

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 25 January 2023

QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Spillman

Thank you, Mister Mayor. Are you confident that tenants in Council housing are safe from hazards to their health and wellbeing, particularly with regard to damp and mould which, I believe, is a category 1 hazard?

Mayor

Cabinet Member for Housing, would you like to respond.

Councillor Spillman

I'm always very concerned about damp and mould. It's something that I deal with regularly in my day job, and it's one of the main focusses that we've put over the past year and a half since I've been Cabinet Member. There're different reasons for new concerns about damp and mould, and that's the cost-of-living crisis which has created a problem whereby a lot of people are finding it very difficult to heat their homes, which is a real dangerous thing when it comes to damp and mould. So, we've put in extra funding to try and help support people in that situation. We're also doing more monitoring regarding damp and mould than this Council has ever done in its history. We've got a Task Force set up, not just with our internal stakeholders, but with a Task Force that's borough-wide of all the different housing providers and care providers in Thurrock, so that it's not just the case of tackling damp and mould in social housing, but it's also about protecting tenants in all housing in Thurrock. So, it's not just about council tenants we're focusing this process on. It's about making sure all tenants in Thurrock are being protected from the harm that damp and mould can cause. Now there's lots of different causes of damp and mould, but it's all about putting the proper structural, if there's structural issues fixing those structural issues. If there are – if the main cause is condensation mould ensure that we do our bit to make sure rooms are properly ventilated, to make sure there's vents, extractor fans and mechanical dehumidifiers where required. But it's also about education as well. A lot of people don't know how they can reduce condensation in their own homes, so it's about going in and helping people reduce condensation in their own homes. So, it's a complete package of financial, repairs, education, and reporting. So, we're looking for more of it and doing more to try and stop it in the first place, we're doing more to try and fix it when it happens, and we're doing more to educate tenants so they can try and avoid its recurrence. So, I think really we are, in terms of the report, we are actually ahead of the curve when it comes to local authorities in dealing with the new regulatory framework that's come out of the terrible, terrible death of that child in 2020.

Mayor

Thank-you Councillor Spillman. Mr Perrin would you like to pose a

supplementary question?

Mr Perrin

Thank you Mister Mayor. Thank you, Councillor Spillman. The death of Awaab Ishak in 2020, eight days after his second birthday, is the direct result of black mould in the flat he lived in, should dispel any lingering doubts that black mould is a category one hazard, dangerous and life-threatening especially to babies and young children. A coroner has said that the death of an engaging, likely, endearing two-year-old from prolonged exposure to mould in his family's flat should be a defining moment for the UK's housing sector. England's housing ombudsman said landlords must make plans to tackle the real risk of worsening damp and mould issues. In view of expected expenditure restrictions, imposed as a result of financial crisis, can you give assurance that the treatment of damp and mould, particularly black mould, will be exempt from financial cutbacks, be a number one priority and residents are not subjected to prolonged exposure to black mould, and that their children will be safe in their home. I take this opportunity to remind Councillors that ten or more years ago Mrs Deirdre Lodge, her late husband Simon, and myself pleaded with the Council to take the issue of black mould in council houses seriously and recognise it as a life-threatening hazard only to be dismissed as scaremongers. I believe in the very least Ms Lodge is owed an apology from the council. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Spillman.

Councillor Spillman

I know Deirdre fairly well and I was also campaigning on the subject of mould – damp and mould throughout that period. I was also told on many occasions that my concerns were unfounded, and I believe wholeheartedly that damp and mould have serious health implications and can kill people. Now, not only did – I think it's worth going back to what happened to Awaab I think it's important that people hear this. This is the what the coroner and doctors said - they said that his throat, windpipe, and other airways were so swollen and congested that breathing would have been made difficult. Fungus was found in his blood and lungs, with such severe inflammation suggesting an allergic reaction to it, and I'm really pleased that this judgement came. It's just a shame that it came as a result of this poor child dying. This is a long time coming and it's created a legislative change and forced councils, landlords across the board to face up to the effects of damp and mould, and I see that as nothing but a positive. Regarding funding I must remind that the HRA is ringfenced from the general fund and that we've had conversations with commissioners and there is – they've said that there is no problems with continuing to invest in our housing stock and – and so I'm really pleased of that. And that's not just regarding repairs, capital projects, also with new builds as well. So, it's very welcome news. You need to separate the HRA from the general fund, in simple terms it's like two different companies within the same

umbrella. So, no there will be no cuts as a result of the financial problems, but I also hope, and I say this regarding cuts to opposition members, that they will not be playing politics with rent increases and service charges this year because if anything is going to result in cuts, that could result in our tenants being harmed, it's going to be playing politics with rent and service increases and ending up with the £26m – that's not what was said at committee, that's not what was said at committee. So, I really hope they support the rent and service charge increases because we'll be able to protect tenants if – it's not about mask it's about playing politics with cuts yeah. And I want to protect this council.

