshall

Absolutely, the reason they've had that and you've been involved in that was there was a design charette piloted to actually see what residents want and working through that and working all through the sites. And because we haven't got local plans and parish councils that's really the critical thing to make sure we – development happens at the request of local areas. That's the factor of this, if you don't want the development make your representations known and give good reasons, not just you don't want that development, but also listen to what you get from the development, and if it's not good enough say so because that's the only way we get a sturdy local plan that we want development in the right places and we don't want development and we want to protect our nice greenbelt. That site as well, I'm going to keep an open mind right the way through it, but I hear your concerns because in the end I'm the Cabinet Member for that and for the local plan. But it would be a choice and make your representations next year, if that makes the grade next year, and then have a conversation about that and what you want there. If not, quite rightly, you shouldn't be making any representations and it shouldn't make the grade. It's up to you – it'll be up the residents and

the Councillors in this to decide these questions.

4. From Councillor Pearce to Councillor Maney

Is the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Public Safety aware of recent incidents of HGVs entering The Village Development in Aveley and what action has been taken to address this? Thanks.

Mayor

Councillor Maney, would you like to respond?

Councillor Maney

Thank you, Mr Mayor. Thank you, Councillor Pearce for your question. Mr Mayor although I've not been made aware of recent HGV incursions into the village estate, I do know that there have been issues up until the start of this year. At that time, I saw complaints from local residents and reported that HGVs were indeed entering the area on a frequent basis and causing a nuisance. There was a suggestion that drivers were following GPS devices which were inadvertently directing drivers onto the estate. This led to vehicles having to turn in very narrow spaces and I saw images of HGVs mounting residential gardens and communal greens, and clearly this wasn't acceptable. I'm pleased to say that following the intervention of former Councillor David van Day and local MP Jackie Doyle-Price, who lobbied the Council and the developer for a solution, signage was erected at the entrance to the estate at Lance Corporal Nicky Mason Way, then the Aveley Bypass. This measure appears to have ensured something of a solution as reports of HGV incursions have not been brought to the attention of the transport development team since. Whilst the Council has limited options at this stage, I would of course expect us to review the situation, should there be a need for this. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Mayor

Thank you, Councillor Maney. Councillor Pearce do you have a supplementary question?

Councillor Pearce

I do Mr Mayor. Thank you, Councillor Maney for that answer. As Portfolio Holder, you may be aware for a year there was no working street lights on part of the estate and I had to fight, with another resident over there, and it took us almost a year to get lights, lucky enough it's up and running now. Then we had the issue of these HGVs entering the estate and being unable to turn. I've now learned that the roads have yet to be adopted by the Council and there are concerns over maintenance. I'm worried that the area will become a forgotten part of Aveley. Would Councillor Maney advise whether HGV weight restrictions in Aveley could be extended to cover this area, and could you suggest when the Council will be in a position to adopt these roads

serving this estate. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Maney, would you like to respond?

Councillor Maney

Thank you, Mr Mayor and thank you, Councillor Pearce for your supplemental question. I'm disappointed to hear that you have concerns for the residents of the village development, and I hope they don't feel that they are a forgotten part of Aveley. But, in truth the questions that you're asking on behalf of your residents are very pertinent ones, and you're doing your job in highlighting them here. I'll take the issue of the road network first because that answers the second question in relation to the weight restriction that you asked. As you know the village development is a sizable one, there's several hundred houses there and the road network should have transferred to the local authority already. Unfortunately, that hasn't happened because there are issues with the construction and maintenance of the road, which don't make them of an acceptable standard and we simply can't adopt them until they are of a standard that we would expect. When that happens, we will be free to extend the existing weight restrictions in Aveley to cover the village development. Obviously, it's not the done thing to implement a weight restriction on essentially land we don't own. It's theoretically possible, we can do it, but we need the consent of the developer, which is Persimmon Homes. Unfortunately, I have challenged the officers on this and they've shown me evidence that they have repeatedly asked Persimmon for meetings and attempted to engage with them on the issue of the road adoption, so it can be brought up to the standard that we expect, and I know we also have been talking to them about extending the weight restrictions, but regrettably they've not been in a communicating mood and so far they haven't responded to any of our communications. I understand we are looking at other options, which involves the use of a third party, but all I can say to you is we're very mindful of the issues you've raised, they do need to be addressed, and that'll be a lot easier when we've adopted the roadway or the highway network, but at the moment that all hinges on the developer cooperating with us, but I promise to keep you updated on that as it progresses. Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Mayor

Thank you, Councillor Maney, Councillor Pearce do you have a supplementary? Okay, thank you.

