

## **Item 14 – Questions from Members**

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 1 question had been submitted to the Leader and a further 4 questions to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Member appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee.

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

#### **1. From Councillor Ojetola**

*By the time this question is heard, Chafford's famous young lady Louisa Johnson, would have reigned for almost six weeks on the X factor throne. What, if any, has the Council done to recognise this achievement and to ensure Louisa's determination to excel in exceptional circumstances is a role model to young residents of Thurrock?*

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

Madam Mayor you have written to Louisa both to congratulate her on her success and to rather cheekily invite her to come along to the civic awards that are being held next month. Unfortunately the X Factor finalists are on tour so that will not be possible but we are currently seeking an alternative date in what is obviously a very busy diary and schedule now for Louise to come along so that we can properly congratulate her. I have got to say I am full of praise for a local young woman who has made the most of her talent and done that so quickly in her life. I do, as I am sure we all do, wish her luck in the world. And I do believe she can be seen as a role model for young people in Thurrock. Madam Mayor we all have talents, very few of us can sing in the way that Louisa can, but we are all still good at something and the Councils aim as far as our young people is concerned should be to do all that we possibly can to help every young person in Thurrock. Whether their skill or talent is singing, playing an instrument, fixing an engine, writing, mathematics, science, drawing, computer gaming or brick laying whatever it is to reach their full potential. Not everyone has the opportunity to catch a moment in time as Louisa has, yet everybody has the potential to shine in their own way and that's why they should follow Louise's lead and to coin the world worn phrase to reach for the stars. Thank you Madam Mayor.

#### **Mayor**

Councillor Ojetola do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

#### **Councillor Ojetola**

Thank you Madam Mayor. I am pleased that you have written to her and invited her to the civic awards and to any other future event and want to place on record my own congratulations. I was wondering how John, the Leader, would somehow get something about X Factor in and congratulate on one moment in time. Thank you.

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

### **1. From Councillor Johnson to Councillor J. Kent**

*Can the portfolio holder confirm that the consumption of alcohol ban is still in place on the Flowers Estate South Ockendon?*

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

Councillor Potheary is unfortunately at a funeral this evening a long way from the borough so is unable to be here. So I will do my best to answer the question. The direct answer is yes that the Designated Public Place Order (DPPO) is still in place and have to point out of course that it does not actually ban the consumption of alcohol on the estate. I think if it did, Councillor Johnson may have a lot of disgruntled constituents banging on his door, soberly of least.

The Flowers Estate DPPO targets alcohol-related anti-social behavior. What it does is gives police officers the power to require people drinking alcohol and acting in anti-social ways to stop drinking or risk confiscation of the drink and perhaps this is the most important point. The DPPO covers the Flowers Estate between South Road, West Road and Tamarisk Road and the immediate surrounding area is the responsibility of the police to enforce and perhaps Councillor Johnson might have been better directing this question to the Police earlier this evening and for completeness the legislation which introduced DPPOs, was replaced by the Anti-Social Behavior, Crime and Policing Act, on 20th October 2014 extending the life of this order for a further three years. Thank you Madam Mayor.

#### **Mayor**

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

#### **Councillor Johnson**

Yes please, Madam Mayor, thank you. Maybe they can listen to this whilst they are still here. The reason I asked was that we heard from the police earlier today the boy racers seemed to have quietened down which they believe is down to the public order in no certain terms. Over the last month or so I have had to ask officers twice to go down to the little area just behind Canterbury Parade to remove, on the first attempt, to remove well over a 100 cans of very strong lager. I was just wondering, I think, it is an equal responsibility between the council and the police to try and police this. So maybe I could ask Councillor Kent if he would support a private company coming in and maybe looking at with no cost to the tax payer to help us out with this.