Mayor

Councillor Spillman, Councillor Spillman, Councillor Spillman. Thank you.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

1. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor M Coxshall

Does the Leader intend asking Government to postpone or cancel May's local elections here in Thurrock?

Mayor

Leader of the Council.

Councillor M Coxshall

No the democratic process should happen.

Mayor

Leader of the Opposition.

Councillor J Kent

I'm glad to hear that and I think we all agree. Would the Leader welcome a boundary review that would lead to all our elections next year or the year after?

Mayor

Leader of the Council.

Councillor M Coxshall

I think there's a boundary review due. We've been since 2002 and we need a boundary review. That would definitely be of use, and I think we need to have a conversation as all of us as to when the boundary review could happen. It's

not due until 2024 and that's a conversation we really do need whether a boundary review should happen. I think, personally, that the democratic process – that should be part of the review of any constitution. What we do here and for all 49, it should not just be me or the Cabinet, or 30 of us our side. I want to engage in 49 about what look – democracy looks like in Thurrock. And I think a boundary review, and there's other opportunities to look at democracy and how we elect people here in Thurrock.

Mayor

Leader of the Opposition.

Councillor J Kent

I think the opportunity for the whole community, for all voters in Thurrock, to have their say and give their opinion on what has happened here is really important, so can I encourage the Leader of the Council to do all he can to bring that boundary review forward so we can have that – all out elections – and we can give people the chance to either re-elect all of us or to replace all of us.

Mayor

Leader of the Council

Councillor M Coxshall

I agree – that was an opportunity, we can do that – that's the Boundary Commissioners decision, unless the government decides that we can actually expedite. The boundary's 2024, it's full up at the moment. I think it was looked at two years ago and we couldn't – when the Boundary Commissioners was – our neighbours will have that next year, all-outs, it would be sensible. How to get a boundary, make sure we're elected the right number here and if it can be done in under 12 months is a different matter.

2. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor M Coxshall

Will the Leader set out his preferred option for local government devolution in Essex?

Mayor

Leader of the Council.

Councillor M Coxshall

I currently have no preferred option for devolution of the Essex area. I can say that Leaders have been actively engaging through the Essex Leaders and Chief Executives Group to explore the possibilities and dialogue with government for a devolution deal. Let's be clear what a devolution deal isn't,

and I think it's very difficult, it's not local authority boundary changes. The work of devolution is to devolve powers from government down to a different – and share services from the top tier authorities, which would be Essex, Southend – Essex County Council, Southend and Thurrock. We would share services with a new body, it's not removing us. The decision has not been taken or made of what – and an expression of interest will be considered at the next meeting of the Essex Leaders and Chief Executives on the 30th January and comments are invited to the proposals well into February. I remind all Members across Essex were invited to share a briefing meeting to this date and works ongoing. I would also invite all Chairs to come to speak to me, and the Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider a special meeting for a briefing of the Greater Essex deal, which has been proposed. But I'd like to move other options - there are other options out there, which is moving ASELA, which has been around for sometime now, it really is a level one and could go to a level two or a level three. But I would give this undertaking that I agree that the decision process for this should be with all Leaders and should come to a democratic governance procedure, not just the 30.

Mayor

Leader of the Opposition.

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor, I understand that the Leader has an open mind on this, but the 30th of January is only Monday, so can I suggest that he comes to some sort of a conclusion over the weekend. Mister Mayor, I think it's really important that if Thurrock is to survive as we know it, in any shape or form, that we fully embrace the devolution agenda to help bring in the extra capacity to deliver some of those infrastructure problems that clearly, we have failed to deliver over the years. I really see embracing devolution, be that combined authorities, elected Mayors for part of the county, as a real opportunity to just help us get out of the mess we're in now. Does the Leader agree with that?

Mayor

Leader of the Council.

