

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 23 September 2015

Item 6 – Questions from Members of the Public

One question was submitted from a member of the public.

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor J. Kent

During the Sky News televised final debate, featuring the candidates for the Leadership of the Labour Party, Yvette Cooper stated Local Government Councils should accept refugees. If you agree with her would you give some indication as to how many refugees Thurrock Council considers it would be capable of assimilating into the Borough?

Mayor

Councillor Kent?

Councillor Kent

Madam Mayor. I think there are very few people who having seen the pictures of the body of Aylan Kurdi the young Syrian boy washed up on a beach that wouldn't have been deeply moved and residents have been quick to offer support including offers of accommodation for Syrian refugees. I think the situation has moved on somewhat since the question was submitted, as the Prime Minister has announced that up to 20,000 Syrian refugees, directly from the region, will be accepted into the United Kingdom over the next five years and the Government has taken the lead in coordinating the operation. I have to say Madam Mayor that the job of coordination has not been handled at all well. We still don't know exactly how the scheme will operate and councils up and down the country in a cross party consensus are pressing the government through the local government association for clarity around a number of issues that need to be urgently resolved. In particular the need for a firm commitment that councils re-settling refugees will receive full financial support. Government so far is suggesting that the foreign aid budget will be used to pay those costs for the first year with no commitment for future years. And if we take the current arrangements for unaccompanied children seeking asylum where we are reimbursed of 75% of the costs, not including social care costs so closer to 60%. I have to say that it is difficult to see how we can successfully assimilate any number of refugees.

Mayor

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

Mr Perrin

Thank you Madam Mayor. Yes I do actually. Thank Councillor Kent. The refugee problem has become a highly emotive especially when the plight of children is so been graphically illustrated the government says that the UK will accept 20,000 refugees over the next four years ie. 5,000 a year. There are 433 councils in the UK, divide 5,000 by 433 you get a figure of 11 or 12 ie. a total of 48 refugees per council. That number of refugees may be considered manageable. But it is unlikely that refugees will be distributed in such an equitable manner. I doubt councils such as Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea will welcome refugees and Thurrock will probably be looking to accept 100 or more, most of them in the first year. Bearing in mind the problems Thurrock residents already face, such as 6,000 homeless. Do you accept that a soft heart needs to be balanced with a hard head and every effort should be made to avoid exacerbating the problem? Generosity and care for others are admiral qualities and easily dispensed when it is at the expense of someone else. It is as distressing for a Thurrock resident to be homeless as it is for a refugee from another country. Will you give assurance that no resident from Thurrock will suffer further hardship or deprivation as a consequence of this council's response to the issue of refugees coming into the borough? And they need to receive equal priority alongside those of refugees or for that matter economic migrants from the EU.

Mayor

Thank you Mr Perrin. Councillor Kent do you wish to answer that supplementary.

Councillor Kent

Thank you Madam Mayor. We are used to Mr Perrin coming month in month out but I think he really should learn to listen to the answer and not just read the supplementary question that he had prepared. I think I have been quite clear that it is very difficult to see how we could successfully simulate any refugees from Syria and I think the comment about hearts and heads is right we need to look at this with our responsibilities to residents of Thurrock. There is a motion on this issue later this evening and I am sure the debate there will be illuminated.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Kent. Thank you Mr Perrin.

Item 13 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that one question had been submitted to the Leader and a further three 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 Snell

With reference to the comments made in the local press by the interim Chief Executive, will Thurrock be 'doing its bit' and housing Syrian refugees?

This question was withdrawn at the meeting by Councillor Snell.

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

1. From Councillor Redsell

The majority of parking outside schools is done responsibly. Having had many yellow lines placed outside of schools, and parents still park(ing) illegally and irresponsibly in side roads and around the school. How do you envisage the pilot scheme allowing teachers to take on parking enforcement will tackle and solve the problem?

Mayor

Councillor Potheary. Please respond.

Councillor Potheary

Thank you Madam Mayor. I am hoping Councillor Redsell that after the wait you will be happy with the responses.

Ok. As to terms of parking, from September the school gate enforcement pilot at Tilbury Pioneer Academy will give appropriately trained and equipped members of the school community the power to issue fix penalty notices to motorists flouting parking restrictions outside schools. Up and till now the school enforcement had to be undertaken by Thurrock small team of enforcement officers who had to spread their resources across all the schools in the borough. I hope that the daily enforcement, the new pilot scheme will provide, will provide an effective deterrent and hopefully in the future based on the pilot we should hopefully be able to roll out to further schools.

