

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 25 November 2015

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public.

1 question was submitted from a member of the public.

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor J. Kent

At the Cabinet meeting on 11th November, you outlined the problem of homeless people in the Borough. You painted a somewhat bleak picture stating that the number of homeless people was increasing whilst at the same time the Council was financially limited, as a consequence of cuts to funding by the Government to Local Authorities. Has the Council any plans to make this Christmas more enjoyable for homeless people, especially young people leaving care?

Councillor J. Kent

Well I think the situation really is pretty bleak, especially for those people who are homeless, and the rise in homelessness that we have seen since 2010 is something that really saddens me and if I'm being honest makes me pretty angry.

We are seeing a terrifying rise in homelessness up and down the Country. Nationally the number of people sleeping rough has increased by 55% since 2010, that's 55%, and the number making a homeless application nationally is up by over a quarter in the same time and Thurrock just can't be immune to that; and we are seeing similar increases in those coming to Council for homelessness.

No matter how hard we work, we just cannot ensure that every case is resolved speedily or satisfactorily. For example we currently have more than 90 households in temporary accommodation, that's a third more than compared with the same time last year and the year before.

I have to say I doubt very much that no matter what we might do, no matter what we may try to do, that any homeless person, or anyone threatened with homelessness, will enjoy their time over Christmas whilst worrying about their future.

So of course we are doing all we can to help homeless people but we have to do that year round. Of course we are doing all we can for young people leaving care. So I have to say that we will not be making any special Christmas plans, we have to work every single day of the year to try and help the poor people that this government is failing, the people who are having their benefits cut, the people who learned today that they are having their tax credits cut, the many hard working people who are seeing the welfare state safety net being swept away when they need it the most. And just for clarity at

this moment there are no care leavers, none known to the service anyway, that are street homeless.

Deputy Mayor

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

Mr Perrin

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor. I do. I fear, in view of your previous statement, Councillors have been asked to put their hands in their pockets to send people to a pantomime. I am going to ask them again to put their hands in their pockets. If you could just read out or divulge the contents of an envelope I have you earlier that will kick off proceedings I think.

Deputy Mayor

Mr Perrin gave me this envelope earlier. I'm just opening it here and there is £50 in the envelope.

Mr Perrin

I make this contribution hoping that all 49 Members will contribute a like amount so that £2,500 can be used to ensure that some of those in needs can be cared for this Christmas.

I hope that my gesture will not be seen as coercive or shaming Members into contributing. £2,500 will enable £50 per person to be spend on 50 needy people, such as young adults leaving care and living alone, homeless ex-service personnel, pensioners living alone and lonely or any other person desperately in need, or £100 per person for 25 such people.

I must confess I have no idea of the logistical problems involved but I am sure that they are not insurmountable. As they say, where there is a will there is a way. I would be prepared to give some of my time on Christmas Day and Boxing Day to help.

Dependent on the generosity of Members, and I am confident there is not a scrooge among you who would say 'barr humbug', would you look into the feasibility of providing a Christmas and Boxing Day dinner and do your utmost to bring it about, thereby ensuring an enjoyable day for those most in need.

As this is the last Full Council meeting of 2015, I take this opportunity to wish all Members a very happy Christmas.

Councillor J. Kent

Madam Deputy Mayor, that is a very generous offer and a very generous donation. Mr Perrin in his question said he wasn't sure of the logistical difficulties there were but I think we all accept the donation and we accept the suggestion in the spirit which it was made.

I am aware that Madam Mayor, Councillor Gray, has already said that she is giving up her Christmas afternoon to do something similar at the Ockendon hub and I think it appropriate, if Members did wish to make their own donation that we would involve Mr Perrin and Councillor Gary in working out just how the money raised would best be distributed. Thank you.

Deputy Mayor

Thank you Mr Perrin.