

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 along 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.

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Item 15 – Questions from Members

The Deputy Mayor informed the Chamber that four questions had been submitted to Cabinet Members, Committee Chairs and Members appointed to represent the Council on a Joint Committee. No questions to the Leader were received.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE LEADER

No questions to the Leader were received.

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

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?

Councillor Gerrish

From my point of view I think the first point to say is that good service would be having sufficient funding to maintain and refresh all road markings across the borough as and when required.

The highway infrastructure deficit was reported to Cabinet in February 2015 and as a result an additional £4 million of capital funding was allocated to highway maintenance, to be spent over the next 3 years, of this £250,000 was allocated specifically for the maintenance of road markings. An in context Madam Deputy Mayor that is against £30,000 that we were spending on road markings previously, so that's a big increase in the amount that we are spending.

£75,000 was allocated for 2015/15 and the work programme is well underway with a number of zebra crossings and mini roundabouts being recovered. In particular, Madam Deputy Mayor in the context of funding challenges I would say that prioritising properly and appropriately is key in delivering that plan.

Deputy Mayor

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

Councillor Hebb

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor I would dearly like to ask a supplementary. Textbook. Quite literally textbook. Thank you for relaying to me what your officers have written for you Councillor Gerrish, that wasn't actually the answer to the question which I asked. So hopefully the rest of the administration won't be reciting what officers have provided tonight, although we will get the answer to how many Council's only have 20 day complaints

returns and we will find out why the MP didn't write to Councillor Potheary about her last motion. Probably because he was too busy talking to the Prime Minister, actually doing something value adding. Anyway, we move on.

So Billet Lane, Councillor Gerrish. We have been in communication quite considerably over the last few weeks. I have been asking for a 1.5 metre extension of a yellow line, and it has now got to the point that I am asking at this meeting because I'm not getting anywhere. Before full documented evidence or anyone from the Labour side tells me what officers have said, I've done that and I'm sick of it.

Can I have a 1.5 metre extension to a yellow line down Billet Lane to allow disabled residents to go up and down a ramp and safely reverse down the lane?

Deputy Mayor

Councillor Gerrish?

Councillor Gerrish

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor. What I will say, and I guess first of all it does sound like there were some delays in this particular case, and as Councillor Hebb has made clear we have correspondence on this matter. I don't think what I want to do is stand up here and make a ruling on a particular piece of local casework, I don't think that's appropriate, and I don't think that's the way policy should be conducted in the Council.

What I have offered Councillor Hebb, and I hope he takes it up, is a meeting between myself and the Head of Highways to discuss this matter in particular check the right prioritisation criteria has been applied in this case, and if it's not then clearly we should make sure that it has been.

I say that Madam Deputy Mayor, and it's quite an important point, in that I think there is a very good case for delivering this piece of work. I think it looks relatively inexpensive and should be done. What I don't know is the entire backlog of work that it should be prioritised against, and clearly as an authority we have to prioritise on road safety, and if there are works that have been prioritised against then we should do that. However, what I am saying is that at the meeting we look into the facts of the case in more detail, and I think there are further facts required before we make that decision and I'm willing to take that forward with him if he finds that acceptable.

Deputy Mayor

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

Councillor Hebb

I do, thank you Madam Deputy Mayor, and I do thank Councillor Gerrish for that commitment. I would say that I have been trying to get this to happen since May. I have to say that you and I, if we don't get anywhere by January 2nd, 3rd, 4th, go out and get a pot of paint and go and do it ourselves. So my question is, do you trust me to paint the line straight?

Councillor Gerrish

Madam Mayor, I'm sure Councillor Hebb is an excellent painter.

2. From Councillor Hebb to Councillor V. Holloway

Please can you describe what reasons there could be for a 28-day reply timeframe (four weeks) for Thurrock Council to respond to residents and members alike?

Councillor V. Holloway

The council's timeframe for responding to member enquiries is 14 calendar days (not 28 days). The timeframe for responding to Stage 1 complaints is 15 calendar days, for residents' concerns 5 calendar days, and for stage 2 and 3 complaints 28 calendar days.

Deputy Mayor

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

Councillor Hebb

I do, thank you Madam Deputy Mayor. I just want to go over the point for concerns and a few stages that we have in play here. Thank you for whoever wrote this for me, it is very illustrative. Six Council's out of eight that have been benchmarked and have a time frame of 20 working days for responding to Stage 2/3 complaints or those of a similar nature. Can I ask if you think having 3 to 4 stages of a complaints process is nothing more than a mere dilution of data and stops us from getting to the root cause of issues and tackling them at root cause.

Councillor V. Holloway

You admonish Councillor Gerrish for reading out a response provided by officers but can I just say Councillor Hebb, that officers also provide responses for you, but never mind.

Councillor Hebb

What's good for the good is good for the gander.

Deputy Mayor

Members please, can we respect each other and listen to Councillor Holloway?