5. From Councillor Redsell to Councillor Jefferies

Thank you, Mr Mayor. I am sure that Councillor Jeffries will like me have been concerned and disturbed by footage and images of recent fires around the country this summer, particularly the one in Wennington which led to the destruction of many residential properties. Would the Portfolio Holder advise

what steps the council has taken to assess and reduce the risk of grass/vegetation catching fire on council owned land particularly those areas surrounded by residential properties?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies, would you like to respond?

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you, Mr Mayor. Thank you, Councillor Redsell for your question. A normal maintenance programme of clean and green includes firebreaks and paths being cut into grass areas where the grass is left to grow e.g., meadows. As an additional measure the width of the firebreak was broadened to try and reduce the risk of grass and vegetation – vegetation catching fire on council owned land during the extreme hot weather. The areas of priority were those areas surrounded by residential properties and the firebreaks are designed to prevent any potential fires from spreading into these areas.

Mayor

Thank you, Councillor Jefferies. Councillor Redsell, do you have a supplementary?

Councillor Redsell

Thank you, Mr Mayor I do. Councillor Jefferies, thank you for that. As you may be aware there was a series of vegetation fires at Hangman's Wood this summer during the extreme heat, with the woods surrounded on most sides by residential properties. Homeowners were left to fight the flames themselves at times. Unfortunately, the council did not cut the grass until well into the summer this year, and only after Councillor Maney and I intervened and undertook a site visit with officers in July. By this time the grass had become very tall, and increasing the risk of fires spreading, even when it was cut the grass lay as a blanket on the ground posing a risk. Would Councillor Jefferies ensure that where council woodland and open spaces are close to homes and buildings, they receive a first cut before high summer, and not once vegetation has already become overgrown and dry? Would he particularly apply this to Hangman's Wood?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies, would you like to reply?

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you, Mr Mayor. Thank you, Councillor Redsell. Firstly, let me apologise to you and Councillor Maney for having to bring this to our attention. It should have been cut at an earlier stage but let me assure you that the firebreaks in this area will be cut early in the growing season and maintained through

regular cutting. Hangman's Wood is maintained as a wood in line with the guidelines from Natural England and our adopted public land maintenance strategy.

Mayor

Thank you, Councillor Jefferies. Councillor Redsell?

Councillor Redsell

Thank you, Mr Mayor. Thank you, Councillor Jefferies for that. Just a short one, it was reported to us as Ward Councillors that fire engines were unable to gain access to Hangman's Wood during the fires and this hampered their efforts. Would Councillor Jefferies confirm that the Council has now discussed this with the fire service and that there will be no restricted access in the unfortunate event of another emergency? Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies?

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you, Mr Mayor. Thank you, Councillor Redsell. So, the locks on the gates have now been changed to standard fire brigade keys, as these are standard keys that the ECFRS carry, and as such there should be no further issues with access to this area.

6. From Councillor Byrne to Councillor Duffin

In February this year, the portfolio holder for communications promised a good news story to come out of Comms every day. What happened, are we short of good news stories?

Mayor

Councillor Duffin, would you like to respond please?

Councillor Duffin

Thank you very much for your question, Councillor Byrne. It's not actually quite what I said, so just to repeat what I said for clarity of everyone in the Chamber: "so I'm challenging the comms team to put out 365 different, positive Thurrock stories in the next municipal year. That's not press releases, that could be social media, it could be other ways, but hold me to account on this because I think there's so much great stuff that we can be shouting about, and we need too". And at my last date and update which was the 26th of September we were at 143 days since that began and 143 unique good news stories have been put out. That's 55 social media posts, 30 e-news articles, 58 press releases. Obviously, we would have been well ahead of target, but

quite rightly with the passing of the Queen, social media and a lot of comms was put on hold. So, I'd like to thank the comms team for their work in achieving this target and we'll keep striding for even more, because I don't want to just hit the target, I want to beat it.