## **Councillor J. Kent**

Madam Mayor this is one of the issues that just about every one of us encounters in our own patches. I know in Grays there are problems with problem drinkers/troubled drinkers that cause real distress to people. We see it in Gray's town centre; I see it in places, such as Church Path in Grays. Everyone in Chadwell Corringham and anywhere could come up with the same stories. I am not sure how a private company coming in to do the job as Councillor Johnson suggests would work. I do, however, think that it is one of those areas that Councillor Jones Overview and Scrutiny Committee could have a look at and see if that works. If it does we can perhaps launch as a pilot on the Flowers Estate.

## **Mayor**

Thank you Councillor Kent.

Councillor Johnson, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

## **Councillor Johnson**

No thanks Madam Mayor.

## **2. From Councillor Hipsey to Councillor J. Kent**

*Of recent weeks the North of England has experienced one of the wettest winters on record where small villages, towns and cities have been damaged to the severe flooding and a lack of under investment to river flood defenses.*

*As one of the ward councillors for Stanford le Hope I feel I have duty bring this to your most urgent attention where any prolonged heavy down pours such as experienced in Northern England could cause real concern for parts of East Thurrock.*

*Would you kindly explain to the chamber if any lessons have been learned from the North of England tragedy and to consider investigating areas especially where the Government inspectorate have given prior planning consents in areas that assist to protect the neighborhoods from any risk of future flooding.*

## **Councillor J. Kent**

Thank you Madam Mayor. We are investigating the feasibility of introducing a number of measures to combat flooding issues on the out skirts of Stanford. In order to capture and slow down the release of runoff water into the town itself. This will form the basis of future funding bids to the Environment Agency in the future. We have also successfully negotiated flood attenuation measures in recent developments such as on Butts Lane and Branksome Avenue. Madam Mayor recently at cabinet we launched Thurrock's first flood risk management strategy. This has involved really close working partnerships

with other organisations that are responsible for flood risk management such as Environment Agency, Anglian Water and Essex Fire and Rescue and Rescue Service. We always think of the fire service/rescue service as putting fires out, they are also invaluable when pumping out flooded properties.

The Strategy Madam Mayor outlines an Action Plan of measures to be implemented over the coming years to address the risk of flooding targeted in areas at highest risk and there are thousands of Thurrock homes that are at risk not necessary at risk of rising river levels but runoff due to very heavy rainfall. I think one of the most important things to note is residents and businesses are actually being aware of their own flooding risks so I would advise everyone to look on the council's website. It is under the tab "flood", go to the map section and if necessary have a look and take heed of the advice given. Thank you.

### **Mayor**

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

### **Councillor Hipsey**

Yes thank you Madam Mayor. Obviously being a resident of Stanford for many years, grown up from down the Warren, know the town very well. We have a river tributary called The Brook that runs through part of the Homesteads ward and in Stanford West and then travels out to the River Thames. Could I urge that the leader of the council or in fact when the member of environment returns from his holidays to instruct officers to actually investigate and if at all possible work with the environmental agency to carry out some maintenance clearance of The Brook because there are quite a number of areas along there that are totally overgrown with vegetation and quite a lot of metal objects such as trollies etc. We know if we have heavy downpours like they have sustained up in the north of England, what will happen to parts of the Stanford, parts of the Homesteads, if these river ways are not cleared as soon as possible really.

### **Councillor J. Kent**

Councillor Hipsey has campaigned on flooding issues around Stanford for a good deal of time and I know it is something that he has regularly bent my ear about it and I know he has bent Gerald Rice ear about it to. I don't necessarily think we should wait for the portfolio holder to return, the Chief Executive has heard what Councillor Hipsey has to say and I am sure that is all that is needed for us to move this action. Thank you.

### **Mayor**

Councillor Hipsey, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

## **Councillor G Rice**

No thank you Madam Mayor.