Councillor M Coxshall

I think we've got to devolve the two because obviously what I don't want is Thurrock's problems to become my neighbours' problems, and I think that muddies the waters of a devolution deal, which I think there is advantages of a devolution deal. I think like the madness of skills agenda being decided by Thurrock, Essex County Council, and Southend is crazy. I think the madness that the A13 and the 127 we have to individually bid for it and a small authority like this, when we can't – it gets now up to 5 Bells, and it still changes. We can get good deals and good deals for the devolution deals can actually get us a good strategic road network. I think the ideas around health and how we can

make sure – there's great ideas how we can share and get devolution and there's a lot of money on the table per capita. If you look at some of the deals now by this government, and I can see the Labour oppositions proposals to the Gordon Brown proposals are very exciting. I think Members must realise what, it's not this government, it's both governments, both heads of – Leaders of government, whoever it's going to be in two years' time are agreed devolution is the way to go, and we can't put our heads in the sand and say no to it, we've got to move forward, but it's got to be the right decision for Thurrock and the Thurrock people. And I think your leading to a boundary changes, and what can we do – I think we can have a conversation about that, but at this time this is all about a new tier of government, and that's what worries people because it'll be another tax on the council tax powers of Thurrock, a fee for something. And I don't want to do that without good conversations. As you say the 30th is the day we see the proposals for Greater Essex. I've just suggested that there's some other alternative proposals and that may need to be there. We've got until the end of March to put something to the Secretary of State, we may not have a settled opinion with 15 Leaders by that time, but we'll have something to open negotiations into the rest of the year, so we won't have to make a decision on the 30th, but again just because we're just been talking about 49 of us, I don't want to make a decision here and just with my Cabinet. It's got to be us and I welcome Councillor Kent's options there to put a few of them out there so we can all get involved in this. And if we haven't had the Leaders meeting at the moment Members, please come to me and I think we can send out all the slides that are freely available and feedback to me what you want for me to say in the next three months, because I will be led by 49 Members, not just the Cabinet or me, my own preferred choice.

Mayor

Leader of the Opposition.

Councillor J Kent

I agree with much of that. The devolution agenda has been about since at least 2006/2007. I remember David Miliband talking about double devolution as he called it. We would devolve powers down to local government, they would devolve powers down to the people. I'm disappointed in many ways that more hasn't been delivered. I take the Leader's point about we don't want to contaminate our neighbours with Thurrock's toxic debt. I think we all accept that. Can I just ask the Leader, when he sees the proposals for devolution in Greater Essex, what are the key tests and principles that he will use to judge which is best.

Councillor M Coxshall

I base it on one – the major principle of the levelling up white paper was a economic area, a functioning economic area actually, and I've got the economic test: is Greater Essex, which is Southend, Essex County Council and us, a functioning economic area. We do have a functioning economic area, ASELA, but I see the advantages of a Greater Essex deal because the government likes county deals, like one county moving forward. But there's options, not to discount that deal, an interesting option with the size of fund available. But I think we just need to make sure that we've thoroughly keep the ties on all options and how we keep them ties is what I want help with.

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 D Arnold

Can you confirm the project managers, drivers, and decision makers for Thurrock's integrated medical centres are the NHS and not the Conservative administration?

Mayor

Councillor Arnold.

Councillor D Arnold

Thank you Mister Mayor. Thank you, Councillor Byrne, as always for your question. I'm going to split it out into three areas because your question relate too. So, drivers, it depends what you mean by drivers. Drivers for the programme are managed through the business case process as set out by NHS England for major capital projects. The dictionary says that a driver is 'a wheel or a part in a mechanism that transmits motion to other parts', so I would argue that I'm a driver, as are my fellow Councillors and those sitting on HOSC and challenging. And that as Councillors we're here because we're wanting to drive and make improvements to health outcomes and services to our residents of the authority and pushing the agenda as much as we can. Project management is controlled and managed by the Integrated Care systems, supported by staff members from across partner organisations and local authority. And the final decision to proceed sit with NHS England through approval of outline and final business cases.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Arnold. Councillor Byrne, a supplementary?

Councillor Byrne

Yes because this is where I get confused because if anything negative

centres around the NHS, so at what point do the Conservatives jettison the NHS and claim it as a personal success.

Mayor

Councillor Arnold would you like to respond?

Councillor D Arnold

Yes strange question, difficult to answer. I don't think we've claimed that we're the success of - for Corringham IMC. This is a partnership, it's the integrated care system, an alliance, its local authority, it's the directors, its staff, officers, its frontline workers, it's the NHS, it's Councillors. We all have our part to play in this, nobody's taking personal credit for anything.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne, supplementary?

Councillor Byrne

Yes, well a recent leaflet delivered to 3,500 homes in the set wards says this is why Councillor Christian Name and Surname has done recently is open the new medical centre, taking full credit for the Kodak moment, printed on leaflets. So, does – and it's here on his leaflet, 3,500 people with the Kodak moment saying it's me. So, somebody's taking the credit and you're jettisoning the NHS. You told it to 3,500 people.

