

## **Item 12 – Questions from Members**

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 1 question had been submitted to the Leader and a further 3 questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Members appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee.

### **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE LEADER**

#### **1. From Councillor Ray**

*Would the leader agree that Thurrock is ideally placed to take full advantage from the recent announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in regards to the full retention of the business rates?*

#### **Councillor J. Kent**

Madam Mayor, regardless of this announcement supporting and enabling our businesses to grow is a priority and a good thing. Creating quality jobs that local people can get is important. It will boost local spending power, improve health outcomes, and reduce the call on public services. And it is of course right that councils that support growth should be properly reimbursed to help manage the impact of growth and improve the quality of life of local residents. So to return to the question, of course we will do whatever we can to take full advantage of this announcement – we do however need to see the details.

I don't think that this is something that we should get too excited about this government announcement. I think we all know that this Government gives nothing to local government, quite the reverse. Currently 50% of business rates are claimed to be localised, but we only get 29% and we are facing another £28m of cuts in the next 4 years. By way of detail the business rates we actually keep are based on an assessment of need, and this assessment of need is done by Government not by us. An assessment of need will remain and will dictate how much of our business rates we generate in future we can actually retain. I can confidently predict Madam Mayor that it will be nowhere near 100%.

Anybody that seriously thinks that thinks the government will hand Thurrock another £55 million of funding, is deluded. To give another example Westminster City Council generates somewhere in the region of £1.8 billion of business rates (8% of the England total) does anyone really think they will keep all of that? Of course they won't, and I expect this to be just another excuse to hand down new unfunded responsibilities to local government.

#### **Mayor**

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

## **Councillor Ray**

No, Madam Mayor but I will thank the Leader for the most detailed reply.

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

The Mayor advised that Councillor Hebb had withdrawn his two questions as set out on page 61 of the agenda and therefore would move onto question 2.

#### **1. From Councillor Hebb to Councillor Gerrish**

*Please can you describe what good service looks like for you from your department, in terms of line painting across the borough?*

This question was withdrawn.

#### **2. From Councillor Kerin to Councillor Potheary**

*After a recent number of illegal traveller encampments across Thurrock, and particularly in our ward of Grays Riverside, can you outline the steps the Council is taking to tackle this problem?*

#### **Councillor Potheary**

Thank you to Councillor Kerin for the question. This summer has seen an increase in the number of illegal traveller encampments that the Council has had to deal with. This has been the case across Essex and isn't actually unique to Thurrock. As fellow Ward Councillor for Grays Riverside, where a number of these have been, I'm as frustrated as anyone that our public amenity space is being used in this way.

That's why money has been dedicated to a target hardening campaign. This means making vulnerable pieces of land resilient against illegal encampments through gating, fencing, bollards and earthworks in some cases.

Parks and Car Parks are being prioritised so that residents can carry on using them as intended. Crown Road Car Park, Kilverts Field and Grays Beach Car Park are all scheduled for target hardening as well as Orsett Heath and the Fondu Club site in Purfleet. Some of these works have been started and the rest are very much in the pipeline.

#### **Mayor**

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

## **Councillor Kerin**

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you for your answer. It is very frustrating and this question came to me, because like yourself and like Councillor Kent, we get the same casework through and it's a big thing that people are concerned about and it's also something that previously councils have been reactive to rather than proactive. Thank you for outlining the schemes that are in place, and also you didn't mention the green on Badgers Dene where a scheme has been put in place to stop encampments happening there, which is really appreciated by the residents so thank you for that. If we can just keep on being proactive it saves in the long run. Thank you.

### **3. From Councillor Hebb to Councillor B. Little, as Chair of Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

*Following the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Conference Statement, regarding the devolution revolution of Business Rates, what role does the Regeneration Scrutiny committee have in ensuring that Thurrock Council work in good partnership with the British Government to realise all outcomes in a favourable way.*

This question was withdrawn.