Mayor

Thank you, Councillor Duffin. Councillor Byrne, do you have a supplementary please?

Councillor Byrne

Yes please. In June we voted to be more press friendly to Neil Speight, but now he's been told he's not allowed to speak to officers. Why are we still trying to stop him doing his job and suppressing the news? We're telling Neil Speight he's not allowed to speak to officers.

Mayor

You have wild gesticulation behind you Councillor Byrne. Councillor Duffin, would you like to respond please?

Councillor Duffin

Yeah, I couldn't possibly comment on the fact that the member in question that you're talking about of the media was having, let's say a liquid refreshment with the Chief Executive only this week, so the narrative you're trying to push doesn't really stack up in facts I'm afraid.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne do you have a final supplementary?

Councillor Byrne

Yeah, he got the same email as me and it's in writing. Read the email, you're reading everything else, read the email you got. Come on you're full of – blah, blah, blah. Anyway, once you told me the only journalist worth its salt is Neil Speight, don't bother talking to the Thurrock Gazette, you said that it's a bias Tory paper. They get their column inches, and they will not go against the Tories or TBC. Is it right that our Communications Portfolio Holder only supports the party he happens to be with at the time. Journalists have the freedom to deliver the news without fear of retribution is what we should be having.

Mayor

Councillor Duffin, would you like to respond to the question?

Councillor Duffin

Yeah, I'm still trying to work out what the question was. Obviously, the first bit is around the email. I don't know which email you're referring to, by all means please send it to me. But yeah, I've made many comments on my views on members of the media, both nationally and locally, and I don't shy away from that. I'm guessing that's from some WhatsApp many a year ago no doubt. But it's hardly like there's some element of secrecy under this administration when the member of the media you're talking about is apparently banished, no one will talk to him. Why is he meeting the Chief Exec and having drinks with him - is that some kind of evil plot. I don't know what you're trying to get at here, but there is a new administration, there is a new trying, we want this and there's a lot of stuff in process. The Leader of the Council spoke earlier about monthly Cabinet briefings for media, there is more we want to do and we'll continue to do that, but I think some of the rhetoric that comes from Councillor Byrne just needs to be toned back and it might be worth just speaking again to that member of the media which you're saying has been completely blocked off from everyone, because it doesn't actually appear to be the truth.

7. From Councillor Polley to Councillor D Arnold

How many Residential and Nursing Homes within the Thurrock area operate a No Lift Policy in the event of a resident falling?

Mayor

Councillor Arnold would you like to respond please.

Councillor Arnold

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you Councillor Polley for your question. During Covid in order to help reduce ambulance attendance in the community the NHS via the ICS gave riser chairs to homes and Thurrock Council used grant money to buy more so that we could provide other providers - care providers with chairs and in that we included training on how to use the chairs and also train the trainer so that they could perpetuate that training. So, we spoke to our older care homes in Thurrock, and they all assured us that they have riser chairs and more importantly they are using them to get people up after a fall providing there's no injury of course. So actually, none of our older people homes are operating a no lift policy.

Mayor

Councillor Polley would you like to put a supplementary forward.

Councillor Polley

Thank you very much for that Mister Mayor. I believe some of our homes did previously operate no lift policies and I - for the good our residents and for their well-being prolonged times on the floor could actually require them to

have an unnecessary hospital attendance so could the portfolio holder offer me any reassurance that we're actively encouraging these care homes to use those facilities. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Arnold, would you like to respond.

Councillor Arnold

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you Councillor Polley. It's really important that we help the ambulance service as much as possible. They are already under stress and strains and there's long delays because of that stress and pressure that goes on so we are acknowledging that. We've proactively phoned every home to talk about riser chairs. We're also proactively encouraging our providers to discuss and review their lift or no lift policy so that we can make sure they are lifted in those instances when they can and in light of equipment being available to them and we're also in the process of arranging additional training to increase their confidence and to have those discussions with them to make sure that they feel comfortable when and when not to use them. I suppose what is perhaps a difficult thing for them because they want to make sure that somebody hasn't got an injury. There's also a provider's meeting in November and this very subject has now been added on to the agenda so that they can have a much broader wider discussion. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Polley, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Polley

No thank you.

8. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Snell

It has been widely reported that, between late 2018 and early 2019, Thurrock Council made payments of £138 million to companies linked to Liam Kavanagh. Can the Portfolio Holder explain what these payments were for?

Mayor

Councillor Snell, would you like to respond.

Councillor Snell

Thank you for your question, Councillor Kent. I find myself in the unenviable position of almost repeating the answer I gave before. This is subject to an on-going investigation as you are aware. There are a few elements to this whole scenario where things are particularly sensitive and what we must be

careful of in this chamber is saying anything which might in the future prejudice an action that may or may not be taken regarding particular aspects of it. This is one of those. There is information there that may or may not be true. We may know stuff we may not, we're not sure to be honest where we are with this at the moment so what the approach were taking is yet again, let's wait for the investigation, let's see what comes out of that and we will go from there but right at this moment it's too sensitive to make much of a comment on it. Thank you.

Mayor

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

Councillor Kent

Could the Portfolio Holder at least acknowledge that those payments were made.

Mayor

Councillor Snell.

Councillor Snell

I can acknowledge that payments were made, yes.

Mayor

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

Councillor Kent

No thank you.

9. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Snell

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism reports that Thurrock Council has hired Camdor Global Advisers to value the solar farms, owned by Toucan, that the council has invested in. They report the value of those solar farms is £200 million less than the council's investment. Can the Portfolio Holder confirm whether this is the case?

Mayor

Councillor Snell, would you like to respond?

Councillor Snell

Thank you, Councillor Kent, for your question. No, I can't confirm that yet again, I know it's a bit repetitive, but this is subject to ongoing investigation and when the BVI report and the intervention comes to its January conclusion shall we say they will know a lot more but right this time now I can't confirm.

Mayor

Councillor Kent to you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Kent

So, Mister Mayor we know that we've ended up in a pretty catastrophic financial place and you know those of us who have been warning about this for some years have been stonewalled, ignored, falsely reassured, we've been lied to, fobbed off and misled. This evening the Leader of the Council has said that he wants his administration to set an example for what openness, honesty and transparently looks like. I've got to say Mister Mayor we've had precious little of that so far. I can't believe that the Portfolio Holder hasn't been briefed. So, I'll ask again is that figure of £200 million in the right ballpark.

Mayor

Councillor Snell.

Councillor Snell

This process that we're going through is going into at least January. I understand that the opposition party wants answers right now, we don't have the answers right now. We will have the answers though, so this isn't about trying to conceal things this is about let's make sure we absolutely know what went on before we start saying things that might be completely inaccurate. We just don't know at the moment so you will get the answers and I appreciate that you're sort of impatient for those, but when we get to it we will get to it and you will all know about it. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Kent do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Kent

Mister Mayor we've been promised by the Leader change this evening, but it doesn't sound like change that sounds like more of the same. So, let's talk about something that we can agree on. At last week's Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee we were told that people in Thurrock, the people of Thurrock, would be paying for the next 30 or 40 years at the price of the Conservative mismanagement of our funds, that's our children and our grandchildren that will be paying for this. Given the opportunity last week to

apologise, the Portfolio Holder refused, will he apologise to the people of Thurrock now.

Mayor

Councillor Snell

Councillor Snell

Thank you for the question, Councillor Kent, as you well know that's outrageous, you know that was speculation on behalf of the Labour member of that particular academy. The question was asked, and the answer was, you know we don't know. We hope 20 years, but we don't know what the answer is to that and as I said at the time and as I've been saying again tonight once we know what's gone on, once we know where we are with the whole situation, once we know who's to blame and who's not to blame, then we will start bringing that to the chamber. You can shake your head as much as you like but what we cannot do is start saying stuff that might be proven to be completely wrong because then the first thing you're going to do is coming in here saying well you got that wrong. We're not going to be pressured into answers now. You will get them, but you're just going to have to be patient I'm afraid. Thank you.

10. From Councillor Kerin to Councillor Johnson

Due to Councillor Kerin sending his apologies, a written response was provided.