Councillor V. Holloway

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor. I do actually think the stages are appropriate. There is a reasonable line between the stages and I am aware these are similar to other Council's.

Deputy Mayor

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

Councillor Hebb

I do and it's ever so brief. OK, I will work with you on this one. I'm not convinced but what I would like to do it perhaps for you and I to engage and look at the complaints, the headings and the categories that are coming out.

So perhaps do some analysis to understand what our biggest issues are. At the end of the day our customers are the residents on the shop floor and I think it's important we get on top of issues.

Hopefully you will give me that undertaking. I'll happily work with you on this one and hopefully you can convince me that 4 stages of a complaints process is appropriate.

3. From Councillor Hipsey to Councillor Potheary

Prime Minister David Cameron MP, has recently questioned the Police and Crime Commissioner for Oxfordshire, (the county he resides), about the Police stations that are to close in Oxfordshire. Would the cabinet member inform me if either the MP of Thurrock or the MP of South Basildon and East Thurrock have to date troubled themselves to contact the Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex about the recently announced Police Station closures in Thurrock?

Councillor Potheary

Thank you Councillor Hipsey for your question. I'm afraid I can't really comment on what the MP's might of done, I'm afraid I haven't actually received a response from them both so far, which I think is frankly bad manners, but never mind.

I have also written to the Home Secretary as well to express this Chamber's concerns for our communities and neighbourhoods and I can confirm that the PCC will be attending January's Council meeting along with the Chief

Constable after I met with both of them at the last Police and Crime Panel meeting in Chelmsford.

Deputy Mayor

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

Councillor Hipsey

Yes it is a bit of a brief question, I'd like you to invite the PPC for Essex Police to come along to the January meeting as I believe the Chief Constable is coming along. I am sure like this side of the Chamber, and also our UKIP Members, I'm hoping that our Conservative Members will have some very pointed questions to their Conservative colleague who is leaving Thurrock unpoliced virtually. With the incident that happened over at Bluewater my words at the last meeting were with security, is becoming a threat to Thurrock and we don't want to see Thurrock unpoliced or unmanned police stations, so please would you ensure the PPC is here?

Councillor Pothecary

Yes Councillor Hipsey, the PCC will be here in January to allow Members to put those questions to him. And we will need to put the pressure up to make sure that the cuts are reversed and we have a properly funded Police force to protect us.

Deputy Mayor

Members, I have asked for you to respect each other when speaking and you are still not doing so. If you continue I may move for you to be removed from the Chamber until the end of the meeting.

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

Councillor Hipsey

No thank you Madam Deputy Mayor.

Deputy Mayor

I have been informed by Democratic Services that the question should have been directed to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Lynn Worrall, and not Councillor Pothecary as stated in the agenda. Councillor Ojetola would you please read your question out to Councillor Worrall?

4. From Councillor Ojetola to Councillor Worrall

How many Houses in Multiple Occupation do we have in Thurrock?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you Councillor Ojetola and as always I am always happy to answer your questions. And we have been doing a piece of work on this so it's a really nice time for you to be asking this question.

From the statistical data that is both local and national we believe it to be about 300 but we do have potential that it could be 400 HMO's.

Deputy Mayor

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

Councillor Ojetola

Thank you Madam Deputy Mayor. Councillor Worrall, what inspections are carried out to ensure the safety of Thurrock residents at these HMO's?

Councillor Worrall

HMO's are quite complication and you only need to licence a HMO if it is above 3 floors and we have got 5 of these in the Borough and we believe that we licenced all those that we know about, and these checks are carried out by our Private Housing Team who are Environmental Health Officers who will check things like fire doors, safety in and out of the home, make sure there is adequate gas, central heating and that sort of stuff. So if we are made aware we do do them. We are also very aware that there might be a change to government rulings on this and HMO's will be checked as they come down to 2 floors which will of course make a big job to be doing because we don't have so many of the 3 floors but we do have of the 2 floors and it could be that we have to increase staff if we are going to properly make sure that they are licensed and checked.

Deputy Mayor

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

Councillor Ojetola

Yes thank you Madam Deputy Mayor and thank you Councillor Worrall for your answer. Indeed it should be one of those that's self-funding if we try to take it on. I know that there is a consultation going on, well I read about that, but we dedicated our own policy to go to 2 floors, and I know it's not just 3 floors, it's about the number of the size of the room, the number of families dwelling in the property etc. But if we decided as a Council to go down to 2 floors etc then it should be self-sufficient because there is a licence fee which I think is about £750 a year over a couple of years which we could charge that and generate.

Madam Deputy Mayor I am hoping if you agree to this then it will protect our

residents even more. Are you happy to review that strategy so that we can ensure the protection of Thurrock residents?

Councillor Worrall

Thank you Councillor Ojetola and as always residents safety is always paramount to me, so more than happy to, the right officers are sitting in the room tonight and the minutes will reflect that. I'm sure we do need to make sure that any licence is carried out and we do all that we can to protect any residents in our houses as we see more HMO's across the Borough.

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