Mayor

Councillor Byrne can you turn off your microphone please. Councillor Arnold.

Councillor D Arnold

Nobody took personal credit; we were at the opening. There's a photograph. I put a letter – a newsletter out to Corringham and Fobbing showing them that the medial centre is there. There are some people that don't realise that that medical centre is open. It's a newsletter to tell people it's open, nobody's taking credit. And thank you Councillor Byrne for reading it. Councillor Byrne you don't – I'm really glad that I put that out for you to see it because you - I'm really glad you've seen it and read it, because you don't attend HOSC, you don't attend Health and Wellbeing, you don't attend Cabinet meetings, you don't attend ICB, you don't attend the MSEE partnership updates, so I can't call you a driver. The only thing I think you're driving is the car here.

Councillor Byrne

Why can't I have my say again – she had hers?

Mayor

Councillor Byrne that's how it works, the Cabinet Member answers the final question.

Councillor Byrne

So, the Cabinet Member likes lies.

2. From Councillor Pearce to Councillor Jefferies

Thank you, Mister Mayor. Dog fouling in children's play areas in Aveley, namely at Martin Road, Kenningtons Park, Aveley Recreation Ground, and Purfleet Playground serving Uplands and Watts Wood, appears to be getting worse and is a concern for many of my constituents. Please would you inform me whether the council has considered any further potential measures aimed at tackling this?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies could you respond please.

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Mister Mayor. Thank you, Councillor Pearce, for your question. By this administration's Clean It, Cut It, Fill It programme we've sought to enhance our public areas by tackling forms of anti-social behaviour, and I agree that dog-fouling is no less than a nuisance, and it's right that the council considers ways to tackle this. I can confirm that over the last five or so years, we've replaced all the old metal dog bins with all-purpose bins, which we now have nearly six hundred dual bins, including the forty large dual-purpose ones in our town centre bins. In the terms of enforcement, this is something which my colleague Councillor Maney will be able to discuss with you more in detail, however I know that the council has sought to tackle dog-fouling in local cemeteries, by the introduction of public space protection orders, and I look forward to seeing them in place soon. PSPOs will allow our officers to issue fixed penalty notices to people who allow their dogs to foul, or who disobey the requirements to keep them on a lead. I know that consideration is being given as to whether PSPOs could also be introduced in play areas and there are a number of considerations which must be made before this can happen, and there are requirements to demonstrate the evidence that a problem exists. I would therefore urge all councillors and residents to report dog-fouling to the council for this reason. Lastly, I understand that our environmental enforcement officers will start making increased patrols of our parks and open spaces, in the hope that their presence will deter some instances of dog fouling. This will also enable the Council to assess whether the need for further action is required.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Jefferies. Councillor Pearce would you like a

supplementary?

Councillor Pearce

Well it was just to say that can – how do you advise residents to report these problems associated with dog fouling given it appears that the next steps are dependent on there being sufficient evidence?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies.

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Mister Mayor. Thank you, Councillor Pearce, for your supplementary question. I think in my last words slightly answered this, and that was I encourage all residents to report dog fouling to the council through the website, so that it can be investigated, and hopefully with more enforcement officers on patrols in our parks or open spaces and our cemeteries, we'll be able to deter this.

Mayor

Councillor Pearce, final supplementary?

Councillor Pearce

No thank you.

3. Councillor Byrne to Councillor Abbas

Yes, thank you. Can the Portfolio Holder confirm the bidders for the Thameside Theatre please?

Mayor

Councillor Abbas, would you please respond.

Councillor Abbas

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you Councillor for your question. The bidding process for the lease of the Thameside Complex is overseen by a different board for you. The relevant director has provided with the bidder's names. The bidders who have submitted proposals for the lease of the Thameside Complex are a partnership between Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions and Thurrock International Celebration of Culture, and Waltham International College.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Abbas. Councillor Byrne would you like a supplementary?

Councillor Byrne

Yes please. Would the Portfolio's interest in the college, coupled with a very serious investigation going into Waltham College, a damning report from Ofsted, issues raised with the Liverpool City region, the Education and Skills Agency, learners have never heard of Waltham College, the inspectors of the GLA and WIC. The most alarming report is learners and apprentices have – Leaders haven't put a secure understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Surely, we don't want any more stains on Thurrock's credibility. Have we again failed on due diligence? If the evidence is correct, will we eliminate the WIC from coming anywhere near Thurrock?

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Byrne. Councillor Abbas could you respond please.