### **3. From Councillor Liddiard to Councillor Gerrish**

*Can the portfolio holder tell us what actions he is taking to ensure the Highways Agency England are cleaning verges of the A1089 and part A13 to a good standard?*

## **Councillor Gerrish**

Thank you Madam Mayor. I am happy to take this question and thank you Councillor Liddiard for the question. Clearly this has been a long-standing issue which persists despite the efforts of Council Officers and Politicians at all levels to resolve it. Although he is not here this evening I would pay particular thanks to Councillor Gerald Rice who is cabinet member for environment who has led on efforts on how we can clean up our roads and verges where we are not directly responsible. As members will know the responsibility of cleaning verges on the A1089 and part of the A13 lies with Highway England. They simply have not been doing a good enough job and as a result there is far too much litter and debris present on and around our roads.

I have personally written to Jim Sullivan, Chief Executive of Highways England to highlight the fact that the present situation is unacceptable. I am aware that Highways England are progressing plans to close lay-bys on the A1089 and A13 which may reduce the problem in due course, however, Highways England need to arrange for more resources in the short-term to ensure the removal of litter which is both an eye-sore and a danger to public health.

I am aware that Councillor Gerald Rice, the Cabinet member for Environment, has also been in extensive discussions alongside Lyn Carpenter, our Chief Executive about this problem. She has also written to Highways England asking them to deal with this litter problem. Lyn as I understand it as yet to receive a formal response them.

Finally I have written to both of our local MPs, Stephen Metcalfe and Jackie Doyle Price, asking for any cross party pressure they can apply to Highways England to help to get this issue sorted once and for all.

Madam Mayor this is a very serious issue which we are not taking it very lightly. Highways England do need to realise they cannot continue to shirk their responsibilities and let's not forget that some of these areas will be impacted by a new Thames Crossing and as well does anyone think this will help matters. This is just another reason to just say no.

**Mayor**

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

**Councillor Liddiard**

No supplementary question.

**4. From Councillor Stewart to Victoria Holloway**

*Would the Portfolio Holder advice on what system a concern or complaint is recorded and advise how that system ensures all departments of the Council are working together and not in isolation?*

**Councillor Gerrish**

All concerns and complaints are recorded and processed on the council's complaints system. This system is called Respond. The corporate complaints team upon having visibility of the feedback (e.g. concern or complaint), will ensure this is recorded and processed in-line with the council's complaints procedure. Complaints data is then analysed and shared with service areas and reports are taken to Cabinet and Standards and Audit Committee on a six monthly basis.

**Mayor**

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

**Councillor Stewart**

Yes please Madam Mayor, thank you. To share an example, I have estimated the cost of one simple area of not sharing information between departments to be in the region of £200-£400. Where an elderly resident wanted to free up a family home by taking advantage of the councils down-sizing policies. She was then refused payment and complained. Her complaint was upheld and the council agreed she would not incur any moving expenses only to be billed a month later, to complain again, have the complaint to be upheld again or receive yet another apology all due to poor communication between departments and not sharing on IT systems. This is not a lone occurrence could the portfolio holder tell me how many complaints were raised last year that were attributed to poor communication and what the true cost to the rate player was to put them right.

**Mayor**

Thank you. Councillor Holloway can you respond?

**Councillor Victoria Holloway**

I am sorry to hear about the resident's case and I know it would be very helpful if you could pass that on to the officers and they could properly investigate and promptly rectify that and specifically obviously then speak to the Portfolio Holder for Housing because obviously it is connected there. I agree that communication is essential but I am not 100% sure that we actually record complaints and communication and errors in that way so officers will look into it and get back to you on that.

**Mayor**

Councillor Stewart, do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Yes please. Do you not think it's about time that Thurrock learnt from these complaints then, and made clear the true cost to the tax payer of remedying the situations that are caused?

The one in question is now resolved.

**Councillor Victoria Holloway**

Yes absolutely, I am glad that the issue has been resolved and of course we don't want any errors happening, indeed we don't want any complaints at all and we have a very strict complaints procedure and I think again, if we pass it on to officers we can work and see what's happening.

**Mayor**

Thank you very much, we will now move on to Item 15.