Mayor

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

Councillor Redsell

Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you for that answer. The pilot scheme at the moment only includes five schools how long before all schools will be included also why only one secondary school has joined in with the first pilot scheme. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor Potheary

Councillor Potheary

Ok, so I think I did say this in my question. But I am aware of why you might have thought it was involving five schools. So, we invited all schools in the borough to take part in the trial, Tilbury Pioneer was the only school in a position at the time to commit the necessary time and effort. Should the trial prove a successful we do hope that others schools will take up the opportunity at a later date. Personally it is something that I would like to see at every school but obviously we have to work with the schools on that to show them that there is a real benefit to the school as well as the local community.

Mayor

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

Councillor Redsell

Thank you for that. Just a short one. I know the time only started in September and if any tickets were issued, I don't expect you to have the answer to night, but if you could let us know how it is going. Thank you.

2. From Councillor Redsell

The unlawful grazing of horses on council land including some children's play areas and also in many other parts of Thurrock. Can you inform the chamber what if any revenue this brings to Thurrock Council or if not, what action is been taken to stop this?

Mayor

Councillor Potheary

Councillor Potheary

Sorry. Thank you Madam Mayor. Thank you Councillor Redsell for her question. So, Thurrock Council does receive a small amount of income from granting grazing licences on some of its land but that's legal grazing. So because your question is about unauthorised grazing I would like to inform the chamber that where the council is aware of this happening on its land and where there is a health and safety or financial risk the owners of the horses are requested to remove them. If the owner is not known a notice is displayed in the area stating that the horses must be removed. Until recently there has not been the need to take these further steps. In recent weeks however there have been increasing incidents particularly on housing and highways land. This has been especially problematic in Tilbury and Councillor Worrall has fought really hard on this issue to find a solution. Consequently notices will be served and specialist contractor engaged to enforce this set of notices. This will hopefully act as a deterrent to others and give the message loud and clear that horses should not be left to graze on verges and in our parks.

Mayor

Councillor Redsell do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Redsell

Thank you Madam Mayor. You have already answered my second supplementary so can I go onto my third. Thank you. I was just going to ask about Children's Park but you have already covered this. As we as a council are we following up the chipping and passporting of horses in the borough and are any of the horses that are not chipping or passported on council land.

Councillor Potheary

I do not know the exact details of that but I can get back to you with that.

Mayor

Councillor Redsell. No.

3. From Councillor Aker

Thank you very much Madam Mayor. Can the Cabinet Member for Housing tell me how many council houses were bought under 'right to buy' every year from 2010 to the current day?

Mayor

Councillor Worrall

Councillor Worrall

Thank you Councillor Aker and I can indeed tell you that in 2010/11, 10 brought; 2011/12, 21; 2012/13, 46; 2013/14, 88; 2014/15, 68. And this year 2015/16 as of 7 September 35; 268 in the last five years.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Worrall.

Councillor Aker do you wish to pose a supplementary question?

Councillor Aker

I do, thank you Madam Mayor. Is Councillor Worrall who gave comment to 'Your Thurrock' on the 12 June 2015 where she said she struggles with the 'Right to Buy' which for decades took homes and money out of a system designed to help those most in need, the same Lyn Worrall who this year in these Land Registry documents brought a property in Kelvin Road, Tilbury using the Right to Buy?

Mayor

Councillor Worrall

Councillor Worrall

I am quite happy to answer that. Councillor Aker, yes I have brought My Right to Buy. I have used my Right to Buy. I have lived in Thurrock all of my life. I have lived in Tilbury all of my life. For 25 years I was a council tenant, I did 9 years in a council flat, I moved into a house and then I moved once more, still in Tilbury, still in the community that I represent. And because I am an elected councillor in the town that I grew up there was no reason that the Right to Buy scheme should exclude me to buy my house. I work full time, as well as being a councillor and I want the same securities for me and my two children that every other resident has in Thurrock, and that we strive to give every other resident. So with all due respects Councillor Aker you are the last person in this chamber that I feel that I have to take moral advice from. Thank you.

Mayor

Now, Now. Councillor Aker do you wish to pose a second supplementary question?

Councillor Aker

I do, thank you, I do. I can understand your comments there, but do you not see the hypocrisy and the people who will be watching this, that it is all well and good campaigning and saying one thing against right to buy and then doing another thing entirely in private. Surely as the Portfolio Member for

housing there should be some consistency on this and not saying one thing and doing another.

Councillor Worrall

Thank your Councillor Aker. And here in Thurrock I am glad to see now we are building houses for when we are selling houses and by 2020 we would have built another 1000 houses using the receipts from right to buy. Firmly efficient houses being built for Thurrock residents. So I don't see that I personally should not buy my right to buy. When everyone else has a right to your right to buy, every other council tenant has a right to buy. We are building good houses for our residents.

Mayor

Thank you Councillor Worrall.

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