Councillor Abbas

Thank you Mister Mayor, and thank you for your supplementary question. My register of interest is very transparent and updated regularly. Because of my education experience in different fields, and my position, different national and international organisations approach me. So, I have been a member in the past of the Board of Governors of Waltham International College. Likewise, I have been a member of Board of Governors of Thurrock Adult Community College. In the past I have been three time appointed Vice-Chair and twice Chair of International Human Rights Committee of Lahore High Court Bar Association, which is one of Asia's largest lawyers associations. I was also appointed member of Overseas Advisory Council for UK by the government of Punjab. Two higher education colleges in London, they have also requested me to become part of their Board of Governors. I think you have – a member of the Board of Governors is something different, I have no role in their administrative or what the college does. I have resigned their post and I'm not – I don't have any Executive powers to make decisions either. Neither assets are in my Portfolio. Thank you.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Abbas. Councillor Byrne a second supplementary?

Councillor Byrne

Well the question was that damning report, will they throw out somebody who's like radicalising college – that was the question. But anyway, you've got no interest, but it was the Christmas party who enjoyed. You must have loved everyone there because there's no faces blanked out.

Mayor

Can everyone let Councillor Byrne finish his question. Councillor Byrne carry on.

Councillor Byrne

Thing is as a – as our representative for the community, for its culture, will the Portfolio Holder be supporting the community by attending the Save the Thameside demo on February the eighth, because you are the man that represents culture, you are the man that represents community. So, you're very welcome and we'll put your right up the front if you like.

Mayor

Councillor Abbas, would you respond please.

Councillor Abbas

Thank you Mister Mayor and thank you for your supplementary question. Though I work not on rumours, the answer is no. Is theatre open – the answer is yes. Is museum open – the answer is yes. Is the library open – the answer is yes.

4. Councillor J Kent to Councillor Abbas

Will the Portfolio Holder apply for the Thurrock Museum to become an accredited Museum under the Arts Council Museum Accreditation scheme?

Mayor

Councillor Abbas, will you please respond.

Councillor Abbas

Thank you, Mister Mayor, and thank you Councillor J Kent for your question, yes I can look into this.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor that is of real comfort, being an accredited museum means that there are certain requirements that have to be fulfilled such as making sure that artifacts are properly registered, that we have a list of artifacts, it makes it more difficult to sell those artifacts should, for instance, the museum were to close, so can I ask that the portfolio holder undertakes to start that process this week.

Mayor

Councillor Abbas

Councillor Abbas

As you have said there are certain requirements, but I can assure you like we have digitalised thousands of items which are in our stock and our plan is to digitise almost 85% stock by June 2023, this is not a simple process but as said, we can look into this.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent final supplementary.

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor I am not really interested in digitalisation of images, what I am interested in is preserving the museum, preserving the theatre, preserving the library, preserving the whole complex. Will the portfolio holder undertake when he comes to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee next week to give us a full update on the progress he has made with achieving accredited status.

Mayor

Councillor Abbas, please respond.

Councillor Abbas

If Councillor Kent thinks this is something I can make in one day or two days, I think he's living in an imaginary world. There are certain requirements to fulfil. We are waiting on the decisions on Thameside complex, there are different requirements. As I said as soon as those things are overcome we will certainly look into this.

5. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor M Coxshall

Will the Portfolio Holder set out the measures the council is taking to fulfil its obligations to protect the State Cinema?

Mayor

Councillor M Coxshall, would you respond please.

Councillor M Coxshall

The Council has been in discussion with the owner about the current conditions of the building and have advised the owner to take steps that consider necessary to secure the land in the short term to protect the building.

Unfortunately, I am sorry to say at this time the owner has not taken any steps in relation to carry out any remedial works. The Council is presently looking at what options are able to take to protect the shorter-term future of the building.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Mister Mayor, we have all seen the pictures of the state, the pictures of the holes in the roof, that the building is clearly deteriorating and it's becoming a matter of real urgency to force the owners to fulfil their obligations as the owners of a grade II listed building. The council has obligations as well, the council has a statutory duty to ensure the safety of that building, so can I ask the portfolio holder to go back and to redouble the efforts and to report back to us soon as to progress and actually securing the building.

Mayor

Councillor M Coxshall, would you respond please.

Councillor M Coxshall

I actually thank Councillor Kent for bringing that here, so the council as a public body, that officers understand how imperative that is to the future of the town centre and its upsetting that the owners haven't started that action and I have been pursuing that through my portfolio. I will mention it tomorrow in my portfolio report, as senior officers that this has been asked at full council last night and I expect an answer to come back to you and I will request a written answer to you on what happens, I report regularly to ward councillors as to what actions have been taken and when they are going to be taken.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent to you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

No thank you.